Report: Google considering an iOS-style anti-tracking feature for Android



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It’s still early, but Apple’s new tracking restrictions on iOS sure seem to be causing headaches for the Internet ad industry. Just last week, Google told partners to expect a “significant impact” to ad revenue, while Facebook has launched an all-out war against Apple’s tracking initiative and is reportedly considering legal action. Now, a new report from Bloomberg claims that Google, the world’s largest

Internet ad company… wants to do a similar thing on Android?

The report says that “the search giant is discussing how it can limit data collection and cross-app tracking on the Android operating system in a way that is less stringent than Apple’s solution.” This “less stringent” solution will be made after “seeking input” from stakeholders, over which Google’s ad division will probably have a large influence.

Citing “people with knowledge of the matter,” Bloomberg says the feature “won’t require a prompt to opt in to data tracking like Apple’s” and that “to keep advertisers happy while improving privacy, the discussions around Google’s Android solution indicate that it could be similar to its planned Chrome web browser changes.” Bloomberg also warns that the idea is in the early stages and might not happen at all.

The Chrome browser changes refer to Google’s plans for a “Privacy Sandbox” in Chrome that would kill third-party cookies, a primary method advertisers use to track users across the Web. Chrome wants to replace tracking cookies with a solution that would use machine learning to group people into various ad interest categories rather than track and share an individual’s specific Web history. As with Android, Chrome’s solution is a reaction to Apple’s more aggressive controls on ad cookies in 2017. Chrome’s tracking plan is a work in progress that won’t be out for at least another year.

It seems counter-intuitive for one of the world’s largest ad companies to push for features in Chrome and Android that could harm the ad industry. With Apple’s regular crowing about privacy, though, it’s possible that Google sees self-regulation as a shield against external regulation, which would surely be tougher than any restrictions it comes up with for itself. Rather than shoot down the report, a Google spokesperson told Bloomberg, “We’re always looking for ways to work with developers to raise the bar on privacy while enabling a healthy, ad-supported app ecosystem.”

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