

New FTC Chair Calls For Universal Do-Not-Track

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William MacDonald

Internet and Privacy Law

PRACTICE AREAS

Internet & Digital Marketing Law

Privacy, Data and Security

In a speech yesterday to the American Advertising Federation new Federal Trade Commission Chair Edith Ramirez urged the advertising industry to give consumers "effective and meaningful privacy protection" by agreeing on a global standard that would let consumers signal with their browsers to websites, advertising networks and data brokers that they do not want their online activities monitored for marketing purposes. According to Ramirez, "consumers still await an effective and functioning do-not-track system, which is now long overdue."

Ramirez said consumers routinely report "unease" with online tracking, noting that "an online advertising system that breeds consumer discomfort is not a foundation for sustained growth." Ramirez added that such a system is more likely "an invitation to Congress and other policymakers in the U.S. and abroad to intervene with legislation or regulation and for technical measures by browsers or others to limit tracking."

Ramirez's comments come ahead of a hearing next week, also scheduled by Sen. Jay Rockefeller yesterday, to examine what steps the industry has taken to give consumers more control over how their personal data is collected online. As we previously covered here, earlier this year Rockefeller reintroduced a bill, the "Do-Not-Track Online Act of 2013", that would require the FTC to establish a standard mechanism for people to use their browsers to tell websites, advertising networks, data brokers and others whether they want their data gathered or not. It would also prohibit online services from collecting any personal details from consumers who opted out of the tracking. Rockefeller noted that the advertising industry "made a public commitment to honor do-not-track requests from consumers but has not yet followed through." He continued that he plans to use next week's hearing "to find out what is holding up the development of voluntary Do-Not-Track standards that should have been adopted at the end of last year."

Industry reacted with frustration to Ramirez's remarks claiming that the industry keeps "getting demagogued by the FTC."