

# Five Myths About Internet Privacy

## ISPs can see everything we do on the Internet.

ISPs can only see what we do on each of their networks. When we're using our wireless ISP, our wireline ISP and work ISPs are in the dark. When we're using encrypted web sites such as Amazon, Netflix, Facebook, and Google, all the ISP can see is the website's brand name. The ISP can't read email, doesn't know what movie we're watching, what products we're buying, and who we're chatting with. More than 70% of web traffic is encrypted now, including all the big sites.

## Google can only see what we do on Google's website.

Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Adobe can see what we do on websites that incorporate their tracking code. They typically collect pseudonymous data such as our IP addresses and often supplement with personally identifiable information such as logins and locations. As many as [65% of top websites track visitors with Google Analytics](#), including the campaign websites of the politicians who voted to keep the privacy status quo. Google Display Network claims to reach 90% of web users world-wide, a figure unmatched by all of America's ISPs combined.

## The only way to control what an ISP does with your info is to switch ISPs.

Privacy frameworks always give users the ability to prevent trackers from using their web history and sensitive information such as financial and health data. The policy debate is about defaults: which information is subject to opt-in and which is opt-out. The FCC took the unprecedented step of disregarding information sensitivity in favor of a role-based system. The FCC left the tracker networks in *opt-out* status for non-sensitive data but imposed *opt-in* on all data collected by ISPs, even non-sensitive data such as the browsers people are using.

## It's easier to change social networks than ISPs.

While it's easy for an individual to switch from Facebook to Google+, social networks are all about groups. Since [Facebook has 1.8 billion users](#) to [Google+'s 200 million or less](#), switching has a very heavy cost. In reality, there's very little difference between switching to Google+ and simply not using a social network at all.

*In terms of market share, Google is a monopoly player, and the same goes for Netflix: it's certainly possible to switch to Amazon Prime Video, but not without a great deal of lost capability. And is there even an alternative to Amazon for shopping?*

## ISPs don't need to sell ads because we pay them.

ISPs aren't nearly as profitable as edge services companies such as Priceline and Facebook; [2013 median ROIC was 13% for edge firms and 8% for ISPs](#). To the extent that ISPs can supplement their revenues with ad dollars, they can lower prices, improve service, and reduce their cost of investment capital. There's no law that says edge companies can't sell subscriptions and ISPs can't sell ads.