

COMPUTER GURU

by Don Benjamin

Technology Lab Programs sponsored by: Akin Care Senior Services

Free Apps that Respect Your Privacy

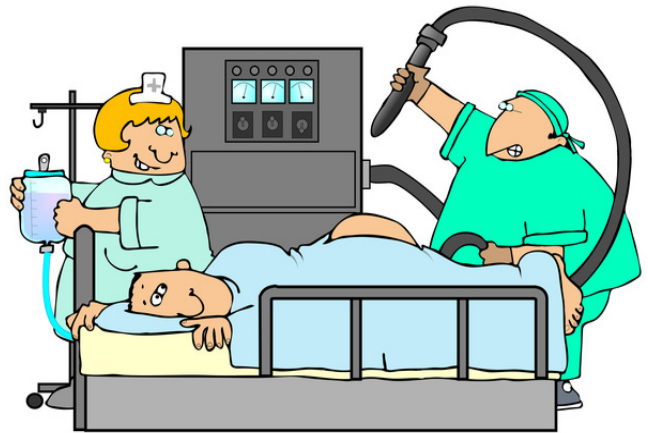
A few weeks ago, I Googled ¹ “washing machine parts,” and ever since, I’ve been bombarded with ads for washing machine parts. They show up in The New York Times app, Google, and other sites, most of which don’t even sell washing machine parts. This happens because Google sells your search requests to advertisers who pay Google when you click on the ad in Google and elsewhere.

Google also owns the Chrome browser, which sends your bookmarks and search requests, but not URLs or any personal information, to the Google folks.

Similarly, WhatsApp, which Facebook owns, provides the Facebook team with your location, device type, phone number, and more.

And Facebook probably knows more about you than your gastroenterologist.

If you’re creeped out by all this, here are some free applications that don’t track you or keep your information.



Todd can't wait to share his experience on Facebook.

Browsers

Firefox tops my list for private web browsing. The Mozilla Foundation, a nonprofit group that promises to never collect your information, developed Firefox. This browser also shields your information from websites that track your online activities.

Go to mozilla.org to download Firefox on your Windows computer. It will also work on Mac computers, but I prefer Safari.

Safari is tailored for Mac computers and works seamlessly with other Mac applications like Apple Mail and Calendar. Apple is big on privacy and, like Firefox, has new protections that keep your data private and warn you if a website tries to track your information. Safari comes with Mac computers, and I see no reason to use anything else.

Search Sites

DuckDuckGo may sound silly, but it’s an excellent private search site and a good replacement for Google. You can access it at duckduckgo.com and make it the default search engine for whatever browser you use, including Firefox and Safari. You can also install the DuckDuckGo extension in your Firefox and Safari browsers to enhance data privacy for all sites you visit. DDG is also available from the Apple App Store for iPhones and Google Play Store for Android phones.

Text Messages

Signal is tops for texting privacy and is an excellent replacement for WhatsApp. As Signal explains on their website, “Signal doesn’t collect or store any sensitive information. Signal messages and calls cannot

¹ It seems that “Google” is also a verb.

be accessed by Signal staff or other third parties because they are always end-to-end encrypted, private, and secure.” Managed by a nonprofit corporation, Signal is quickly becoming the “go-to” text messaging service. Oh, and you can also use it for voice and video calls.

Signal is available from the Apple App Store for iPhones and Google Play Store for Android phones. After you add Signal to your smartphone, you can download a desktop version for your MacBook or Windows PC. How convenient!



DuckDuckGo

Yes, that's what it's called.

If you need help with any of these applications or with computer security and privacy in general, please visit princetonsenior.org/psrc-tech-resources/ to set up an appointment with our volunteer tech team.