BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Your Advertising ID — The Hidden Tracking Number

The hidden number that tracks you, and how to turn it off

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea, if you only have a minute.

Your phone, tablet, smart TV, and computer each carry a hidden number called an advertising ID. It is not your name or phone number, but it works like a name tag that every app can read. When you use a weather app, then a game, then a shopping app, each one can quietly report that same number to advertising companies, which stitch it all together into a profile of what you do, like, and buy.

- What it is: a per-device tracking number used to follow you across different apps and build an advertising profile.
- Where it lives: on iPhones and iPads, on Android phones, on most smart TVs, and on Windows computers.
- The fix: a quick setting on each device lets you turn it off, reset it, or even delete it entirely — usually a tap or two.

GOOD TO KNOW

Turning this off does not mean fewer ads or broken apps. You will see just as many ads, but they will be generic instead of built from a history of everything you have tapped. Your apps keep working exactly as before.

> *Folks worry that changing a privacy setting will break something. This one does not. You are simply taking the name tag off — the apps never even notice.*

WHAT IT ACTUALLY IS

2 What an Advertising ID Actually Is

A name tag your device wears for advertisers.

Think of the advertising ID as a name tag your device wears, but one only advertisers can see. It is a long string of random letters and numbers that was assigned to your device. On its own it means nothing — it is not tied to your real name. Its whole purpose is to be the same number everywhere on that one device, so that different companies can recognize they are all looking at the same person.

Here is why that matters. Without a shared number, the shopping app and the news app would have no way to know they were both being used by you. The advertising ID gives them that common thread. Each app reads it, reports back what you did, and an advertising company on the other end quietly assembles the pieces.

Why it was created

Years ago, apps tracked people using permanent device serial numbers that could never be changed. The advertising ID was introduced as a supposedly friendlier replacement: a number you are allowed to reset or switch off. That is the part most people were never told about. The off switch has been there for years, sitting quietly in the settings.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You have an advertising ID whether or not you have ever seen a targeted ad. It is on by default on most devices. Nothing is wrong with your device — this is simply how it ships from the factory.

WHY IT MATTERS

3 Why This Is Worth Five Minutes

What the tracking actually adds up to.

It is fair to ask: so what if an ad knows I looked at garden hoses? On its own, not much. The concern is the accumulation. Over months and years, that one number ties together your searches, your shopping, the apps you open, roughly where you are, and how long you linger — into a surprisingly detailed picture.

- That profile can be bought and sold by data brokers you have never heard of and cannot contact.
- It can reveal things you consider private, pieced together from ordinary activity across many apps.
- It follows the device, so it can quietly connect the different things you do that you may think of as separate.

None of this is dramatic, and none of it is an emergency. But it is collected whether you want it or not, and switching it off costs you nothing in convenience. That is an unusually good trade: real privacy for a few taps and zero downside.

> *I tell people this is the rare privacy chore with no catch. You lose nothing you will miss, and you quietly close a door that was left open without you knowing.*

ON THE IPHONE

4 On Your iPhone or iPad

Apple calls its number the IDFA.

Apple's advertising ID is called the IDFA, short for Identifier for Advertisers. Apple built a feature called App Tracking Transparency around it. That is the reason you sometimes see a box pop up saying an app would like to track you, with the choice to Allow or to Ask App Not to Track.

Rather than answering that pop-up app by app, you can flip a single switch that tells your iPhone to refuse every tracking request automatically.

1. On your iPhone or iPad, open Settings.
2. Tap Privacy & Security.
3. Tap Tracking.
4. Turn off the switch labeled Allow Apps to Request to Track.
5. If it asks whether to tell current apps to stop tracking, choose to ask them all to stop.

With that switch off, no app can get your IDFA, and every app that tries is automatically treated as if you had tapped Ask App Not to Track. You will not see the pop-up again, and you do not have to remember to tap it.

GOOD TO KNOW

On that same Tracking screen you can also see the list of apps that previously asked to track you, and switch any of them off one at a time if you prefer to decide app by app.

WATCH OUT

On some accounts the Allow Apps to Request to Track switch is already locked off and grayed out — for example on accounts set up for someone under 18, or accounts managed by a school or workplace. That is fine. It simply means tracking is already blocked and there is nothing more to do.

