BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Why Am I Seeing This Ad?

Ad-personalization controls everywhere — the switch in each big service, turned down one at a time

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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1 The Short Version

If an item you looked at once seems to follow you from your phone to your computer to your television, you are seeing ad personalization at work. Behind the scenes, the big companies build a profile of your interests and use it to pick the ads you see, across all your devices at once.

The good news is that nearly every big company offers a switch to turn that down. The trouble is that each one hides its switch in a different place. This guide is your map, visiting them one at a time in plain English.

- Google has a switch. So do Facebook and Instagram, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple.
- Even your television belongs on the list — smart TVs show personalized ads too.
- A couple of industry-wide opt-out pages cover many smaller advertisers at once.
- You do not have to visit them all in a day. Do the biggest one or two and you will feel the difference.

GOOD TO KNOW

Menu names change often, so your screen may not match this guide exactly. When a label has moved, open that service's settings and search the word "ads" — the switch is almost always one search away.

TIP

Turning off personalization makes the ads less tailored, not fewer. For most folks that is exactly the goal: it is the sense of being watched that bothers people, not the mere presence of ads.

2 Why the Same Product Follows You

Understanding the mystery first makes the settings make sense. No person is doing this; a system is matching your devices to one profile. Here is the chain, step by step.

1. You look at a product online. That interest gets reported to an advertising system.
2. The system ties the interest to a profile it keeps of you.
3. It then shows you ads for that product on other sites and apps, hoping to nudge you back.
4. Because you are signed in to the same accounts on your phone, computer, and tablet, the profile follows you between them.

That is why the jacket you eyed on your phone shows up on your laptop that evening. The devices are tied together by your sign-ins, and the profile rides along.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Most services let you not only turn this off but view and even edit the profile they have built — which we will look at together next, because seeing it takes a lot of the worry out of the whole subject.

3 Seeing the Profile for Yourself

The thing driving all these ads is a profile — a collection of guesses about who you are, built from your activity. It is worth looking at one early, because the reality is usually less sinister and more clumsy than people imagine.

- A rough age range and a likely gender.
- A list of interests, like gardening, travel, or pets.
- A general location, often your region rather than your exact home.
- Guesses about life events, like a recent move or a new grandchild.

1. Open the ad settings of a service like Google or Facebook.
2. Find the section that lists the interests or topics it has assigned you.
3. Read through them — you may be surprised how many are simply wrong.
4. Remove any that feel too personal, and the system has that much less to work with.

GOOD TO KNOW

Trimming your interests is a gentler middle path than turning everything off. It suits folks who do not mind tailored ads in general but want to rein in a few sensitive topics. Seeing the list also makes the whole system feel less like a watcher and more like an imperfect guesser.

4 Personalized Versus Fewer Ads

Before we start flipping switches, set your expectations, because this is where people get disappointed. Turning off personalization does not reduce the number of ads you see. The ads stay; what changes is how they are chosen.

With personalization off, ads lean on broad signals — the general topic of a page, your rough region — instead of your personal history. They become more generic. For most people that is exactly the goal, because it is the pinpoint targeting that feels invasive, not the ads themselves.

WATCH OUT

If any guide or product promises a setting will make ads vanish, be skeptical. Only an ad blocker hides ads, and even that has limits. These switches change the aim of advertising, not its existence.

5 A Gentle Plan of Attack

You do not need to conquer every service in one sitting. In fact, trying to is the surest way to give up halfway. A calmer plan works far better and still gets you most of the benefit quickly.

1. Start with the service where ads bother you most — often Google or Facebook.
2. Do that one, then stop for the day.
3. Come back another time for the next service.

4. Finish with the industry opt-out pages that cover many advertisers at once.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Keep a short list of which services you have done and the date. Six months from now it turns a vague worry into a quick glance, and you will not redo work you already finished.

6 Where Each Big Service Hides Its Switch

Here is the map at a glance. The exact wording may drift, but the place to look rarely does.

Service	Where the switch lives	What it covers
Google	My Ad Center (myadcenter.google.com)	Search, YouTube, and Google ads on other sites
Facebook & Instagram	Accounts Center	Ads inside both apps, plus off-site activity
Amazon	Advertising preferences, in your account settings	Ads across Amazon's sites and apps
Microsoft	Ad settings in your Microsoft account privacy page	Personalized ads in Microsoft's services
Apple	Settings, Privacy & Security, Apple Advertising	Apple's own ads in the App Store and a few apps
Your TV	Privacy or ad options in the TV's settings	Interest-based ads and viewing-data tracking

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> A good rule of thumb: if you had to open a gadget's own settings to change it, you will probably need to do the same on your other gadgets. Account settings apply everywhere you are signed in; device settings are per device.

