How The Government Killed Your Online Privacy

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You aren't valuable. Not to online companies. From a financial point of view, you just don't hold much value to them. The money they make from having you as a user is relatively inconsequential.

It's shocking to hear this, but it's a fact of how online businesses operate. And once you understand how they operate you understand your true value in this world.

You see, you as an individual are not valuable…but…the data about you is valuable.

That's what online companies are after. Whether it's Facebook, Google, Twitter, or the Internet Service Providers (ISP), they all want data about you.

The more data the better.

They don't care if your name is Max Jones. They care about your hobbies and interests. They care if you have a wife and kids, and the age and gender of each kid. They care about your education, what you do for a living, and how much money you make. They care about your political beliefs. You get the idea.

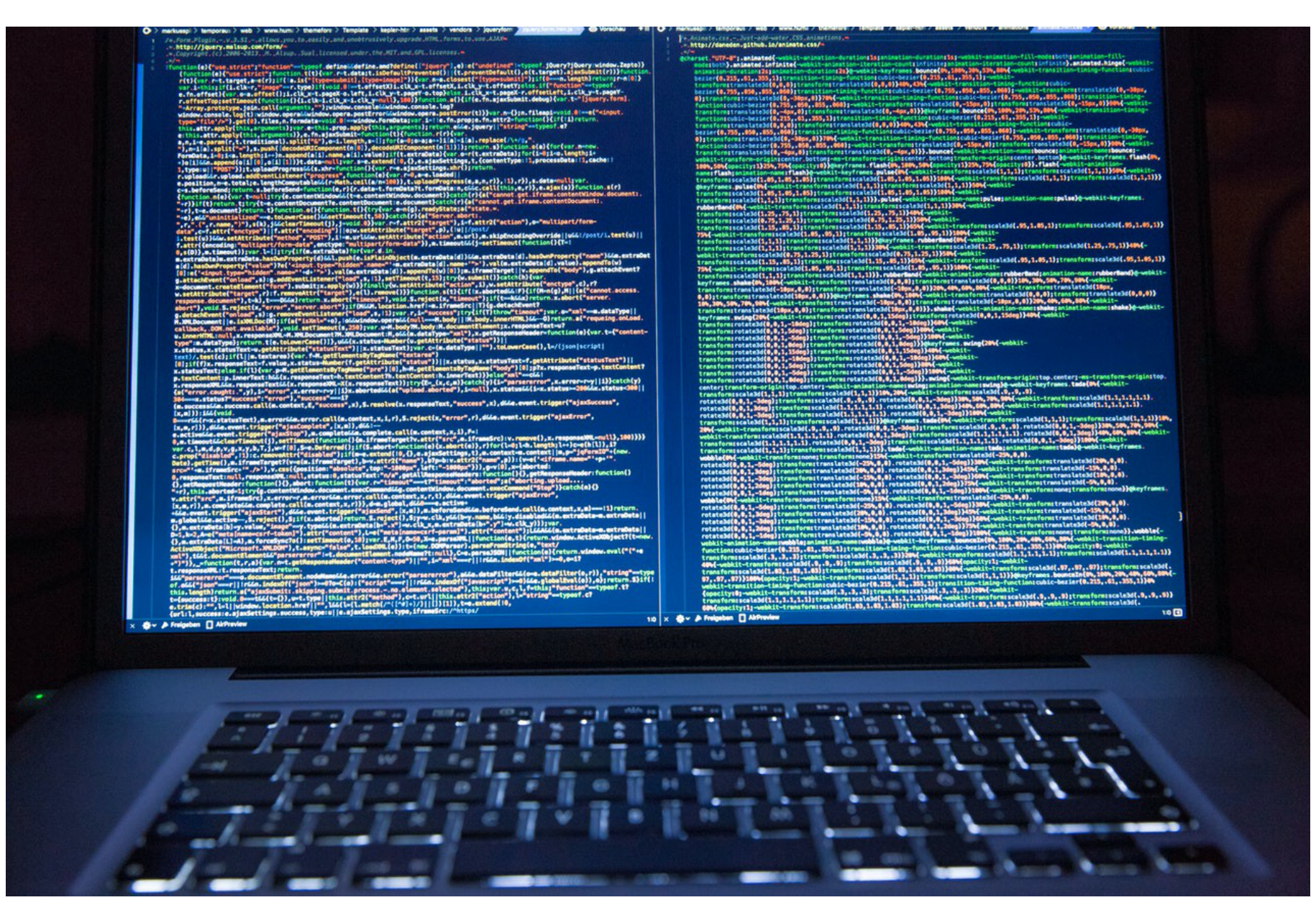
Your value isn't in you as a person but you as a compilation of data.

This is how online companies make money. They compile as much data as possible on all their users to sell to advertisers. When Nike wants to advertise online, Facebook can tell them exactly which of their users are active athletes.

If this economy were a prison then your data would be the carton of cigarettes.

Needless to say, this setup should worry you. Whether you guard your privacy like a hawk or you openly share every detail about your life, it's disturbing that your value is based on what people know about you.

And it's just getting worse.



ISP-y on you without your consent

ISPs are, to put it kindly, not well regarded in the consumer world. As a matter of fact, they're the most hated companies in the country. When you overtake airlines on the hatred scale, you know you're something special.

The FCC understood the nature of ISP's so they previously put restrictions on them with regard to your data. The restrictions required ISP's to explicitly get your consent before they sold your data.

It was a good idea to do this so, of course, it didn't last long.

Thanks to legislation passed in Congress, ISP's will have an easier time selling your data. All the previous restrictions that were placed on them have now been lifted.

Yup, the most hated companies can now take your data without your consent and sell it to the highest bidder.

Who says democracy doesn't work?

ISP's were able to successfully argue that since Google and Facebook don't have restrictions on selling data that neither should they. This logic doesn't hold up well for many reasons.

For starters, Google and Facebook are free services, while ISP's are already taking a good chunk of your money.

There's also the slight detail that ISP's are essentially monopolies.

If you use a website (such as Facebook) and disagree with their privacy rules then you can choose not to use them or to use another website. But that doesn't work with ISP's. So you're stuck with what you've got.

They know you don't have a choice and they're taking advantage of their monopoly. No wonder they're so hated.

Privacy advocates are understandably upset about this whole scenario. In addition to data about you personally, ISP's are also able to sell your browsing history, app usage, and even location information.

Your options are limited.

The one time you want to reduce your value

How ISP's make money is their concern. Protecting your data is your concern. As it stands now, the battle is between you and them. So what can you do to fight this battle?

Well, we know your value to ISP's is based on the data you (unwillingly) provide to them. So you can look into ways to kill your value.

If they can't get your data then they can't sell your data.

One of the best tricks you can use is to create a Virtual Private Network (VPN). A VPN essentially adds a layer between your computer and the internet, which hides your browsing from ISPs.

Related to VPN technology, you can also use a private browser such as TOR. TOR was created explicitly to prevent unwanted access to your browsing habits.

Search engines are another problem is this world. So many of them track your search history. If you want to use a search engine that doesn't track you then you should try DuckDuckGo.

As you can see there are many tools available to help you protect your data.

Ultimately you can't change how ISP's operate, and you can't change how your value to them is based on them violating your privacy, but you can change how much data they can access.

You can control your data.

It's a shame that it we have to take these measures but the government is enabling this system so we need to protect ourselves. Hopefully, with enough outcry, the legislation will go back to putting the restrictions on ISP's.

After all, why would anyone want the most hated companies in America to sell your data?

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