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How Do-Not-Track is Like Inconceivable

by [Jim Harper](#) on July 25, 2011 · [Add a Comment](#)

Do-Not-Track is not inconceivable itself. It's like the word "inconceivable" in the movie [The Princess Bride](#). I do not think it means what people think it means—how it is meant to work and how it is likely to offer poor results.

Take Mike Swift's [reporting for MercuryNews.com](#) on a study showing that online advertising companies may continue to follow visitors' Web activity even after those visitors have opted out of tracking.

"The preliminary research has sparked renewed calls from privacy groups and Congress for a 'Do Not Track' law to allow people to opt out of tracking, like the Do Not Call list that limits telemarketers," he writes.

If this is true, it means that people want a Do Not Track law more because they have learned that it would be more difficult to enforce.

That doesn't make sense ... until you look at [who Swift interviewed for the article](#): a Member of Congress who made her name as a privacy regulation hawk and some fiercely committed advocates of regulation. These people were not on the fence before the study, needless to say. (Anne Toth of Yahoo! provides the requisite ounce of balance, but she defends her company and does not address the merits or demerits of a Do-Not-Track law.)

Do-Not-Track is not inconceivable. But the study shows that its advocates are not conceiving the complexities and drawbacks of a regulatory approach rather than individually tailored blocking of unwanted tracking, something any Internet user can do right now using [Tracking Protection Lists](#).