ON ANDROID

5 On Your Android Phone or Tablet

Here you can delete the number entirely.

Android phones — Samsung, Google Pixel, Motorola, and the rest — have their own advertising ID. Android gives you something the iPhone does not: the option to delete the number completely, not just reset it. When you delete it, any app that asks for it simply gets a row of zeros, which is as good as having no number at all. To delete it entirely — the strongest choice — follow these steps.

1. Open Settings on your Android device.
2. Tap Privacy, then tap Ads. (On some phones look under Settings, Google, then Ads, or use the search box at the top of Settings and type the word Ads.)
3. Tap Delete Advertising ID.
4. Confirm your choice.

To reset it instead

If you would rather keep an advertising ID but wipe the profile tied to the old one, you can reset it instead. Follow the same path to Settings, Privacy, Ads, and tap Reset Advertising ID. Your device gets a fresh random number, and the history linked to the old one no longer points at you.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Deleting is the cleaner option for most people, because it leaves apps with nothing to track. If you ever want the number back, the same screen simply offers to restore it — nothing is lost for good.

On a few older Android phones you will not see a Delete option. There you want Settings, Privacy, Advanced, Ads, and then turn on Opt out of Ads Personalization, which blocks the profiling even though the number stays.

ON YOUR TV

6 On Your Smart TV

Yes — your television has one too.

This surprises people the most. Smart TVs and streaming boxes carry advertising IDs as well, and they use them to track what you watch and show you targeted ads on the home screen and inside free streaming channels. The setting lives in a different spot on each brand, but the idea is always the same: find the privacy or ad section and turn on the option to limit ad tracking, then reset the ID. Here is where to look on the common brands.

- Roku: Settings, then Privacy, then Advertising. Turn on Limit Ad Tracking and reset the advertising identifier.
- Amazon Fire TV: Settings, then Preferences, then Privacy Settings. Turn off Interest-based Ads, and Device Usage Data if you like.
- Samsung TV: Settings, then Terms & Privacy or Privacy Choices, and turn off the personalized or interest-based advertising option.
- LG TV: Settings, then the Advertisement or Ads section, and turn on Limit Ad Tracking, resetting the ID if offered.
- Google or Android TV: Settings, then Privacy, then Ads, and opt out of ads personalization and reset the advertising ID.

GOOD TO KNOW

The exact wording shifts from model to model and from one software update to the next, but the controls are almost always grouped together under a Privacy or Ads heading.

TIP

If you cannot find these on your model, grab the remote and search the TV's own settings for the word Ads or Privacy. The menu wording changes between models and updates, but the ad and privacy controls are almost always grouped together.

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.

ON WINDOWS

7 On Your Windows Computer

One switch in the privacy settings.

Windows computers have an advertising ID too, used to personalize ads inside Windows itself and in some built-in apps. It is a single switch to turn off, and the steps are the same on Windows 10 and Windows 11.

1. Click the Start button and open Settings. (The gear icon, or type Settings into the search box.)
2. Click Privacy & security.
3. Click General.
4. Turn off the switch that says Let apps show me personalized ads by using my advertising ID.

Flipping that switch off stops Windows from using the ID to personalize ads, and it resets the number at the same time, so the old profile no longer applies.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> While you are on that General screen, you will see a few other friendly privacy switches you can safely turn off as well, such as letting websites see your language list. None of them are required for your computer to work normally.

SAME, BUT DIFFERENT

8 A Quick Look at All Four

The same job, four different doorways.

It helps to see the four devices side by side. The wording differs, but you are doing the same thing each time: finding the ad or privacy setting and shutting the tracking off.

Device	What to do
iPhone, iPad	Turn off Allow Apps to Request to Track
Android	Delete or reset the Advertising ID
Smart TV	Turn on Limit Ad Tracking, reset the ID
Windows PC	Turn off the advertising-ID switch

Notice that Android is the only one that lets you delete the number outright. The others switch it off or reset it, which gets you essentially the same protection — apps can no longer build a profile that follows you.

> *Four devices, four slightly different doorways, but the same simple goal behind each one. Once you have done it twice, the third and fourth feel obvious.*

THE TRADE-OFF

9

Will I See Fewer Ads?

