Rix's Browser Extensions

The Issue

So you probably have heard the words "Manifest v3" being thrown around in regards to an upcoming version of Google Chrome. This has raised a number of concerns among internet watchdogs, with a number of valid complaints being raised about the implementation, which according to the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) will hurt Privacy, Security, and Innovation on the internet. But one more widely talked-about impact is that Manifest v3's implementation by Google will render adblocking extensions inoperable.

Many people utlilze and rely on adblocking software for a number of purposes. Some websites are in fact impossible to navigate without these extensions and tools. While yes, there is an argument to be made about the morality of adblocking software, with various schools of thought of when you should "whitelist" sites or channels, that is a decision that should be left with the user of the software, not the world's largest ad conglomorate. So, what can you do? Public outcry has not been enough to sway Google from their path. Thankfully, there are other options for web browsing that do not have this issue.

Enter FireFox. Yes, good old trusty FireFox. Sure, the software has had its ups and downs, but the current version of FireFox is fast, private, and my personal choice for daily driving. Why should you care about privacy? There isn't one "true" answer, but there are plenty readily available good ones. (Here, Let Me Google That For You) Simply speaking, in my opinion your data is your data and it's not Google's business or anyone else's. The world spent 521.02 billion USD on advertisments in 2021, and incredibly smart people have dedicated their lives to collecting data about you to serve you more topical ads - tracking every click, keystroke, and preference you have on the internet. Sophisticated algorithms can even know more things about you than your best friend or significant other, and all of that data is sold to the highest bidder. Among various technologies that can be used to identify users is Browser Fingerprinting, using various programs and techniques. Want to test how much personal data your browser is leaking and how identifiable it is? You might be surprised. Check here:
https://coveryourtracks.eff.org/

Firefox bills itself as privacy, speed, and security focused. What's nice is that I can also add a number of extensions and heavily customize it for my purposes. I am a fan of online privacy, but that is not to say I am perfect. I still use GMail, Google Search, and sometimes filter pages through Google Translate. But, I have taken steps to limit the amount of data I leak, and honestly, that's a good place to start. Completely De-Googling is often something that online privacy communities fixate on, and shun anyone who isn't willing to make that jump and sacrifice. I'll be the first to admit that Google, the largest ad company on the planet, is so incredibly convenient - but that's not to say that I like all the things their company does. Even taking little steps can help you lead a more secure, faster, cleaner life.

My Extensions

Online Privacy

> Some of these products can break some webpages, meaning that they must be manually disabled on occasion for some sites. In my mind, it's a hassle worth paying. YMMV.

- uBlock Origin (Link): An efficient wide-spectrum content blocker. Easy on CPU and memory.
- WebGL Fingerprint Defender (Link): Defending against WebGL fingerprinting by reporting a fake value.
- Canvas Fingerprint Defender (Link): Defending against canvas fingerprinting by reporting a fake value.
- Decentraleyes (Link): Protects you against tracking through "free", centralized, content delivery.
- Facebook Container (Link): OK, Look... yeah I still have a Facebook account, because if I don't have one I'll never know what my family is up to. At least I can lock it to its own little sandbox and not let it see all my off-site traffic anywhere that has a "login with Facebook" option.
- Neat URL (Link): Removes garbage parameters from most URLs. This is stuff like that utm_campaign garbage... it'll shock you just how much junk is in some links (Looking at you, Amazon!)
- Privacy Badger (Link): Another product from EFF, automatically learns to block invisible trackers slipped in by some sneaky actors.

Website Enhancements

- Enhancer for YouTube (Link): Ever want to control the playback speed, volume level, select playback quality automatically, or control YouTube more than can be done with the stock experience? Check here. You'll never want to go back after using this.
- No Coin (Link): Did you know that come websites use your browser to mine cryptocurrency? That slows down the webpage and causes your computer to use more resources. This extension is designed to block that behavior... mine your own business!
- Outline Sidebar (Link): This navigational aid generates a table of contents by extracting all the headings in the page.
- Reddit Enhancement Suite (Link): A Suite of Enhancements for Reddit... sorta self explanatory. Works best on the old reddit site, but I'm not completely against some of the changes in New Reddit.
- Skip Redirect (Link): Attempts to skip over URL redirects and automatically navigate you to the final URL. 60% of the time it works... every time.
- SponsorBlock (Link): Oh, you thought we were done messing with YouTube? Uses a crowdsourced database of video segments to skip over annoying reminders, intros, sponsor segments, and other stuff you really don't care about. And now a word from our sponsor... Ra-***SKIP***

Utility

> A number of these probably leak some amount of personal data, but I still use them because they're convenient

- TWP - Translate Web Pages (Link): Translate your page in real time using Google or Yandex.
- BitWarden (Link): My Password Manager's Firefox extension
- Grammarly (Link): Me fail english? Unpossible! (Makes my writing suck a little less)
- Mailvelope (Link): Ever want to send encrypted emails? You can with this. Secure, end-to-end webmail with OpenPGP standard encryption. Does require some setup, and both parties to have keys. If you do this you are truly a giant nerd. (I like you.)
- Mendeley Web Importer (Link): The only reason I got my senior thesis done. Probably not useful for you, unless you need to save and cite research papers and the like frequently.

A lot of the extension I use are either niche, overkill, require some tweaking of settings, or all three. Howver, some are simple drop-in tools that I use every day. Combined with neat features like Firefox's DNS over HTTPS, strict inbuilt tracking protection, and HTTPS-Only mode (seriously, if your website doesn't support HTTPS in 2022 what's wrong with you), and other settings you can find in Firefox's simple, easy-to-navigate menus, Firefox has

become my favorite browser and has resulted in a much cleaner, ad-free experience on the net. In fact, I donate money to Mozilla every month for the work they do, to help keep Firefox relevant and secure and to avoid giving Google a total monopoly on how you browse the internet.

I hope this has been informative, and if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out! Here's to a faster, more secure future together.

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