7 Google: My Ad Center

Google is the giant, so it is a sensible place to start. Its ad controls live in a hub called My Ad Center, reached at a web address that begins with myadcenter, or by searching your account settings for "ads."

1. Open My Ad Center in your browser while signed in to your Google account.
2. Find the Personalized ads control near the top.
3. Switch it to Off.
4. Optionally, review and remove the interests Google has guessed about you.

That single switch covers Google Search, YouTube, and the ads Google places on other sites, across every device where you are signed in. It is the biggest single win in the whole guide.

The "Why this ad?" tool

Even with personalization off, Google gives you an in-the-moment tool worth knowing. Beside many ads is a small menu, often three dots.

1. Open the small menu next to an ad that bothers you.
2. Read why it was chosen for you.
3. Choose to see fewer ads like it, or block that advertiser.
4. Repeat whenever a particular ad wears out its welcome.

> **TIP**
>
> This tool is especially good against the "I looked at it once and now it is everywhere" problem. It lets you shut down one relentless product without touching any other setting.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

8 Facebook and Instagram

Facebook and Instagram share one set of controls, found in a section called Accounts Center. There are really two parts: the activity other sites report about you, and your ad preferences within the apps themselves.

1. Open your Facebook or Instagram settings and go to Accounts Center.
2. Look for the ad preferences or ad topics area.
3. Turn down personalized or interest-based ads where the option appears.
4. Find the off-site activity control and disconnect or clear the activity other businesses have reported about you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because these two apps share one Accounts Center, changing the setting once generally covers both. You do not need to hunt the switch down twice.

9 Amazon and Microsoft

Two more of the big ones, each with its own tucked-away switch. Neither takes long.

Amazon

1. Sign in to your Amazon account and open your account settings.
2. Look for Advertising preferences (sometimes under communication or privacy settings).
3. Choose the option to not show interest-based ads.

Microsoft

1. Sign in to your Microsoft account and open the privacy section of its settings.
2. Find the ad settings or personalized-ads control.
3. Turn off "See ads that interest you" so Microsoft stops tailoring ads in its services.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> These are account settings, so turning them off follows you to every device where you sign in with the same Amazon or Microsoft account.

10 Apple, Your TV, and Streaming

Apple shows fewer ads than the others, but it does run some in its App Store and a few of its apps, and it offers a clean switch to turn personalization off.

1. On an iPhone or iPad, open Settings.
2. Go to Privacy & Security.
3. Open Apple Advertising.
4. Turn off Personalized Ads.

That handles Apple's own advertising. Separately, Apple's App Tracking Transparency lets you stop other apps from tracking you across companies — well worth doing too, and covered in the phone-tracking guide.

Your smart TV watches back

Here is one people rarely think of. Smart TVs and streaming devices show personalized ads and often track what you view through a feature called automatic content recognition.

- Look in your TV's settings for privacy or ad options.
- Turn off the interest-based or personalized ads setting.
- Turn off viewing-data collection, sometimes labeled ACR.
- Streaming boxes like Roku have their own ad settings to limit as well.

GOOD TO KNOW

The exact menus vary by brand, but the ideas are the same everywhere. The point is simply to remember that your living room belongs on the list.

11 The Wide Net: Industry Opt-Out Pages

Beyond the individual companies, the advertising industry runs a couple of shared pages that let you opt out of many advertisers at once. They are not perfect, but they cover ground no single company's setting can.

- The Digital Advertising Alliance runs a "YourAdChoices" opt-out page covering many companies.
- The Network Advertising Initiative runs a similar member opt-out page.
- Both let you opt out of a long list of advertisers in one visit, and there are separate versions for app-based advertising.

Think of these as a broad sweep that catches many smaller advertisers you would never visit one by one. They are a good finishing move once you have done the big services.

WATCH OUT

These industry opt-outs often rely on a cookie stored in your browser. Clear your cookies, or switch to a different browser or device, and the opt-out can be forgotten. That is not a reason to skip them — just a reason to treat them as a periodic chore, and to redo them after any big cookie cleanup. The newer app-based opt-out is sturdier on phones.

12 The "Do Not Sell or Share" Link

On many websites now, usually at the very bottom, you will find a link that says "Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information" or something close. It exists because privacy laws in a growing number of states require it, and many companies offer it to everyone.

1. Scroll to the footer of a website you use often.
2. Look for a "Do Not Sell or Share" or privacy-choices link.
3. Open it and follow the short opt-out.
4. Repeat on the handful of sites where you spend real time.

