



Proposal for FTC's PrivacyCon 2016 on “Adblock, Privacy and the Future of the Web”

I've submitted a presentation proposal to the FTC's PrivacyCon 2016 conference. You can still publicly support my bid to be selected by **Recommending** this story here on Medium: tap that heart and attach your name. Then help spread the word.

I believe this could be a new form of radically open public peer review, especially for government sponsored conferences on fast-moving topics like adblocking when scholarly publishing moves at a glacial pace.

I warmly welcomed your feedback during the final 24hrs leading up to the October 9, 2016 deadline.

I've appreciated all the endorsements here, on Twitter, and Facebook. I've especially appreciated the direct comments that informed draft revisions. Your Medium Recommendations will continue to show your support well into the future.

*The Federal Trade Commission will hold a conference on **January 14, 2016** to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders, including whitehat researchers, academics, industry representatives, consumer advocates, and a range of government regulators, to discuss the latest research and trends related to consumer privacy and data security. The FTC is calling for research to be presented at the conference.*

Proposal Letter of Intent

October 9, 2015

Federal Trade Commission
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580

RE: PrivacyCon 2016 Call for Presentations

Dear Review Committee,

I propose to produce a 15-minute presentation for PrivacyCon 2016 tentatively and provocatively titled: **How Adblocking, Adfraud and Dataveillance threatens to ruin media for good. Or not.**

Research Questions

The topic of consumers rapidly adopting adblocking software has only recently reached the mainstream media with Apple's release of iOS 9 this September. This new mobile operating system is being updated by iPhone users at a record pace while adding support for Content Blockers, apps that modify how the Safari browser app and in-app Safari View Controller load Web pages. Within the first day of release, paid adblock products surged to the top of the App Store sales charts. This event has triggered a profound discussion about advertising, privacy, and data rights. There are many things we don't know yet, for example:

- How will publishers of different sizes be affected?
- How will the thousands of so-called "ad tech" companies adapt and survive?

- Will the major platforms of Apple, Google, Facebook, and Twitter succeed at displacing the complex and distributed network of intermediaries while consolidating the browsing habits of billions into an increasingly potent advertising data trove to mine for privacy-invasive targeting?
- Will these platforms and formats including Apple News, Facebook Instant Articles, Google/Twitter AMP (Accelerated Mobile Pages) overtake W3C ratified Open Standards in terms of content pages produced and consumed?
- Will mobile telecom carriers, especially Verizon with its acquisition of Aol, succeed at entrenching and expanding consumer surveillance for the benefit of shareholder value across its holdings at the expense of consumer's wallets, privacy, and data rights?
- Will the Web become more de-anonymized as consumers resort to blunt instruments to recapture their data rights?

As this unfolds, my research has consisted of ongoing public engagement with industry organizations and leaders. As I form an initial

analysis in public, in real-time, I am preparing a publication in-progress to submit to a scholarly peer-reviewed publication. In the meantime, adblocking's effect on the "adtech" and publishing industries, increasingly finding themselves at the mercy of the major technology and platform companies, is an unfolding narrative with daily developments. Consumers have unleashed a devastating blow to industry that according to Doc Searls is likely the "biggest boycott in human history" already 400 million users strong, and growing (PageFair/Adobe).

By the time the PrivacyCon conference is convened on January 14, 2016, the situation could be somewhat more stabilized or clarified. At least important data, research, and analysis will become somewhat more feasible over the coming three months.

The purpose of my proposed presentation is to:

- Summarize and analyze the lead-up to the tipping point of adblocking adoption
- Summarize the positions, availability/credibility of data, and market reaction of the: adtech industry,

publishing industry, major technology platforms

- Highlight influential voices in the debates
- Summarize the adblocker market and its variants
- Examine the user interfaces of common iOS 9 Content Blockers from technical, business, and consumer intents
- Interpret various data generated by different actors in this space, identifying cross-correlations, conflicted biases, and conventional-wisdom defying consumer attitudes and behaviors
- Review proposed solutions and their viabilities

Hypothesis

The basic hypothesis of my presentation will assert that consumer adoption of adblocking software indicates clear consumer attitudes about privacy and data agency, not just that advertising is annoying. Publishers have good reasons to want less tracking and don't want or need to sell targeted ads. The necessity of targeted ads is a myth propagated by both the adtech industry and big platforms owned by Google, Facebook, Twitter, and

Apple. This heralds significant changes in the marketplace, both desired and undesired. The future of the Open Web, privacy norms, and access to open knowledge flows are at stake, right now.

