

Tiny Course Empire Podcast Episode 50: Should Affiliate Marketers Be Worried About Apple and Google Cracking Down on Third Party Cookies and Email Trackers

PLEASE NOTE: This is a machine transcription. Some punctuation and spelling weirdness are to be expected.

Between the crackdown on third party cookies and Apple deciding that they're no longer going to allow email tracking on their iOS devices, you might be a little worried if you're an affiliate marketer, you might be thinking, Hmm, my commission's are going to tank if all of these things are no longer tracking, because that's what I rely on to get paid. Well, it turns out, there's a whole lot of confusion around these recent developments in cookie tracking and email tracking and in today's episode, I want to dig into that and really unpack what's going on because I don't think it's as scary or as much of a cause for concern as you might think. I'm Cindy Bidar. And this is episode number 50, of the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, and in today's show, we are going to dive into all things cookies and tracking, for affiliates, especially so if you are an affiliate marketer, stick around because you are going to want to know this information, it is critical to your business success.

Welcome to the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, a weekly show dedicated to helping you launch and grow your digital course business. Even if you don't have a big team or a six figure ads budget. We'll help you design smart systems take consistent action and achieve massive success on your own terms. Now, here's your host, Cindy Bidar.

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Hey guys, before we dive in, I just want to take a minute and give a shout out to the members of [Six Figure Systems](#). This topic about cookies and third party tracking came up what is yesterday now as I'm recording this on our [Q&A](#) call. And I felt it was just such an important topic. And there was so much confusion around it, that I wanted to help everyone understand it better. It's so so important, as an affiliate marketer, as a course creator who maybe has an affiliate program that you understand how these things work, and how changes that other companies are making might impact your business. So it's really important that you understand this stuff, I'm going do my best to break it down and make it not quite as geeky as it could be. Let me tell you, I read some things online that made my head spin. So I'm going do my best to clarify everything for you. And I hope that you will walk away with a better understanding of how cookies work, how tracking works, how affiliate tracking works, how email tracking works, all of those things that really can have an impact on your business.

If you're new here, thank you for joining me, I would love for you to hit the subscribe button so you don't miss any future episodes. Next week, we're going to be talking about how to be more visible online. So you definitely want to hear that one. Because that's pretty critical to your success as well. And if you've been with me for a while, thank you again for joining me, I so appreciate you spending a little bit of your time with me every single week.

All right, so let's dive in and talk about cookies and tracking. And third party tracking and all of those big scary things that we keep hearing about. We're going to talk about three different topics. Today, we're going to talk about email tracking, and why the changes that Apple has made to their iOS devices and that Android has made to their software may be impacting you as an email marketer. We're going to talk about cookies and how they matter and why they matter to affiliate marketers or people who run affiliate programs. And finally, we're going to unpack what this third party tracking thing means, and how all of those things tie together, or maybe how they don't.

So let's get started by talking about email tracking. That's the first thing I want to cover because there's a ton of confusion around this, especially because we often hear it talked about in the same sentence or in the same article or in the same email, as we hear about third party tracking. And they're really not the same thing.

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So let's talk about how email marketers are tracking what their subscribers are doing. And why Apple and Android and phone manufacturers don't want you to be able to do that. So first of all, when you send an email if you are an email marketer and you have an Active Campaign account or you have a ConvertKit account, you are sending an email out and you are then later able to look in your Active Campaign or your ConvertKit or your Aweber or Mailerlite account, you're able to look in your reporting and see how many people opened your email, how many people clicked on your emails, all of that kind of information. You can even see what devices people are using to read your email what percentage of people use an Apple device, what percentage of people use a computer, you get all kinds of information based on how people are consuming your emails. And that is what Apple and other phone manufacturers and software manufacturers do not want you to be able to do, they do not want you to be able to see that I opened your email, that I opened it on Sunday at two o'clock, or that I opened it 12 times but didn't click all of this information, they feel is a violation of privacy. And I'm not here to debate privacy laws with anybody. I personally don't care if you know that I opened your email, but I know some people do. So it is what it is. The point is that the phone manufacturers have decided that we as email marketers should not be able to know whether or not someone has opened our email. So let me back up a little bit and talk about how the email providers actually know whether a particular email has even been opened. It turns out, there's what's called a tracking pixel. This is not to be confused with a cookie. A tracking pixel is an actual tiny little one pixel image that is displayed in an email. And when that pixel is displayed. It sends a tiny little call back to the email platform that says hey, Susie opened this email. So that's how email opens are tracked. Now they've notoriously been unreliable. Anyway, we've always known since we've been doing email marketing, that this method of tracking opens is not reliable. It depends on the email platform or on the email client actually displaying that image. And in a lot of email clients, images are not displayed by default. If you have ever had to click in your email reader, whether you're using Outlook or Macmail or Gmail, if you've ever had to click a link that said display images, then your images in your email are not displayed by default. And if images are not displayed, then open rates are not tracked anyway. So historically, since the beginning of email marketing, we've always known that open rates are unreliable. Now what Apple has done is they have said, we are no longer reporting on open rates at all period, Android has followed suit, they are no longer reporting on open rates either, but they're not reporting on it in a different way. So with Apple devices, what they have done is every email that is received on an Apple device is