WATCH OUT

Do not get tangled in the wording. If a site offers any way to limit the sharing of your information, take it — the exact phrase matters far less than the switch behind it.

13 On Your Phone: The Advertising ID

Underneath all the accounts, your phone carries a hidden advertising number that apps use to track you for ads. It is separate from every account setting above, so it deserves its own visit.

- On an iPhone, App Tracking Transparency lets you stop apps from tracking you across companies.
- On Android, you can reset or delete the advertising ID in the privacy settings.
- Deleting or limiting it weakens cross-app tracking right at the source.

GOOD TO KNOW

The exact steps differ by phone and are covered in the phone guides. The account switches and the phone's advertising ID are different levers, and pulling both gives the fullest effect.

14 What's Really Going On Behind the Ads

A little plumbing knowledge makes the whole subject less mysterious — and points you at the settings that matter most.

Cookies, the fuel of tracking

Much of this following-around runs on cookies — small files websites store in your browser. Not all are bad; some keep you logged in or remember your shopping cart. But the tracking kind ties your visits together across sites. Clearing cookies now and then breaks those links. The catch is that clearing also wipes the industry opt-outs, so sequence them: clear first, then redo the opt-outs.

First-party versus third-party

First-party is the site you are actually visiting. Third-party is some other company tucked into that page, usually for advertising. The following-around is largely a third-party business — companies you never chose to deal with, riding along on the pages you do visit. That is why blocking third-party tracking in your browser strikes at the heart of it without breaking the sites you use.

Retargeting, explained simply

The specific trick behind "I looked at it once and now it is everywhere" has a name: retargeting. An advertiser tags people who showed interest but did not buy, then pays to show them the product again and again. It is not that the company is fixated on you — an automatic system is replaying your interest to many people at once. Turning off personalization starves it of the tag it needs.

> **TIP**
>
> Modern browsers increasingly block third-party trackers by default. If yours offers it, turning its built-in tracking protection up to the stronger setting is one of the best single moves you can make — quiet, set-and-forget, and it reduces the fuel this whole system runs on.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

15 A Few More Settings Worth a Minute

Beyond the big switches, a handful of smaller habits quiet the noise even further.

Email, location, and private windows

- Email ads are handled by unsubscribing, not ad settings. Use the unsubscribe link on marketing from senders you recognize; for stubborn ones, mark the message as spam instead.
- Location feeds a surprising amount of ad targeting. Set apps' location to While Using or Never, and be stingy with the Always option — weather and map apps rarely need you every minute.
- A private or incognito window helps for one-off browsing, because it does not carry your usual cookies. It is handy, but not a cloak — your internet provider and the sites still see plenty.

WATCH OUT

Be cautious with unsubscribe links in email from senders you do not recognize at all. In a clearly fake or scam message, clicking anything can confirm your address is live — so for those, mark as spam rather than unsubscribe.

16 What These Switches Don't Do

Let me be straight about the limits, because honesty here keeps your expectations healthy. Turning off ad personalization quiets the tailoring. It does not do several other things you might hope for.

- It does not remove you from data-broker or people-search sites.

- It does not stop your internet provider from seeing the sites you visit.
- It does not block ads outright — only an ad blocker does that.
- It does not protect your accounts; that job belongs to strong passwords and two-step verification.

Each of those has its own guide. This one closes a big, annoying door — the following-around — and pairs with the others to build real protection.

17 Staying Safe: Ads Aimed at Older Adults

It is worth a candid word. Some advertising aimed at older adults is not merely annoying but predatory — dubious health products, aggressive insurance pitches, and outright scams dressed up as ads. Turning down personalization helps, because it stops advertisers from singling you out by age and interests. But some warning signs hold regardless of your settings.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Never click an ad that creates a sense of urgency or fear, and never call a number or enter payment details from such an ad. When in doubt, look the company up independently, or call someone you trust first.

18 Common Mistakes and Troubleshooting

A few missteps crop up as people work through these services. None of them cause harm; they just leave the job partly done, and knowing them ahead saves repeat trips.

- Expecting fewer ads, then thinking it failed when the count is the same. The ads become generic, not gone.
- Doing the account setting but missing the per-device ones, like a TV or a phone's advertising ID.
- Clearing cookies and wiping out the industry opt-outs by accident. Clear first, then redo them.

- Changing settings on the wrong account when you have more than one.
- Giving up because a menu name moved. Search the service's settings for "ads" instead.

