

MANAGING

Ways to avoid the trackers that follow you online

STEVE ALEXANDER

Q: I use a Windows 10 laptop, the Microsoft Edge web browser and the privacy-oriented DuckDuckGo and Startpage search engines. When I most recently used the CCleaner program (which finds and deletes unneeded or unwanted software) it found only two Web trackers on my PC, down from the hundreds it usually finds. Why am I detecting fewer trackers?

STAN FRIEDMAN, Phoenix

A: Web trackers are typically put on your PC by commercial websites; they are designed

to learn about your interests and what you might buy (see tinyurl.com/4upryjxx).

If you are finding fewer Web trackers, you may have enabled CCleaner's "smart cleaning" feature (see tinyurl.com/589wmwxk). It causes the program to automatically clean, or prompt you to clean, your PC and browser. As a result, the PC would accumulate fewer trackers.

Software updates are another possible cause. There may have been security changes made to the Edge browser (see tinyurl.com/c9bdhe6b for changes that are in progress) or the DuckDuckGo and Startpage

search engines (read about their Web tracker blocking at tinyurl.com/ybw4yxss for DuckDuckGo and tinyurl.com/4n6c6sbm for Startpage.)

Clarification: Last week's column about using safe passwords referred to the 2020 hack of the SolarWinds IT firm, which allowed hackers to spy on the federal government. While the company's use of a simplistic server password was criticized in Congress, it was ultimately determined that the hackers had used another method to gain entry to SolarWinds' IT systems, and that the simple password had not been involved.

Q: I've lost the use of about a third of my Apple iTunes music, which I keep on two iPods. Due to a (2009) file format change, the older music won't play on other devices. Will DRM (Digital Rights Management) removal software give me access to this music again?

LAURA COE, Miami

A: Yes. Any iTunes songs that were downloaded in 2009 or earlier are protected by DRM, which limits the devices they can be played on. DRM removal software can convert them to MP3s (see tinyurl.com/asbpekcs), which are not restricted and can be played on

nearly any device.

You will need to move the music from the iPods to a PC or Mac, the devices on which most DRM software runs. The iTunes program won't do that, so use non-Apple software for the transfer (see tinyurl.com/83u5zem2 for PC and Mac programs or tinyurl.com/7wrb9b8n for PC-only software.)

Q: I didn't get an instruction book with the iMac I bought three years ago. How can I get one?

MARILYN VICK-KALAR, Wayzata

A: The user manual should

be stored on the Mac. In the Apple menu, click "about this Mac," then click "support." In the "macOS resources" section, click "user manual."

But if you can't find what you need there, go to tinyurl.com/2np3x52m, click "desktops," and at the bottom of the page, click "load more results" until you find your specific Mac model. Click the word "essentials" next to your model. Click "table of contents."

E-mail tech questions to steve.j.alexander@gmail.com or write to Tech Q&A, 650 3rd Av. S., Suite 1300, Minneapolis, MN 55488. Include name, city and telephone number.

MANAGING

These steps keep Windows from shuffling screen

STEVE ALEXANDER

Q: I like to leave my PC screen windows open and arranged a certain way. The open windows include Excel and Word files, photos, a web browser and a command prompt (C:\). But when I leave the PC for a while, Windows 10 rearranges these open windows. How can I prevent that?

JIM CARLSON, Tucson, Ariz.

A: This problem has been around for several years, but Microsoft is expected to fix it in Windows 11, which will be a free upgrade to Windows 10.

While the problem suppos-

edly affects only computers that use more than one monitor (another name for computer screen), it also appears to affect PCs that have received software driver updates for a monitor. (A software driver allows the monitor to communicate with Windows 10.)

Here's what happens: When you return to your PC, Windows 10 awakens from "sleep mode" (an energy-saving feature) and looks for the monitor it should "wake up." To do that, it looks at a list inside Windows 10 that includes every monitor that's ever been connected to that PC. It then picks what seems to be the right monitor.

If Windows 10 picks the right

monitor from the list, the open windows on your screen will appear just as they did before the PC entered sleep mode. But if the operating system picks the wrong monitor, any open windows may be rearranged (resized or moved).

Unfortunately, Windows 10 seems to treat any monitor with an updated software driver as a "new" monitor. As a result, even a PC that has never used more than one monitor may have a list of several that Windows 10 can choose from — sometimes with bad results.

