

Panel: Web Privacy and Anonymity

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(the panelists are anonymous for now)

The web has become the predominant channel through which users interact with providers of information on the Internet. Because of its placement between the user and the information the user wants to access, web software is in a unique position to learn about the user's interests and possibly to provide that information to others. This panel will address the issues of privacy as it relates to the web and other information retrieval protocols and software.

Panelists will address the technical means by which web servers identify users as individuals, or determine that a set of queries originates from the same user. Among these techniques are the use of network addresses, user authentication, and *cookies*. Is it possible for a service provider to meet its security requirements, be paid for the service it provides, or collect the demographic information needed to obtain advertising revenue, while preserving the user's anonymity? The technical means by which users can hide their identities will be discussed including the use of pseudonyms and anonymizing proxies.

Social questions will be considered, including whether there is a legitimate need for anonymity, how to balance the security and marketing needs of the information provider against the user's need for privacy, and whether users are prepared

to sacrifice their privacy for certain benefits. Panelists will be asked for examples of what is and is not appropriate use of the information obtained from user's queries.

The legal issues associated with the use of user information will be discussed, including who owns the information about the users access patterns, what may be done with this information, and how the privacy laws of different countries affect the answer to this question. What recourse do users have when their privacy is violated?

The panelists will be asked what technical mechanisms might be used to limit the retention and dissemination of such information, and how the user can be assured that the information is not being used beyond its intended purpose.

Finally, the panel will consider weaknesses in the mechanisms that have been implemented or proposed to provide anonymity. What assurances about privacy can be violated by collusion, or by subsequent association of a pseudonym or cookie with an individual.