And when a page simply will not cooperate — an opt-out that will not load, a switch that will not save — do not let it stop the whole effort.

1. Try again later; opt-out pages are sometimes briefly down.
2. Try a different browser or device for a stubborn page.
3. Use the service's own search box for the word "ads."
4. Move on to the next service and come back to the troublesome one.

19 Common Questions, Answered Plainly

Will turning this off break anything?

No. Every service keeps working normally; the ads simply become more generic.

Will I see embarrassing ads less often?

Often, yes, because the ads stop drawing on your personal browsing. But no setting is a guarantee, so a generic ad can still happen to be awkward.

Do I have to pay for any of this?

No. Every switch and opt-out in this guide is free.

If I change my mind, can I turn personalization back on?

Yes, any time, with the same switches. Nothing here is permanent.

Why do these controls exist at all?

A mix of public pressure and law. A growing patchwork of state privacy laws pushed companies to provide visible opt-outs. Ohio has not passed a broad privacy law of its own yet, but many other states have, and big companies generally find it easier to offer the same choices to everyone. So you often benefit from rules written elsewhere.

Is my phone listening to me through the microphone?

It can feel that way when an ad matches something you only spoke about, but the far likelier explanation is the profile and retargeting this guide describes — your searches, your browsing, and the people you are connected to give advertisers plenty to guess with, no eavesdropping required. If it still worries you, the phone guides cover turning off microphone access for apps that do not need it.

Will a VPN stop ads from following me?

Only a little. A VPN hides your rough location and your internet address, which trims one small signal. But it does nothing about the profile tied to the accounts you are signed in to, so the switches in this guide do far more against the following-around than a VPN does.

20 Keeping It Up, and Helping Others

Many readers will do this for a parent or spouse who finds the menus confusing. That is a kind thing to do, and a few gentle rules keep it comfortable for them: let them make the choices, explain each switch in plain words first, write down what you changed, and do not sign in as them on your own devices unless they ask.

Because these settings drift and new services appear, a light check now and then keeps your work from quietly unraveling. The same habit works for new gadgets too — cars, smart speakers, even some appliances now carry ad and data settings worth a two-minute look when they join the house.

1. Twice a year, revisit the big services and confirm personalization is still off.
2. Redo the industry opt-out pages, especially after any cookie cleanup.
3. Give any new internet-connected gadget's settings a quick look for a privacy or ads section.

> **TIP**
>
> These controls exist because people spoke up and lawmakers responded. Using them, and expecting them, helps keep them available for everyone.

21 Words Worth Knowing

A quick, plain-English list of the words that come up around ad personalization. No need to memorize any of it — just a place to look when a term trips you up.

Word	What it means
Ad personalization	Choosing the ads you see based on a profile of your interests. Turning it off makes ads generic, not fewer.
Profile	A collection of guesses about you — rough age, likely interests, general region — built from your activity. Usually editable, and often wrong.
Cookie	A small file a website stores in your browser. Some are helpful; the tracking kind ties your visits together across sites.
First-party	The website you are actually visiting.
Third-party	Another company tucked into a page, usually for advertising. The following-around is mostly third-party.
Retargeting	An ad trick that tags people who looked but did not buy, then shows them that product again and again.
Advertising ID	A hidden number on your phone that apps use to track you for ads. It can be reset or limited in settings.
ACR	Automatic content recognition — a smart-TV feature that notes what you watch to feed personalized ads. It can usually be turned off.

App Tracking Transparency	An iPhone feature that lets you stop apps from tracking you across other companies.
Do Not Sell or Share	A footer link, required by many state laws, that opts you out of a site sharing your information.
Industry opt-out	A shared page (YourAdChoices or the NAI) that opts you out of many advertisers at once, usually per browser.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to...	Do this...
Start with Google	My Ad Center: turn Personalized ads Off
Facebook & Instagram	Accounts Center: clear and disconnect off-site activity
Quiet Amazon & Microsoft	Turn off advertising preferences in each account
Apple and your TV	Settings, Apple Advertising off; turn off TV ad tracking
Your phone's ad ID	Turn off Apple Advertising, or reset the Android advertising ID
Sweep the rest	Use the industry YourAdChoices and NAI opt-out pages
When an ad feels creepy	Open its "Why this ad?" menu and block that advertiser
Trim your ad profile	View the interests a service guessed, and remove the wrong or too-personal ones
Quiet email ads	Use the unsubscribe link for senders you know; mark unknown ones as spam
Limit location-based ads	Set apps to While Using or Never, and be stingy with Always
Block trackers in your browser	Turn its built-in tracking protection up to the stronger setting

Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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