Verizon “Enhances” Mobile Ad Program to Collect PC Web Traffic

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This article has been updated to add comment from Verizon.

Verizon alerted customers it’s “enhancing” it Relevant Mobile Advertising program to incorporate information gathered from desktop and laptop Internet habits.

According to the LA Times, Verizon will begin using an “anonymous, unique identifier” assigned to users when they register on a Verizon website.

That identifier will gather information about what websites the user visits on their desktop or laptop. Marketers will in turn use that information to deliver targeted ads to that user’s mobile devices. The online PC activity tracked is not limited to computers with a Verizon connection.

Verizon Wireless will automatically enroll customers into the enhanced ad program and could put software on users’ PCs unbeknownst to them, according to the LA Times report. Customers can opt out of the program.

Verizon said the mobile identifier is not a mobile cookie and that the carrier does not serve ads to customers based upon their mobile browsing activity. The mobile identifier only allows the link between customary advertising practices online (cookies) and ads that appear in the mobile space, a Verizon spokesperson told Wireless Week.

“There is no Verizon-collected Web browsing information used in the program. The unique identifier provides the advertiser with the ability to place an ad on a customer's mobile device through an ad network and that advertiser may bring Web data to the equation,” a Verizon spokesperson said. “This is all done without any personally identifiable information being shared.”

Verizon broadening its data scope comes as the U.S. population is still highly sensitive about its personal information being collected online.

When information about the NSA’s data collecting policies toward U.S. citizens last year surfaced and stirred outrage, wireless providers like Verizon largely stayed quiet. But as the government pushed toward carriers hosting the NSA-harvested phone data, carriers have pushed back against storing those records for the NSA.

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