There are two ways you can try to fix this problem:

- Wait for Windows 11 to be downloaded to your PC and see

if the problem has been fixed. However, that may take a while. Although Windows 11 was introduced this month, Microsoft says it won't be downloaded to all eligible PCs until mid-2022. (To see if your PC meets the requirements to run Windows 11, you can download Microsoft's "PC Health Check" app by going to tinyurl.com/4ayc3w66). Note: While Microsoft says all your files and data should transfer to Windows 11, you should back them up before installing the new operating system.

- Try a fix that has worked for some people. Open Control Panel, choose "device manager" and, in the resulting list, click the arrow beside "moni-

tors." Delete any monitor listed that's not in use (it should have a light-colored icon or be covered by a light color.)

Q: When I search online for products or services, the ones that are supposed to be "near me" often aren't close by — they may be elsewhere in the state. How can I limit my search results to places that are nearby?

JOHN WEZOWICZ, Suffield, Conn.

A: Your search results are wrong because your PC isn't sharing your specific location. As a result, Windows must guess where you are based on GPS, nearby Wi-Fi hot spots or your IP (Internet Protocol)

address. If you want to give out your exact location, open Windows settings and click "privacy." In the resulting menu, click "location" and make sure that "allow access to location on this device" and "allow apps to access your location" are turned on. Under "default location" click "set default" and type in your street address. Under "choose which apps can access your precise location," turn on "desktop app Web viewer" and "maps."

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MANAGING

Make it harder for spammers to learn about you

STEVE ALEXANDER

Q: Spam keeps changing and several readers wonder what to do about it. Sharon Gresham of Sarasota, Fla., said she has begun to receive e-mails in a foreign language, and trying to block them hasn't worked. Ann Donovan of Colorado Springs, Colo., said she's getting a steady stream of what appear to be scam e-mails from someone named Elene, who she thinks is not a real person. Labeling the e-mails as spam stopped them for only a short time.

A: Foreign language e-mails or repeated e-mails from a stranger probably are spam. So, what should you do?

- Never click anything in a spam e-mail. (you could get malware or sent to a bogus website.)

- Give up trying to block spam because it's fruitless. Once you block an e-mail address the spammers start using a different one. Instead, send spam to your e-mail's spam folder, which should (eventually) help the service's spam filter to block at least some of the junk mail. As the spammers change their e-mails, you may need to label them as spam again.

- Avoid opening what appears to be spam. Spammers embed graphics in an e-mail to make it look authentic. These graphics reside on a server

run by the spammer, so every time you open a piece of spam, a graphic image is automatically downloaded to your computer and the spammer learns things about you, such as: your IP (Internet Protocol) address, which in turn can reveal your approximate location (down to the city you live in), the name of your internet service provider and the type of internet connection you are using (cable, phone or cellular.) The spammer also may be able to identify your device, operating system, browser, time zone, screen size and preferred language. A spammer may use this information to send spam that might appeal to you.

- If you need to open an e-mail to make sure that it is spam, try to limit what a spammer can learn about you. Turn off your e-mail's "automatic image downloading." (To do this in several e-mail systems, see tinyurl.com/4w7nk73y and scroll to the bottom of the article.)

Q: I want to use the online version of Microsoft Office (part of the Microsoft 365 subscription service) on both my new and old PCs. But I prefer the format of the Outlook 365 program (version 2108) that's on my old PC. I'd like to transfer it to my new PC rather than use the latest Outlook 365 program (version 2109), which has

a new layout that I dislike. Can I do this?

A: You can't avoid the Outlook change on your new PC, but you can on your old one. Microsoft changed the visual appearance of the Office apps that are part of Microsoft 365 (see tinyurl.com/7medev94) to make them look more like Windows 11, which is a free upgrade to Windows 10. Here's how that will affect you:

New PC: It can't avoid the change because you can't transfer the old version of Outlook (version 2108) from your old PC to your new one. Instead, you must deactivate

Office on your old PC, then activate it on your new PC. That means you will have to download the new Office apps (version 2109) to the new PC (see tinyurl.com/4rs6pcvc).

Old PC: You can keep the Outlook version you like if you disable the automatic updates from Microsoft 365. That's accomplished differently depending on whether you downloaded Office to the old PC or it came preinstalled (see tinyurl.com/t8bye6dp).

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MANAGING

How to stop Edge promotions in Windows 10

STEVE ALEXANDER

Q: I dislike Microsoft's frequent interruptions of my work in Windows 10. How can I keep the Windows 10 news feed from continually popping up when I'm trying to write an e-mail? The news feed window covers part of the screen on the right side.

Also, how can I stop Microsoft from bombarding me with messages to switch from the Google Chrome browser to Edge? When I use the search box at the lower left of the screen, I get the message "Try the browser recommended by Microsoft" and a button to

click "Launch Now."