Working in Public, Working in Realtime

I have been actively engaging with important industry and academic voices both on Twitter and through in-person meetings and discussions. In addition, I have been testing initial hypotheses and research findings on Medium and succeeding with aspects of this new kind of informal but radically transparent peer-review by public citation on Twitter and Medium referrals, recommendations and comments. Indeed, this topic is too new and moving too fast for traditional academic peer review at this early stage.

Adblock as a Tragedy of the Commons: When consumer attention, property rights, privacy rights, media ethics, and market misalignments collide, monopoly wins. September 18, 2015 on Medium.

Adtech vs. Adblock: Computers ruined advertising. Can they save it? September 8, 2015 on Medium.

Adblockers and the fracking of data: An inconvenient truth about digital content. September 1, 2015 on Medium.

I was quoted by *The New York Times* when they first began to cover this story of iOS 9 Content Blockers.

Enabling of Ad Blocking in Apple's iOS 9 Prompts Backlash. Katie Benner and Sydney Ember. September 18, 2015 in The New York Times.

I was invited by the premium publisher trade association, Digital Content Next (DCN) to write a byline that originated as a comment to the first public media coverage of the adblocking story on the Note to Self podcast (WYNC) by Manoush Zamorodi on September 23, 2015.

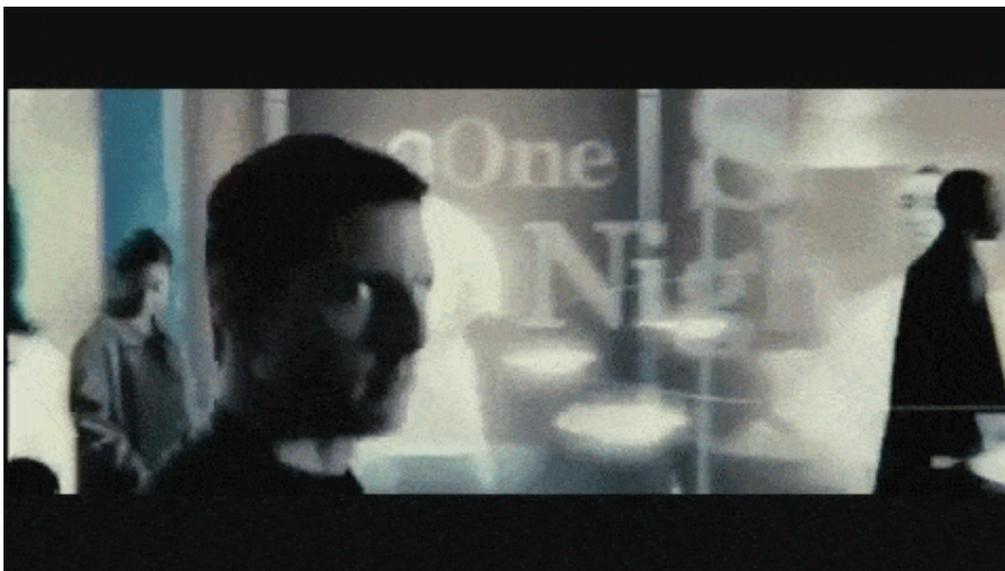
You say you ignore the banners but they never ignore you. September 28, 2015 on DCN In Context.

What if customers trying to prevent a future of flashing banners and clickbait...



Idiocracy (2006) directed by Mike Judge

...inadvertently accelerates us toward a future of ubiquitous, invasive, hyper-targeted advertising?



Minority Report (2002) directed by Steven Spielberg

Annotated Bibliography

I offer a selected and informal annotated bibliography to help foreground some of the research that may inform my final presentation:

Pew's Public Perceptions of Privacy and Security in the Post-Snowden Era finds $\pm 90\%$ of adults feels they have lost control of their personal data.

