Instant Workshops

Blockers for Online Ads and Data Collection
This workshop explains how to use uBlock Origin to block ads and tracking online.

Transcript
In this workshop I'm going to show you a simple tool you can use to block advertising on the web and stop many sites from collecting data about you.

You might be surprised how much you're being watched online. Most websites collect data about you when you visit them. For example, CNN's site tracks you and shares data with close to 40 other websites, mostly without you knowing. Some of this data is used to make websites more interactive or useful; some is used to build a profile about you for targeted advertising; and some is sold to other data collectors.

Free, open-source tools like uBlock Origin can help you monitor and block data collection, advertising, and malicious websites. This is one of the most important tools you can add to your web browser, and I'm going to help you get it set up.

To get the uBlock Origin tool, access ublockorigin.com in your web browser. The tool is supported by Chrome, Firefox, Microsoft Edge, and Opera. A quick warning: There is an old version of the tool, simply called uBlock, that is NOT maintained anymore, so be sure you're accessing uBlock Origin.

To install the tool, select the “get uBlock Origin” button in the middle of the page, near the top. The next screen will vary, depending on your web browser, but you'll generally select a button labeled Add or Install, and then follow the prompts in your web browser.

When installed, uBlock Origin appears in the web browser menu as a small shield with a “uo” symbol. It will begin blocking ads and trackers for you right away.

To demonstrate I'll go to CNN.com. The number that overlays the uBlock icon indicates the number of trackers and elements the tool has blocked... More than 40 here! But the page now has no advertising on it, and a large number of sites have been stopped from gathering information about me.

To turn off blocking for a site – perhaps because the blocking makes the site unusable or because it's a site you trust – select the uBlock icon and then select the large circular “power” button. You'll be prompted to reload the page. If I do this for CNN and reload it, all of the ads appear again.

This is all you need to know for the basics of uBlock Origin. For finer control, you can select the “More” button in the bottom of the window and use the row of buttons to...
enable or disable pop-up windows, large media files, cosmetic filtering, remotely-hosted fonts, and JavaScript.

There are other settings to explore by selecting the gear icon. In addition to general settings, there is a tab for Filter lists, where you can choose what types of content you would like the tool to block. The team at Privacyguides.org recommends selecting all the items under “Ads”, “Privacy” and “Malware domains”. The “Annoyances” and “Multipurpose” lists can also be enabled, but they might break the features or interactivity on some of the websites you visit.

In the Regions section, you will also find lists dedicated to specific languages such as French.

Finally, on the Support tab, you’ll find links to full documentation and a Reddit community that can offer support for uBlock Origin.

Advanced users of the tool can customize many things, and there are features this workshop doesn’t cover, but this will get you set up to block a large amount of unwanted advertising and tracking online.

Instructions

Install uBlock Origin

1. Navigate to https://ublockorigin.com/
2. In your web browser, select the Get uBlock Origin button near the top of the browser window.
   
   The response may vary. The add-on or extension marketplace for your web browser will appear, along with an entry for the uBlock Origin tool.
3. In your web browser, select the Add button (the precise text may vary).
   
   The uBlock Origin extension will appear in your web browser’s top bar as a red shield icon marked with a stylize “uo”

Use Block ads and tracking on a website

Once it is installed, uBlock Origin will begin to block unwanted content right away. You can customize which elements are blocked, and how strictly to enforce rules.

1. Navigate to any website
2. Select the uBlock Origin icon.
   
   A small drop-down menu appears containing a large blue power button, indicating that uBlock Origin is currently active on this site. From here:
   
   a. Select the power button to disable uBlock Origin for the current site. You will be prompted to reload the site in order to see changes.
b. Select **More** at the bottom of the uBlock Origin window to see additional features for toggling JavaScript, large media files, and other content on and off.

**Customize filter lists**

uBlock Origin comes with a default set of websites and activities that it will block. You can customize this list in the application’s settings:

1. Navigate to any website.
2. Select the uBlock Origin icon in your web browser. A small drop-down menu appears containing a large blue power button, indicating that uBlock Origin is currently active on this site.
3. At the bottom right of the uBlock Origin window, select the gear icon. If you do not see this icon, select **More** at the bottom of the uBlock Origin window to expand its user interface.
4. Select the Filter lists tab at the top of the setting screen.
5. Check off as many of the lists as you’d like. According to privacyguides.org, all the items under Ads, Privacy and Malware domains should be selected. The Annoyances and Multipurpose lists can also be enabled, but they may break the features or interactivity on some websites.
6. Select **Apply changes** at the top of the browser window.

**Review**

**Task for Learning**

Navigate to any popular news website and use uBlock Origin to disable remotely-hosted fonts.

**Review Question**

When browsing a website, what does the number overlayed on the uBlock Origin icon signify?

- a) The number of times you have been to that website
- b) The number of other people currently viewing the website
- c) The number of elements on the website that uBlock Origin has blocked
- d) The number of pop-up windows blocked by uBlock Origin

The correct answer is on the next page.
Review Question Answer
The correct answer is c) The number of elements on the site that uBlock Origin has blocked.