By JENNIFER VALENTINO-DEVRIES

A few online marketers will show you what they know about you – or think they know.

Google Inc., Microsoft Corp., Yahoo Inc. and others have created “preference managers” that let you see, and change, the interests they've assigned to you based on your browsing behavior. The companies acted partly in response to concerns about the privacy of the people they're tracking.

Some, but not all, of the preference managers let you halt tracking by that company. But none will block all tracking, or prevent you from seeing ads. Some require you to register, and one lets you pick a charity to which you can donate some of the money made by selling your data.

The companies gather this information by tracking your Web-surfing activity through small computer files or software programs installed on your computer by the websites you visit. Over time, this information says a lot about your interests. Companies then use the information to make other guesses and predictions about you, ranging from gender and age to marital status and creditworthiness.

Some of their guesses can be wrong. Your profile might also be inaccurate if you block or delete cookies, since that prevents companies from following your Web surfing to assess your interests.

Here's where you can go to see what the marketers think they know about you. Some let you correct or delete information already in their database about you, or add more information.

• Google was the most prevalent tracker in The Wall Street Journal's survey of popular websites, with tracking code appearing on 49 of the 50 sites tested. Google's Ads Preferences Manager, at http://www.google.com/ads/preferences/, lets you see the name of the tracking file, or "cookie," it associates with your Web browser and the interests it links to that cookie.

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More From What They Know

Google Agonizes Over Privacy
On Web's Cutting Edge, Anonymity in Name Only
Stalking by Cellphone

About This Project
Marketers are spying on Internet users - observing and remembering people's clicks, and building and selling detailed dossiers of their activities and interests. The Wall Street Journal's What They Know series documents the new, cutting-edge uses of this Internet-tracking technology and the implications for consumers.
regions. You can also disable Google’s cookie so it no longer tracks you.

Dig Deeper

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The Times on geotag stalking. http://nyti.ms/apUGk1

References one of our fave recent studies, “Cybercasing the Joint.”


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Should Companies Sell Privacy Offsets? From @theatlantic


1 days 10 hrs 19 min ago from WhatTheyKnow (WSJ's What They Know)

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