

## Crossing the Digital Divide (v40)

### “Control”

By Joseph Feigon for the Observer

It's really not all doom and gloom, but the minute you connect your computer to the Internet, you are exposed and you will be probed, poked and prodded in an attempt to discover any vulnerabilities (un-patched system, dated software, no virus or malware protection, etc.). There's too much out there on the Internet \*not\* to use it, so let's start with a few helpful applications now that your computer is patched, your antivirus and anti-malware apps are up-to-date, and you're using secure passwords.

The graphical browser (IE, Chrome, Opera, Safari, Firefox) is the application most often used by the average computer user. Email is checked via a browser page, as is news, entertainment, shopping, health care. Everyone has a website, and most businesses prefer you use their website instead of a bricks and mortar location, the answer is simple economies of scale. One web server can process thousands of customer requests at the same time, how many customers can a cashier handle at once, without error?

The most common complaint I hear: can you kill the ads I see whenever I'm web surfing? The answer is yes, and there are many ways to customize the many solutions available.

It should come as no surprise, I'm a fan of Google (as a end-user, not as a business), for the richness of their product solutions: <https://www.google.com/intl/en/about/products/>

I encourage everyone to get their own gmail account. A gmail account gives you access to: Docs, Sheets, YouTube, Drive, Maps, Contacts, Hangouts, and much more. Gmail=mail. Docs=word processor that will talk to Microsoft documents. Sheets=spreadsheet alternative. YouTube=on demand video/audio, free. Drive=Storage, lots of it, and inexpensive if you need more. Maps=maps, satellite, traffic. Contacts=one place to store, accessible anywhere. Hangouts=text/video chat. Oh, the Microsoft alternative to a free Google account: Office 365 w/One Drive for about \$10/month.

Google's browser is called Chrome. Google ties all their services together beautifully with Chrome. You log in, Gmail has your contacts, your calendar, your documents, spreadsheets, videos of the dogs, and chats. Yours to edit, delete or copy. Google also knows you don't work the same way Johnny does, so they build in end-user tools to make your life as easy as possible. Chrome “EXTENSIONS” are a means by which you can modify the way in which Chrome presents web-pages to you.

I recommend two extensions, both easily added without any technical skill. These applications can be modified, by you, if you find their functionality breaks or limits what you see when you visit a particular website.

Advertising drives Internet revenue - Google makes lots of money, not by giving us free services, they make money selling ad space to vendors and merchants, and tie the placement

and frequency of those ads based on many factors, the biggest being commitment (\$\$). Most commercial websites sell ad space, or promote themselves with active reminders, promotions, etc.

**AdBlock** is one Chrome Extension that will filter out ads. You'll notice the wider margins, or place-holders with an "x" in the middle for ads that have been filtered out. Some sites will recognize the adblock, and request you whitelist them (easy enough). Ads keep many websites free (YouTube a prime example). AdBlock shuts off much of that noise.

**PrivacyBadger** is another Chrome Extension I use. The software is developed by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), and monitors/alerts/disables website content that may include tracking cookies that remain persistent. Cookies are a small piece of data sent from a website and stored on the user's computer when Chrome/IE/Firefox/Safari/Opera is used to visit websites. Cookies that persist could be notifying the owner of the website you just left where you went thereafter. PrivacyBadger works in conjunction with AdBlock, and silently disables cookies that could be malicious or revealing.

These are but two examples of how, with a little bit of knowledge, you can reduce the amount of advertising you're subjected to as well as keeping your web browsing history and behavior limited to the sites/businesses you do business with.

Keep control of those things you can control.