

Tech Coach Corner - Browsers and Browser Extensions By LTCL Librarian Karen Scott

Hi y'all, this tech coach column is inspired by a recent Tech Coach Q&A session about using web browsers and browser extensions. Browser extensions can be a lot of fun, but, like everything on the internet, there's a lot to keep in mind. First, let's take a broader look at the topic.

Web browsers are the applications you use to navigate the world wide web—Apple's Safari, Google's Chrome, and Mozilla's Firefox are the most common. Some of you might remember Microsoft's Internet Explorer, but this one has slowly gone out of style. Browser *extensions* are add-ons you can download to increase the fun or functionality of your web browser, like ad-blockers, coupon finders, and games. Each browser (Safari, Chrome, and Firefox) has their own version of a browser extension "store," although any browser extension you download should be free. Extensions that require payment most likely have bad intentions (these are the ones to look out for)!

And, unfortunately, sometimes even the free ones have malicious ulterior motives. I won't get into the specific risks, but damages could include viruses, tracking data and clicks on the internet, changing browser settings, and leaking your personal information. I know this sounds scary, but the average web user is most likely safe from these attacks when using the correct precautions. So how can we know what is safe to download and what to stay away from? My first suggestion is to trust your instinct. Extensions that are developed by major companies, like Google or Apple, or ones that have thousands of positive reviews are generally safe. You can see the one below has 4.5 stars and over one million users.

Search results



Honey

Automatically find and try coupon codes with 1-click. Works at thousands of stores in the US, Canada, Australia, India and the UK.

★★★★★ Honey

👤 1,073,665 users

Some companies you know of might offer a browser extension that you don't need for the sake of staying on your mental radar. For example, your anti-virus software provider might offer a browser extension under the guise of extra safety. But if you already have an anti-virus provider, you don't need a browser extension!

Having these extra extensions can clog up your computer and increase security risks. If you think about extensions as little doors into your world, it's best to keep as many of these doors closed as possible, therefore reducing privacy risks. So, it's best to delete any extension you're not using or that you're unsure of. It's also worth noting that not all browsers have the same extensions. For example, I mentioned the Bitmoji Chrome extension in a previous tech coach column but Firefox does not have this option. Some users will develop duplicate extensions like the one below but it's best to stay away from these knockoffs as well. Thankfully this one is transparent about being unofficial.

Search results



Bitmoji (NOT OFFICIAL)

12 users

Use Bitmoji anywhere on web! This is a port of the Bitmoji extension.

This is not official.

★★★★★ Serge Brainin

All of this might sound pretty scary, but I want to reassure you that with the right care and thought you should remain safe from malicious attacks. Trust your gut, use your best judgment, and if the extension is for a function your device already does, skip it!

Happy browsing!

Tech Coach Assistance

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