RICK REITER, Anoka

A: Microsoft uses these interruptions to promote Edge, which ranks a distant third in web-browser popularity. In a recent study of World Wide Web browser market share, Google Chrome had 65.27%, Apple Safari 18.34%, Microsoft Edge 3.4%, Firefox 3.29%, Samsung Internet 3.18% and Opera 2.19% (see tinyurl.com/vyct2ep4).

The "News and Interests" pop-up window is triggered if you accidentally hover your cursor over the weather icon at the lower right of the Win-

dows 10 task bar. It then covers up part of whatever else is on your screen with links to news, weather, stock prices and traffic information. If you click on any of the links, they open in the Edge browser, even if you have set Google Chrome as your default browser.

To turn off "News and Interests," right-click the task bar. In the resulting menu, click on News and Interests and choose "turn off." You will know it's gone because the weather icon will disappear from the task bar.

The Edge ads you see when using the search box are called "tips, tricks and suggestions," and they appear because Win-

dows 10 knows that you're using a different browser. To turn off the messages, click Settings in the task bar (the icon looks like a gear wheel.) Then click on System, and in the resulting menu click on "notifications & actions" on the left side. On the right side of the menu, uncheck the box that says, "Get tips, tricks, and suggestions as you use Windows."

Q: I'm unable to work on a Microsoft Word document from 2009 that I transferred to my Windows 10 PC from an older computer. The file can't be worked on because is under "protected view." What can I do?

MICHAEL FOX, Minneapolis
A: "Protected view" opens a Word document in read-only mode. It's activated when your PC believes a file might contain malware because it came from an unknown source. The easiest fix is to disable protected view. To do that, open Word, click the "file" heading, then click "options" in the lower left corner of the screen. In the resulting menu, click "trust center" on the left, then click "trust center settings" at the right. In the next menu, click "protected view" on the left side of the screen.

Then, in the center of

the screen, uncheck all the boxes under the "protected view" heading. They include "Enable protected view for files originating from the internet," "Enable protected view for files located in potentially unsafe locations" and "Enable protected view for Outlook attachments." Click OK at the bottom of the screen, and on the next screen click OK again.

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MANAGING

Turn off Windows 11 automatic data encryption

STEVE ALEXANDER

There are always a few surprises in a new Windows operating system.

Even so, I was quite surprised to find that my newly installed Windows 11 Home was encrypting all the data on my PC, even though I hadn't told it to do so.

The fact is, I would never tell Windows to encrypt anything, because it's the equivalent of putting my data in a locked room to which there is only one key. If I couldn't find the key, I would lose my data.

Microsoft, however, has decided to automatically encrypt the data on every Windows 11 computer without telling you about it. Lock-

ing down your data makes your PC safer, the company said.

Dear Microsoft: I will take your chances. I'm turning off encryption in Windows 11 before it's too late and I lose my PC's data. That's my idea of security.

Here's why readers should do the same if they get the free Windows 11 upgrade:

Microsoft didn't give me basic safety information. Encryption scrambles the data on your disk, and that data can only be reassembled if you have the encryption key, a bit of code that functions like a password. So, where is the key? Microsoft didn't tell me. (Some experts believe the encryption key will be

stored in your online Microsoft account.)

You could be in big trouble if your Windows 11 PC stops working. Say your PC fails because of a flawed Windows update, a hard disk drive failure or a burned-out component on the main circuit board. Normally, you could take the nonworking PC to a repair shop and have all your data copied from the hard drive (or SSD, a computer chip substitute for a hard drive). You could then have that data stored on another computer, or on the old one after it's repaired.

But, if your data is encrypted and you don't have the encryption key, you are out of luck. The repair shop

won't be able to read your data and it will be lost forever.

Wait a minute, you say. Do I really have to turn off encryption, a new Microsoft security feature, to make sure I won't accidentally lose my data?

You have one other option: Copy all your PC's data to a flash drive or external hard drive. Data stored on those external devices won't be automatically encrypted. If your PC then fails and you lack the encryption key, you will still have the backups.

But, if you would rather not make backups every day, here's how to turn off automatic encryption. Go to the Windows 11 settings (click the gear wheel icon in the tool bar) and click "privacy & security"

on the left. On the right, click on "device encryption." You will see that it's turned on by default; flip the switch to off.

You will be warned that doing so will start a task that could take a lot of time. Do it anyway. Windows 11 will then decrypt your PC's data and leave it that way.

