

Web Browsers Leave 'Fingerprints' Behind as You Surf the Net

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New research by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) has found that an overwhelming majority of web browsers have unique signatures -- creating identifiable "fingerprints" that could be used to track you as you surf the Internet.

The findings were the result of an experiment EFF conducted with volunteers who visited <http://panopticlick.eff.org/>. The website anonymously logged the configuration and version information from each participant's operating system, browser, and browser plug-ins -- information that websites routinely access each time you visit -- and compared that information to a database of configurations collected from almost a million other visitors. EFF found that 84% of the configuration combinations were unique and identifiable, creating unique and identifiable browser "fingerprints." Browsers with Adobe Flash or Java plug-ins installed were 94% unique and trackable.

"We took measures to keep participants in our experiment anonymous, but most sites don't do that," said EFF Senior Staff Technologist Peter Eckersley.

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