

Cookies Explained

What is a Cookie?

A cookie is a small file which is stored on a user's computer. They hold information specific to a particular client and website, and can be accessed either by the web server or the client computer.

Cookies can allow a web page to be tailored to a particular user, or the page itself can contain script which is aware of the data in the cookie and so can carry information from one visit to the website (or related site) to the next.

Cookies may be set by the website you are visiting ('first party cookies') or they may be set by other websites who run content on the page you are viewing ('third party cookies').

What's in a Cookie?

A cookie is a text file that is stored on your computer or mobile device by a website's server, only that server is able to retrieve the contents of that cookie. Each cookie is unique to your web browser. It contains some information such as a unique identifier and the site name and some digits and numbers. It allows a website to remember things like your preferences or what's in your shopping basket.

Session Cookies

Some cookies are only used temporarily during a browsing session and are automatically deleted when the browser window is closed. These types of cookies typically store a session ID and do not allow the user to be personally identified.

Permanent Cookies

Permanent cookies (also known as persistent cookies) are stored on the hard drive and retain their information after the browser session has expired. Permanent cookies can be used to personally identify individual users and therefore can be used to analyse surfing behaviour.

Permanent cookies are not always used to identify individuals they are also used to simply track general information. For example; to count the number of visitors to a website or the average time spent within a site, etc...

Flash Cookies

Most computers have Adobe Flash installed as a browser plug-in. It is a common way to view videos and interactive content. Using Flash causes small files to be stored on your computer known as LSOs (Local Shared Objects) or Flash Cookies. These can be used for the same purpose as regular cookies as described above.

Are Cookies Dangerous?

No, cookies are not dangerous. They are not computer programs and can't be executed as code so cookies can't do any harm to your computer, nor can they be used to distribute computer viruses.