

by Ralph Lee Scott

Anonymisers

We have all become increasingly aware that, for commercial and perhaps other reasons, our use of the Internet can and is being tracked. For most of us this tracking has become a major concern as unwanted e-mail (commonly called SPAM) has begun to clog our incoming mail-boxes. There are a variety of ways to combat both the tracking and the receipt of unwanted e-mail. One of the ways of dealing with this problem is the use of an anonymiser service, many of which are available over the Web.

Every time you visit a Web site, publish over the Internet, or send an e-mail from your home or business mail system, you provide useful information about yourself. You send details of where you are located, your interests, habits, computer type, and browser type as you move from page to page on the Internet. Many Web sites and Internet providers track this information, which is then sold to marketers and advertisers. You send this information every time whether you want to or not. If you do a Google search on "Computers> Internet> Proxies> Proxies> Free" you will find a list of eighteen free anonymisers.

Proxy servers can be used to both hide your real IP address (the true location of your computer location on the Internet) as well as provide a hidden e-mail address that masks your true identity on the Web. You can think of your IP address as the street address where your computer is located. Servers on the Internet use this address to communicate with your computer. Each computer has a number of ports through which you allow Internet information to enter and leave. For example, in the IP address, 216.150.33.56:80, the 80 is the port number. Since there are potential hackers who spend all day scanning for open ports on computers, you need to hide your real address from them. Proxies and anonymisers will also block cookies, Java, JavaScript, and other hidden tracking schemes. If you want to use cookies, anonymisers will also encrypt your URL request so that you cannot be tracked. Anonymisers also provide a firewall for your computer that will allow you to surf the Web, send e-mails, and access newsgroups without compromising your home or work

Anonymizer.com is a commercial service that provides

anonymiser service. It provides 20 passes through sites that you can use for free. If you want more direct access to more Web URLs the current Anonymous Web Surfin" service costs \$14.99 for three months of unlimited use. The site is Web-based <www.anonymizer.com) and requires no software to be installed or configured on your computer. The Anonymizer Secure Tunneling service for \$29.99, also for three months, includes all of the features of the "Anonymous Web Surfing" service as well as a firewall.

Another anonymiser is The-Cloak.com <www.the-cloak.com>. The-Cloak functions in much the same way as Anonymizer.com. It also limits both the number of simultaneous users and the number of Web sites that you can visit at one time. For information on how to configure your browser to use this service, check the FAQ page, and for additional information on why you need an anonymiser service check out the "Why?" pages, both on The-Cloak Web site.

MagusNet Public Proxy server (<www.magusnet.com>) has been in operation since September of 1997 and provides an anonymous pass-through proxy service. It also offers a service that will hide your Web site and make it available only through its proxy service. Using the MagusNet proxy server to go to a Web site, you must type the following in your browser:

http://proxy.magusnet.com/-_-http://[enter the URL here].

Public proxy servers are not restricted to computer sites just in the United States. For example, you can view a list of public proxy servers available through a Web site in the United Kingdom called The-Scream <www.the-scream.co.uk/html/resources/proxies.html>. The-Scream lists fourteen public proxy servers and their associated free access ports along with proxy setting instructions for your browser. The-Scream lists some software that will modify the html address before it reaches your browser, including Muffin, ByProxy, Proxomitron, and WebWasher.

Finally, an Australia Web page called the Anonymous Browsing Quick-Start Page allows you to enter the URLs needed to access any number of anonymisers. This quick start page can be reached by pointing your browser to: <www.space.net.au/~thomas/quickbrowse.html>.