

The Creepy New Billboard Advertising That Threatens Your Privacy

March 3, 2016 –“ Do you remember the movie *Minority Report*? It was released in 2002 and starred Tom Cruise. The movie was set in 2054 and among other things it demonstrated how technology could track consumers and feed them customized advertising. This week, Clear Channel Outdoor is introducing new billboard that appear to mimic that movie. They have the potential to feed consumers custom advertising everywhere they go while diminishing their privacy at the same time. By our calendar, 2054 appears to have arrived early.

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(function() {
var s = document.createElement('SCRIPT'), s1 = document.getElementsByTagName('SCRIPT')[0];
s.type = 'text/javascript';
s.src = 'http://widgets.digg.com/buttons.js';
s1.parentNode.insertBefore(s, s1);
})();
```

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(function() {
var po = document.createElement('script'); po.type = 'text/javascript'; po.async = true;
po.src = 'https://apis.google.com/js/plusone.js';
var s = document.getElementsByTagName('script')[0]; s.parentNode.insertBefore(po, s);
})();
```

For the time being, the new billboards don't actually track consumers. Instead, Clear Channel Outdoor has partnered with several data providers – including AT&T. Those data providers are feeding the company what they call anonymized aggregate data. That data is used by the company to target advertising.

As an example of how this might work, if an advertiser using Clear Channel had information that showed that people who shopped at a particular chain store also had a penchant to traveling to Las Vegas, they could place ads that make sure that their ads were displayed on billboards near those stores. But taking this one step further, if that same advertiser could find out that the people shopping at that chain of stores frequented certain roads at rush hour, they could make sure that their ads were displayed at the best times of day to get a response.

The bottom line here is that in order for this type of advertising to be effective on you, someone needs to track you. They need to track your daily travels and they need to figure out what your interests are. And since Clear Channel Outdoor says they aren't doing this, that means their data providers are.

In an interview with *PC World*, Clear Channel Outdoor VP of Corporate Communications, Jason King attempted to dismiss the public's concerns. He said, "Only the data providers, who have direct relationships with their own consumers, have access to a customer's personal information."

The article went on to say, "Before providing the data to Clear Channel, the data providers categorize their consumers into anonymous groups such as soccer moms or NBA fans, and advertisers want to target these aggregated groups of anonymous consumers."

But how do you get classified as an NBA fan? The only way that works is if someone is looking at what you are looking at. Tracking what you do – presumably on your cell phone. And then that someone is also tracking where you are going.

Frankly, that brings up too many privacy concerns to name them all here.

Apparently, one of the data providers involved in this requires users to opt in. The other three will "allow you" to opt out how nice of them. In our view nobody, and especially not your cell phone provider, should be allowed to track and use this amount of information on anyone without their affirmative response. Having to "opt out" of this kind of service is simply nonsense.

by Jim Malmberg

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