Cookies and other Baking Tips on how the World Wide Web Works

by

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About the Baker

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- 35 years experience in Information Technology.

- Saw the light in 2010 and retired.

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Overview

- The question that was asked

  - What are Cookies ?

  - Are they a good or a bad thing ?

  - Should I get rid of them or keep them ?

- History of the Cookie.

- Good and Bad Cookies.

- Inspecting your Cookies.

- Surgical Removal or Do No Harm ?

History of the Cookie

- As defined by Wikipedia:

- *"A cookie is usually a small piece of data sent from a website and stored in a user's web browser while a user is browsing a website. When the user browses the same website in the future, the data stored in the cookie can be retrieved by the website to notify the website of the user's previous activity. Cookies were designed to be a reliable mechanism for websites to remember the state of the website or activity the user had taken in the past. This can include clicking particular buttons, logging in, or a record of which pages were visited by the user even months or years ago."*

- Used to maintain "*State*" and "*Persistence*".

- For us mere mortals: *"Remember where I left off, what I told you and who I am so that we can pick up where we left off last time"*.

What are State and Persistence ?

- Stateless vs. Stateful.
  - Consider how a department store operates.
  - Sales Clerks vs. Personal Shoppers.
  - One sales clerk for many customers.
  - One personal shopper for each customer.
- Persistence.
  - Keeping notes on each customer.
  - Their identification, likes, dislikes, what's in their cart, have they paid yet, credit card, etc.

So, what is a cookie ?

- In order to have persistence, the web program needs to store information somewhere attached to the customer so that it can be retrieved when they come back.

- One handy place, is on the customer's computer inside a special folder or "*Cookie Jar*" hence it stores "*Cookies*" on your computer.

- Note it may store all of the data or just a key into a database where the data is kept and maintained every time you visit. For example. Amazon.com.

Good and Bad Cookies

- Like guns cookies themselves are neither good nor bad. It all depends on things that use them.

- Always use common sense when you enter details about yourself into a web page.

- If one honest and pure web program happens to store data about you in a cookie, realize that another evil program can also access that data.

- Well baked cookies are those that store only a key into a database or encrypt data inside the cookie. Professional Bakers generally do this.

Inspecting your Cookies

- Any experienced customer should always take a look at their cookies every so often. It is good to know what is inside your cupboards.

- In Firefox, goto Firefox Preferences – Privacy and then click on "*Remove Individual Cookies*".

- In Google Chrome, goto Settings. Click on "*Show advanced settings*". Click on "*Content Settings*" under Privacy. Click on the "*All cookies and site data...*" under Cookies.

- In Safari, You need to install Safari Cookies from MacUpdate.com to view and manage them.

Surgical Removal or Do No Harm ?

- Apple says: "*Important: Changing your cookie preferences or removing cookies in Safari may change or remove them in other applications, including Dashboard.*"

- The general rule of thumb, "*If it ain't broke, don't fix it.*"

- Next, be sure that you really understand what it is that you are removing, before you remove it.

- Get Technical Support advice if you are in doubt.

Summary

- Cookies are a fact of life and are very difficult to avoid being exposed to. You have to allow them.

- Be careful what information you enter into web pages and other apps that use cookies.

- Use apps that are from professional developers.

- Review your cookies to see just what information about you is being stored on your computer.

- Ask first and remove cookies that look like they are storing information you are not comfortable with. EG. An exposed credit card number.

And now for a live demonstration