

MANAGING YOUR COOKIES

Beginners' Kaffee Klatch
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WHAT IS A COOKIE?

Picture this: You access an online shopping site, such as buy.com, and explore much of what the site has to offer. You find a DVD Player you are interested in buying, but you want to compare prices first, so you put it into your shopping cart and plan to come back later. The next day you return to buy.com, and without entering any information about yourself, you click the shopping cart icon, and there sits the item you selected the previous day. How did buy.com know to call up your shopping cart rather than one belonging to any of its millions of other online customers?

The answer lies in a mechanism called a “cookie.” Cookies are tools that Web sites use to keep track of certain aspects of your computer’s visits. They can remember information such as your login name, password, pages you like to visit, and even which banner advertisements you’ve seen on a particular Web site. Sound mysterious? It isn’t, because although cookies work behind the scenes, for the most part they are relatively straightforward pieces of code that Web servers send to your browser for later use.

A cookie is a file created by a Website to store information about you **ON YOUR COMPUTER**. For example, if you register a username and password at the MyWay.com Web site and you indicate you want to automatically enter the site without having to type in your username or password at every visit, the MyWay Web server stores your login information in a cookie file on your hard drive (not on their server). The next time you visit, the server will read your cookie file and enter login data for you. If you enter the site from another computer, you must log in again because the cookie is not stored on that computer’s hard drive.

Cookies can also store personally identifiable information, i.e., information that can be used to identify or contact you, such as your name, e-mail address, home or work address, or telephone number. **However, a Web site only has access to the personally identifiable information that you provide.** For example, a Web site cannot determine your e-mail name unless you provide it. Also, a Web site cannot gain access to other information on your computer.

In addition, cookies are not universal in that they cannot be read by every Web site on the Internet. Only the Web site that sent a cookie to your computer has the ability to read it.

A cookie is not a program; it's a piece of data. Therefore, it cannot carry a virus. (Viruses attach themselves to programs in order to run.) Since a cookie is not a program, it cannot "do" anything to your system. For example, it cannot scour through it for personal data you haven't provided, such as your e-mail address or the credit card numbers stored on your system.

You have the ability to enable or disable cookies, or have Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox (your browser) prompt you before accepting cookies. . Some Web sites require cookies; therefore, if you select a setting that does not allow cookies to be saved on your computer, you might not be able to view certain Web sites.

WHAT IS A FIRST PARTY COOKIE?

A first-party cookie originates on the Web site you are currently viewing. These cookies are commonly used to store information such as your preferences when visiting that site. Generally speaking, first party cookies are not only harmless, but also desirable.

WHAT IS A THIRD PARTY COOKIE?

A third-party cookie comes from a Web site other than the one you are currently viewing. Third-party Web sites usually provide some content on the Web site you are currently viewing. For example, many sites use advertising from third-party Web sites and those third-party Web sites may use cookies. These cookies are placed by ad companies that pay for the right to place advertising on the sites' pages (some sites also leave their own ad cookies). These files track your visits to pages that display their clients' ads (or their own), and they may tailor the ads you see to your browsing history. Over time, cookies can reveal your browsing habits, although standard ad cookies can't attach a name to a specific surfing trail.

Third-party cookies are the source of many unwanted popups—so you may wish to set your browser to block them as you surf. In other words, be stingy in your willingness to accept cookies. One excellent way to minimize popups is to automatically reject all third-party cookies (those from companies that have advertising or marketing relationships with the sites you visit).

WORKING WITH COOKIES IN INTERNET EXPLORER

To take advantage of everything cookies have to offer, your browser must be set up to accept them. However, not everyone likes the idea of distant computers putting files on his or her hard drive. As mentioned earlier, cookies don't read information from files on your computer to report back to the Web server; only the information

in the cookie file is sent back. Still, some people are just uncomfortable with giving another computer that kind of access. For that reason, you can configure your Internet Explorer browser to accept or reject cookies.

By default, Internet Explorer allows the use of cookies; however, you can change your privacy settings to prompt you before placing a cookie on your computer (this enables you to allow or block the cookie); or you can prevent your browser from accepting any cookies.

You can use the Internet Explorer privacy settings to specify how you want Internet Explorer to handle cookies from individual Web sites or all Web sites.

How Do You Know If a Website is Sending You Cookies?

1. Go to the Website you believe is sending cookies.
2. Click on **View** on the Internet Explorer's menu bar.
3. Scroll down to **Web Page Privacy Policy** and click on it.
4. A dialog box appears listing all the cookies that are going out from the Website.
5. Read down the list and right click on any cookie that you don't want. You will then have the option of choosing whether or not you want to "always accept", "reject", or use "default setting" for that particular cookie. If you choose "reject", then you can move down to the "Summary" and click it to see that the bottom button is marked with "Never allow this site to use cookies."

How to Change Your Privacy Settings:

To limit the cookies that will be deposited on your computer via Internet Explorer:

1. Open **Internet Explorer**.
2. Choose **Tools**.
3. Choose **Internet Options**.
4. Click the **Privacy** tab.
5. Click the **Advanced** button.
6. Place a check mark in the box next to **Override Automatic Cookie Handling**.
7. Under **First-Party Cookies**, click **Prompt**.
8. Under **Third-Party Cookies**, click **Block**.
9. Make sure **Always Allow Session Cookies** is **UNCHECKED**.
10. Click **OK** twice to finalize the settings.

When you change your privacy settings, the changes will not affect cookies that are already on your computer. If you want to ensure that all of the cookies on your computer meet your privacy settings, you should delete all of the existing cookies on your computer (see the last item on page 4). When you return to Web sites that previously had saved cookies on your computer, the Web sites that meet your privacy settings will save cookies on your computer again. The Web sites that do not meet your privacy settings will not be allowed to save cookies on your computer, and might not function properly. Some Web sites store your member name and password or other personally identifiable information about you in a cookie; therefore, if you delete all cookies, you might need to re-enter this information the next time you visit the site.

How to customize your privacy settings for an individual web site:

1. In Internet Explorer, on the **Tools** menu, click **Internet Options**.
2. Click the **Privacy** tab, and then click **Sites**.
3. In **Address of Web site**, type the complete address of the Web site for which you want to specify custom settings. For example, <http://www.microsoft.com>
4. To specify that you want Internet Explorer to always allow cookies from the specified Web site to be saved on your computer, click **Allow**. To specify that you want Internet Explorer to never allow cookies from the specified Web site to be saved on your computer, click **Block**.

You can view a list of Web sites for which you have specified custom settings in the **Manage sites** list. To remove a Web site from this list, and delete its custom privacy settings, click **Remove**. When you remove a Web site from the Managed Web sites list, your privacy settings for all Web sites without custom settings will apply to that Web site.

How to Remove Existing Cookies from Your Hard Drive

1. Open your **Internet Explorer** browser.
2. Select **Tools** on the Menu Bar.
3. Select **Internet Options**.
4. In the **Browsing History** box, select **Delete**.
5. Click on **Delete Cookies**.
6. Click **Close**; then **OK** again.

One final note: During the scanning process, **Ad-Aware** does an excellent job of identifying and destroying known spying cookies.