

Cookie Cutter 1.0

A small utility which makes it easy to control your 'MagicCookie' file.
Works only with Netscape.

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Cookie Cutter is freeware. You can send me a quick email if you like it, though <sbarnham@ibl.bm>. Cookie Cutter runs on both 68K and PowerPC.

What is a 'MagicCookie'?

Netscape creates a 'MagicCookie' file which it uses to store small amounts of information for various web sites. If a web site is set up to do so, it can save a 'cookie' to your Netscape 'MagicCookie' file. A 'cookie' is simply a line of text which the web site can store and retrieve when you visit the site. For example: A web site may store some kind of userID in a cookie. Each time you visit this site, it will know who you are by looking at the userID in the cookie. A web site can only read a cookie it created -- it cannot read all your cookies.

Cookies are useful to web sites for a number of things. These include user authentication, tracking for marketing purposes.

Sites which advertise may want to track your visits for marketing purposes. This would allow them to work out statistics such as 'we have 10,000 hits per day, with an average of 30% of them being return visitors'. They could also see how frequently people return to their site, just by identifying you with an ID number in a cookie.

User authentication could be used by a paid service, or by an online publication. Basically, each time you visit the site it would look at your cookie and see if you are a registered visitor. If you are, it lets you into 'members only' areas, or knows that you have already filled out a questionnaire.

Some people find the whole MagicCookie concept to be a breach of privacy, as they don't like the idea of being identified and tracked. I think cookies can be useful for enhancing a web site, but I don't like the idea of just any site keeping tabs on me. A cookie can save you the bother of typing in a userID and password everytime you visit a service or publication which has members or registered users. It can also make online shopping much easier by giving you a 'shopping basket' which keeps track of items you have selected -- even between visits. But do you want your visits tracked by just any site?

What does Cookie Cutter do?

There are a few applications available which trash the MagicCookie file on a regular basis. This stops any site from being able to track you, but it will also lose any useful cookies, such as ones used for user authentication. Cookie Cutter gives you more control of the MagicCookie file. It allows you to selectively remove cookies that have been placed in your MagicCookie file. You can also set Cookie Cutter to automatically remove cookies from particular sites (domains), each time you use it, and to always ignore cookies from other domains.

For example, you could set Cookie Cutter to never remove a cookie from the domain 'coolsite.com', if you have a subscription for this site. You could also set it to always remove cookies from 'annoyingsite.com', if you find that site is frequently putting cookies in your MagicCookie file, and you don't want it to. All remaining domains will be listed for you to either remove, or set CookieCutter to always remove or never remove.

Note: 'coolsite.com' and 'annoyingsite.com' are fictional to the best of my knowledge.