The honest answer, and why it is still worth it.

This is the question I hear most, so let me be plain. Turning off your advertising ID does not reduce the number of ads you see. You will see just as many. What changes is the kind of ad.

- Before: ads chosen from a profile of what you have browsed, bought, and tapped — the shoes that seem to follow you from app to app.
- After: ads chosen from general information, like the app you happen to be using or your rough region — the same quantity, but not built from your personal history.

So the trade is not fewer ads for more privacy. It is the same ads, minus the profile. For most people that is exactly the point: you were never going to escape advertising, but you can stop it from quietly studying you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because nothing about your experience gets worse, there is no reason to leave the ID on as some kind of fair exchange. You are not paying for free apps by keeping it — the apps work the same either way.

NOT THE WHOLE STORY

10 What This Does Not Cover

The ad ID is one door, not every door.

Turning off the advertising ID closes one important door, but it is honest to say it is not the only way you are tracked. A few others are worth knowing about in plain terms, so you are not caught off guard. These are separate settings for another day — the ad ID is the single biggest and easiest win.

- TV viewing tracking, called ACR: many smart TVs watch what is on your screen using automatic content recognition, a separate switch often labeled viewing information or Live Plus. Worth turning off, but it is its own setting.
- Location history: your phone can share your location with apps, tracked separately under the Location settings, app by app.
- Website cookies: when you browse the web, small files called cookies track you within your browser — a different system, handled in your web browser's own privacy settings.

WATCH OUT

Do not feel you must do everything at once. The advertising ID is the highest-value, lowest-effort step. Handle it first; the others can wait for another quiet afternoon.

THE CLEAN SWEEP

11 A Quick Privacy Pass Across Your Devices

Fifteen minutes, start to finish.

Here is the way I like to do it with folks: gather every device in one sitting and go down the list. It takes about fifteen minutes and you only have to do it once. Keep this guide beside you and work through them in order.

1. Your phone first: turn off or delete the advertising ID using the iPhone or Android steps earlier in this guide.
2. Your tablet next: it follows the exact same steps as your phone of the same kind.

3. Any other household phones: do the same for a spouse's or family member's phone if they would like.
4. Your smart TV: find the ad or privacy section and turn on limit ad tracking.
5. Your computer: flip the Windows advertising-ID switch off.
6. Done. Make a quick note of the date so you know it is handled.

GOOD TO KNOW

New devices arrive with the advertising ID switched on again, so it is worth repeating this little pass whenever you set up a new phone, tablet, TV, or computer. It is a five-minute habit, not a one-time fix.

> *Set aside one quiet afternoon, go device by device, and you are done. I have never had anyone tell me afterward that they wished they had left it on.*

COMMON QUESTIONS

12

Common Questions

The things people ask me most.

Will turning this off break any of my apps?

No. Apps are designed to work whether or not they can read your advertising ID. Nothing you use will stop working, lock up, or charge you. The app simply does not get the number.

Do I need to pay for anything or install an app?

No. Every step in this guide uses a setting already built into your device. There is nothing to buy and nothing to download. Be wary of any app or website that offers to 'block your advertising ID' for a fee — you do not need it.

If I delete the ID on Android, is it gone forever?

Not unless you want it to be. Deleting it leaves apps with a row of zeros to read, which is the goal. If you ever change your mind, the same settings screen offers to restore an advertising ID, so there is no permanent harm.

How often should I redo this?

Once is enough for a device you already own. Just remember to repeat it on any new phone, tablet, TV, or computer, since they arrive with the setting switched back on.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If a web page or a phone caller claims your device is 'infected' and pushes you to tap a link or install something to fix your advertising ID, that is a scam. The only safe place to change these settings is inside your device's own Settings.

IF YOU WANT A HAND

13

If You Would Like a Hand

This is a friendly thing to do together.

If any of this feels fiddly, that is completely normal — the menus are buried on purpose, and the wording changes between models. There is no shame in wanting a second pair of hands, and it is a quick, pleasant job to do side by side.

