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COMPUTER: TECH TIPS

Web Sites & Cookies

Did your mother tell you not to take candy from strangers? Think of computer cookies in the same way. From trusted sites, they make your Internet usage easier and faster. From untrustworthy sites, you could end up with a severe case of spam (unwanted e-mail) or worse.

What is a cookie?

A cookie is a piece of text placed on your computer by a Web site. It allows the site to store information about your computer and read it the next time you visit.

A cookie can't harm your computer, spread viruses or gather personal information. Cookies make the Internet user-friendly by tracking who visits the site; storing your preferences to help customize your visit; and enabling shopping carts.

Are Cookies Harmful?

Cookies don't tell a site your e-mail address or other personally identifiable information –unless you choose to provide it by making a purchase or registering for an event. Then personal information may be linked to the data stored in a cookie.

If you trust the company and understand its privacy policy, all is well. If you want to protect your personal information, set your browser software to warn you when cookies are offered.

Here's how:

In MS Internet Explorer, click Tools/Internet Options, then the Security tab. Highlight the Internet icon and click Custom Level. There, you can tell Internet Explorer to accept all cookies, reject all cookies or (my choice as an acceptable compromise) ask for permission to store a cookie.

That way, you can have your cookie and feel OK about who gave it to you!

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