Note that this automatic encryption issue will only arise if you are able to upgrade from Windows 10 to 11 over the next few months. It turns out that the upgrade is being limited to PCs that can handle the computations needed for several new security features — and PCs more than three years old may be unable to do that. PCs that don't qualify to run Windows 11 can continue

to use Windows 10 until October 2025, when Microsoft will stop supporting it. After that, you will need to buy a new Windows 11 PC.

But, even if your PC is capable of being upgraded to Windows 11, is it a good idea to do so? Some experts said you should wait awhile (see tinyurl.com/b6b5dyzt). I would say go ahead and upgrade. I have been able to turn off the encryption feature I didn't like. And, who knows, maybe Windows 11 will improve PC security.

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DREW ANGERER • POOL • ABACAPRESS.COM • TNS

Former Facebook employee Frances Haugen testified last week during a Senate committee hearing. The whistleblower provided internal company documents about Facebook to journalists, alleging Facebook consistently chooses profit over safety.

American public wiser now about social media's effects

In Facebook's major scandals of the last five years, some of the scary details or breathless conclusions have been off base. But each one has moved us closer to essential truths about how Facebook affects our lives.

In 2016, the worst fears were that a wildfire of Russian propaganda on Facebook persuaded a bunch of Americans to vote for Donald Trump. In 2018, people spun yarns that the political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica brainwashed us with data they vacuumed up from Facebook users. Not quite right.

In the firestorms, there may have been too much credit given to the Kremlin, Cambridge Analytica and Facebook — and too little to human free will.

And in Facebook's crisis du jour, kicked off by a whistleblower's claims that the company repeatedly chose its short-term corporate interests over the good of humanity, some nuance has likely been lost. Instagram's internal research about the app's influence on teenage girls' mental health does not appear conclusive, as some researchers told me and NPR reported.

So yes, we have all gotten stuff wrong about Facebook. The company, the public and people in power have at times oversimplified, sensationalized, misdiagnosed the problems or botched the solutions. We focused on how the heck

Facebook allowed Macedonian teenagers to grab Americans' attention with fabricated news and did less to address why so many people believed it.

Each public embarrassment for Facebook, though, is a building block that makes us a little savvier about the influence of these still relatively new internet technologies in our lives. The real power of the scandals is the opportunity to ask: Holy moly, what is Facebook doing to us? And what are we doing to one another?

“Those stories have ... started to make people take the power of technology companies seriously.”

Kate Klonick, professor at St. John's University School of Law

Kate Klonick, a law-school professor, told me that when she started as a doctoral student at Yale Law School in 2015, she was told that her interest in internet companies' governance of online speech was not a subject for serious legal research and publication. Online life was not considered real life, she explained. Russian election propaganda, Cambridge Analytica and other Facebook news in the years that followed changed that perception.

“Those stories have done one huge thing: They've started to make people take the power of technology companies seriously,” Klonick said.

That is one thing that is

different about this Facebook episode from all the ones that came before. We are wiser. And we are ready.

There is a coterie of former tech insiders and outside professionals who have studied Facebook and other tech superpowers for years, and they are armed with proposed fixes for the harms that these companies perpetrate.

Another difference in 2021 is the presence of Frances Haugen, the former product manager at Facebook who seems to be the right messenger with the right message at

the right time.

I want to resist the comparisons that some senators and Facebook critics have made between the company and cigarette makers. The products are not analogous. But the comparison is apt in a different way.

For decades, there were warnings about the harmful effects of smoking and big tobacco companies covering it up. In the 1990s, a whistleblower — Jeffrey S. Wigand, a former executive from Brown & Williamson Tobacco — crystallized and confirmed years of suspicions and helped compel U.S. government authorities to act.

Haugen, like Wigand, went

public with damning firsthand knowledge and documents, and a compelling story to tell to a public that was ready to hear it. That magical formula can change everything for a company or industry.

“We are moved by stories,” Erik Gordon, a professor at the University of Michigan business school, told me. “The facts don't have to be bulletproof. They have to be enough to give a good story credibility.”

I do not know if this is Facebook's Big Tobacco moment. Haugen was not the first former Facebook insider who sounded alarms about the company. After Wigand's bombshell disclosures, it took a couple more years for the U.S. government's crack-down on the tobacco industry to get real. And, of course, people still smoke.

Blame is a blunt instrument, but at each Facebook crossroad, we learn to wield blame more judiciously. Facebook and other online companies are not responsible for the ills of the world, but they have made some of them worse. We get it now.

The answers are not easy, but Haugen is directing our attention straight at Facebook's molten core: its corporate culture, organizational incentives and designs that bring out the worst in humanity.

And she is saying that Facebook cannot fix itself. A wiser public must step in.

Ovide writes for the New York Times.

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