- We can walk through every phone, tablet, TV, and computer in the house in one short visit.
- I will show you exactly where each setting lives on your own devices, so you can redo it yourself later.
- If you would like, we can turn off the TV viewing tracking and tidy up a few other privacy switches while we are at it.

The whole point is that this should feel calm and simple, not technical. A few taps, device by device, and you have quietly closed a door that was open for years.

GOOD TO KNOW

Whether you do it yourself with this guide or we do it together, the result is the same: your devices stop wearing that hidden name tag, and you lose nothing you will ever miss.

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...
Understand it	A hidden per-device number that lets ads track you across apps
iPhone or iPad	Settings, Privacy & Security, Tracking, turn off Allow Apps to Request
Android phone	Settings, Privacy, Ads, Delete Advertising ID
Smart TV	Open the TV settings, find Privacy or Ads, turn on Limit Ad Tracking
Windows PC	Settings, Privacy & security, General, turn off the advertising-ID switch
Know the trade-off	You still see ads, just generic ones instead of ones built from your history
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

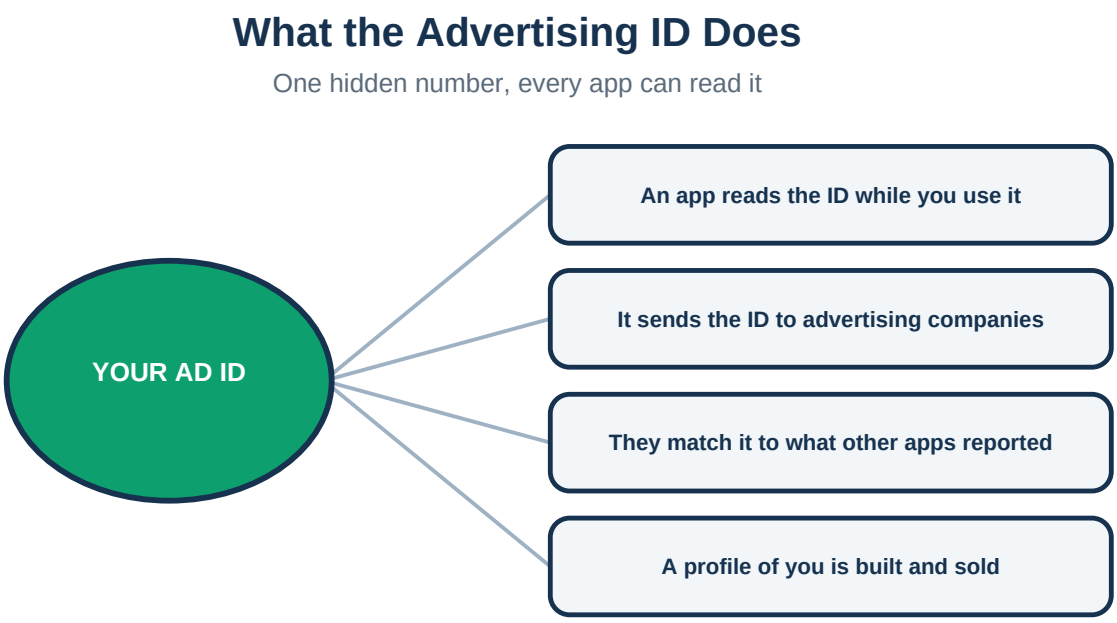


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

The Quick Privacy Pass

A few taps on each device

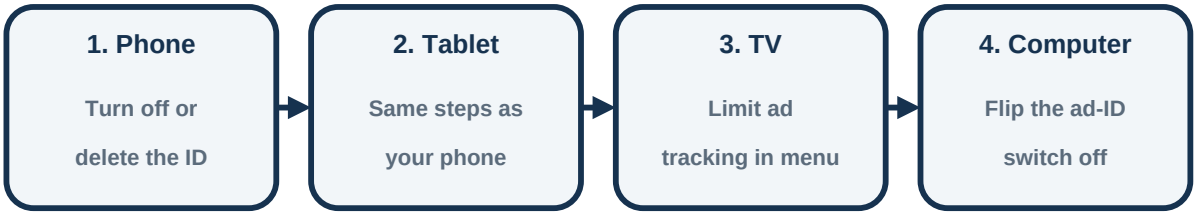


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

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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