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## Heads Up: Chrome's Omnibox May Record What You Type



By JR Raphael  
TechNewsWorld  
09/04/08 1:12 PM PT

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**The shine on Google's Chrome browser is dulling a bit as users discover some features that could affect their privacy. The Omnibox, Google's smart address bar, records and stores what you type into it if the default settings are left alone. Google also made changes to its end user license agreement copyright provisions in response to privacy concerns.**

Google's (Nasdaq: GOOG) newly released Chrome browser is facing a backlash over its data collection and privacy practices. The [company](#) has already revised its end user license agreement following widespread concerns. Now, new worries are being raised about the browser's all-purpose Omnibox and how closely Google may be monitoring what is typed into it.

Chrome drew plenty of hype with its beta release Tuesday. The browser boasts impressive speed and performance capabilities in addition to a number of innovative user options -- but now, Google is having to answer some tough questions over its actions surrounding users' information.

### Wording Worries

The first issue, the end user license agreement, is [already resolved](#). There's no question, however, that the document underwent a drastic transformation.

The original draft stated that by using Chrome, you gave Google a "perpetual, irrevocable, worldwide, royalty-free and non-exclusive license to reproduce, adapt, modify, translate, publish, publicly perform, publicly display and distribute" any content moving through the service. The modified version, in contrast, states that you "retain copyright and any other rights you already hold."

Google, for its part, has said the initial language came from its overall terms of service and was

removed once concerns were raised. That, however, isn't enough to ease many of the qualms over what's going on behind the scenes.

"It was astonishing, to say the least, that Google attempted to usher through such broad and overreaching language in its initial user agreement," Ryan Jacobson, an attorney and cochair of the Entertainment Media and Privacy Law Group at Chicago-based SmithAmundsen, told TechNewsWorld.

"In essence, the user was forced into relinquishing serious privacy and copyright interests in exchange for access to the browser. While an influx of criticism may have prompted Google to amend its language, the mere notion that each query one makes through the browser is saved, tracked and linked to a particular browser should be a cause for concern," he suggested.

### **Omnipotent Omnibox**

As for Chrome's powerful Omnibox, the intelligent location bar at the top of the browser that lets you type in URLs or search terms, data collection is still actively taking place. Anything typed into the box -- even if the enter key isn't struck -- could potentially be logged with the user's Internet protocol address, Google spokesperson Carolyn Penner told TechNewsWorld.

However, only about 2 percent of entries are collected, she said, and users can prevent this from happening by using the "Incognito" private browsing mode or simply turning Chrome's "suggest" feature off.

Changing the default search engine will also prevent another type of data collection from occurring -- one that is specific to search queries executed via Omnibox.

"If Google is set as [the] default search engine, any entry into the Google Chrome Omnibox that returns search results after hitting enter is considered a search query by the browser, sent to Google, and ... stored in our search logs," Penner explained.

"However, most entries of URLs into the Omnibox will be recognized by the browser as URLs and will return a Web page with that URL. In that case, nothing is stored," she added.

### **Freedom Compromised?**

The collection limitations and turn-off options are mitigating, no doubt -- but they also require user involvement, something that often strikes privacy advocates as a problem. The general notion of the information availability, even before hitting enter on the Omnibox, is troublesome to SmithAmundsen's Jacobson.

"The idea that I can type in a search, maybe for work or for something else, and I have 500 advertisers hanging on every word that I type into my query so that they can start targeting me for some future product -- it limits the freedom of people using the Internet, and I think that's precisely the opposite motive that Google has in putting out this browser," he pointed out.

Google, of course, is hoping the power of its product will outshine any apprehension -- and that its open and user-controllable methods won't wipe away Chrome's sheen. [ECT](#)

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