

Privacy conversation turns to enabling smart TV tracking services

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Remember when tech topics had such happy focal points as bendable displays and a new stylus for tablets? Unfortunately, the accent in this year's headlines is on how much we might be getting tracked. Facebook, move over. This time the glare is on smart TVs.

An article in the *The New York Times* has attracted a lot of buzz in its look at smart TV tracking services, designed for viewers' convenience as well as ad targeters.

"Smart TV Services allows Samba TV – as well as third-party apps and services you approve – to gather and use [information](#) based on the content you view on your television in order to provide a variety of content-based services across all of your connected devices."

The New York Times included a shot showing a detail from a slide from a marketing presentation at how the [service](#) can analyze what viewers are watching, determine how many connected devices they have in the house and then target them with ads.

In theory, a tracking service is a win-win, in that the viewer receives relevant recommendations for content and targeted adverts while, for marketers, it is all about the almighty data.

No more channel surfing. "We believe that our data can change the way you experience TV. You should never search for great content. You should never miss what's hot. You should never watch an ad that you don't care about."

Sapna Maheshwari, a business reporter on the advertising beat for *The New York Times*, wrote that "Samba TV is one of the bigger companies that track viewer information to make personalized [show](#) recommendations."

She said Samba TV has deals with a number of TV brands to place its software on certain sets. When a viewer first sets up a smart TV, they are shown the interactive TV service that can recommend shows, a service which they can enable. Thing is, many people accept.

One of the service executives had said at the end of 2016 that more than 90 percent of people opted in, according to the article. [BGR](#) carried the same number, 90 percent of opt-ins, and its software running on 13.5 million smart TVs in the US alone.

"Samba TV's language is clear, said Bill Daddi, a spokesman, as quoted in the article by Maheshwari. "Each version has clearly identified that we use technology to recognize what's onscreen, to create benefit for the consumer as well as Samba, its partners and advertisers," he added."

"Once enabled, Samba TV can track nearly everything that appears on the TV on a second-by-second basis, essentially reading pixels to identify network shows and ads," said Maheshwari.

While the article attracted attention, the presence of tracking viewing habits has been discussed numerous times in the past; the opt-in choice of viewing-choice convenience has been accepted by many consumers.

Back in February, Jefferson Graham, *USA Today*, reported that "Buy a smart TV, and odds are your [viewing](#) habits are probably being tracked. That's what Consumer Reports found out after studying the five biggest TV brands." Software companies integrated into the sets take the information to suggest other TV shows and movies to viewers and allow advertisers to make targeted advertisements.

What if you don't want any such service? Fine, you can turn [off](#) monitoring by revisiting your original setup menu.

Nonetheless, there is room for one further action, according to the article in *USA Today*, to ensure the public is aware of what they are getting into.

Lee Neikirk for Reviewed.com, according to Graham, said

manufacturers could do a better job informing the public about the data being collected from them on smart TVs. "The integrity move would be a blatant statement right up front when you're setting up the TV, 'this is what we are doing, and this is how to turn it off.' "

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