<http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/11/12/public-privacy-perceptions/>

Head of Premium Publishing trade group DCN, Jason Kint, reveals how targeted ads aren't worth the trouble and risk. Why sell brand equity off with consumer trust for only a \$0.30 boost on remnant CPM? Why risk losing trust for any reason? If ad targeting works so well, why haven't content creator revenues soared with the pace consumers adopting digital?

• <http://adage.com/article/datadriven-marketing/behavioral-advertising-crucial/291858/>

• <http://digiday.com/publishers/publishers-data-trackers/>

• <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2015/03/02/co>

connect-the-dots-between-unbridled-tracking-and-ad-blocking/

Verizon caught tracking customers with “zombie cookies.” Soon swallows up Aol’s vast adtech holdings.

<http://www.propublica.org/article/zombie-cookie-the-tracking-cookie-that-you-cant-kill>

The publishing industry calls for a redesign of advertising.

<http://recode.net/2015/09/24/advertising-2-0-a-call-to-think/>

Publishing industry’s heads are not in the sand.

<https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2015/09/24/7-important-ad-blocking-issues-you-need-to-know/>

Casey Johnston offered the early, sharp critique of Adblock’s effect on independent media and the prospect of a less open web.

<http://www.theawl.com/2015/09/welcome-to-the-block-party/>

War correspondent on the adwars, Doc Searls, and early influencer on principles of data rights through VRM has gathered his collected articles.

<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/doc/2015/09/24/the-adblock-war-series/>

Foregrounded through lenses of culture and power, Maciej Cegłowski, maker of Pinboard, outlines a resistance movement to tracking, comparing it to the tobacco industry.

http://idlewords.com/talks/what_happens_next_will_amaze_you.htm

Journalism self-investigates its own revenue model with an exposé that blows up the clickfraud crisis.

<http://www.bloomberg.com/features/2015-click-fraud/>

The tangled fabric of the adtech industry that will either give way to Big Platform or something more democratic and privacy-positive.

<http://www.lumapartners.com/resource-center/lumascares-2/>

Rigorous research by Don Marti indicates that targeted advertising is harmful to advertisers, publishers, and consumers alike.

<http://zgp.org/targeted-advertising-considered-harmful/>

Premium publishers rigorously studied the relationship between ad targeting and click-bot fraud, documenting the complex effects of bad actors who easily exploit adtech networks for profit. <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2015/09/28/2015-dcn-bot-benchmark-report-what-makes-a-publisher-premium/>

Neustar sponsored a survey by the Ponemon Institute to learn what consumers expect when they visit a website. 50% of consumers consider privacy a top factor in determining brand trust. <https://www.neustar.biz/resources/whitepapers/digital-brands-trust-report>

Adtech stocks plummet as adblocking narrative surges. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/ad-tech-stocks-keep-falling-1443735887>

The cost of mobile ads to consumer data plans shocks everyone as *The New York Times* publishes an illuminating test. <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/10/01/business/cost-of-mobile-ads.html>

Tech journalist veteran Walt Mossberg is first major non-public-media reporter to start making connections between adblock and privacy.

<http://recode.net/2015/10/07/mossberg-the-real-trouble-with-web-ads/>

Podcast interviewing Clauda Perlich includes insights into how advertisers are starting to admit blame for triggering adblocking by relying on misaligned metrics and perverse incentives.

<http://radar.oreilly.com/2015/10/movement-data-is-going-to-transform-everything.html>

The “Do Not Track” Saga is the story of missed opportunity to solve this crisis of collapsing trust before it tipped.

<http://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2015/10/tracking-not-allowed-unless-youre-google-000261>

Qualifications and Credentials

As a member of the full-time faculty at The New School, I bring a design-led research practice embedded within the social sciences. As a founder and CEO of a digital media technology startup intertwined with the publishing industry, I bring a

deep knowledge of industry practices, attitudes, and trend insights thoughtfully considered within the context of how the technology works and how it incentivizes behaviors of different actors in the system.

As a presenter, I contribute an up-to-the-minute perspective on the subject of adblocking as approached from both academic and industry perspectives. This allows me to uniquely synthesize issues across business, design, technology, and policy. I differentiate my research practice on this topic by combining analysis across industrial, academic, and social media sources, signals, studies, and discussions.

Sincerely,

David R. Carroll

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