reported as having been opened. So you might have seen your open rates go up. If you have a lot of subscribers who read your emails on an Apple device, Android went the other way. They are reporting all emails received on Android devices as having not been opened whether they were opened or not. So the opposite has happened. If you have a lot of readers who are reading your emails on Android devices, you may have seen your open rates tank. But again, this is not something that's new, open rates have always been unreliable. They're just maybe a little bit more unreliable today than they were previously.

So that's email open tracking. But what about click tracking? If you look in your email platform, you will also see reports about who clicked what link? How is that tracked? Has that changed? Well, no, it hasn't. It is tracked in an entirely different way. The way that email platforms track who clicks on a link is by redirecting that link through their own redirect engine. So it requires an action on the part of the email reader on the part of your subscriber. When they actually click that link. That information is recorded in the email platforms redirect engine, so that has not been impacted by this change to Apple devices or to Android devices. Those links are still reporting as being clicked. And that has always been the case. So nothing has changed in that way. But and here's the really important thing. This email tracking has nothing to do with third party tracking. It has nothing to do with your affiliate commissions, has nothing to do with any of that and we're going to get into why that is the case. Next. So the next thing that you need to know is about cookies and how cookies work. Cookies are The most important thing to affiliate marketers cookies are what earn us commission. Cookies quite simply are just a little piece of information that's stored on your computer when you visit a website, then those cookies are used by that website to identify you in some way or to identify something about you about your browsing habits about your preferences. So for example, if you visit a website that offers content in both English and French and German, and you prefer to read it in French, you might select French from the menu. The next time you go to that website, it's going to remember that your preferred language is French, because there's a cookie on your computer, that tells the website that that's the case. I'm a big fan of The New York Times game Wordle. I play that every morning as I'm drinking my first cup of coffee. And there is a cookie on my website that stores my latest win streak. And I had to clear my cookies yesterday. And now my win streak is gone. And I was devastated when I logged in today, and found that I had to start from zero. And that's because the cookie was gone, because I cleared my browser cookies. So cookies do a lot of different things

to enhance your user experience on websites that you visit more than once. But that's just one use of cookies, there are a lot of different things that cookies can do. Some of them are good, and some of them are maybe not so good. And some of the not so good comes from what we call third party cookies.

So let's talk about what a third party cookie is, and why some people, some companies, Apple, Google, and others are kind of anti third party cookie and why they're trying to do something about it. So a third party cookie is a cookie that is placed on your computer when you visit a website. But it's not the website owners cookie. So we talked about how the website owner might put a cookie on your computer to save your preferences, so that you always see the correct language in a website or so that you can maintain your Wordle streak. But third party cookies or doing something else third party cookies are not for that website owner, therefore, another company. So probably the most commonly known third party cookie is a Facebook tracking pixel, a Facebook cookie. So these are cookies that the website owner allows on their site. They're allowing Facebook to keep track of what you are doing, where you are browsing what sites you visit. And the way third party cookies work. And the reason for their existence is so that companies can track your browsing across different sites. A good example of this is if you visit a site such as Amazon, maybe you visit Amazon and you are looking maybe for a new computer and you are browsing different computers, you're seeing different options, you're kind of weighing all the options out, maybe you've looked at four or five different computers. And then you take a break and you go off to look at your favorite gardening site. And this gardening site, or maybe this recipe site has ads on it. And all of a sudden you're seeing ads for that computer that you were just looking at. That is a third party cookie at work. And that is what companies like Apple and Google are trying to put an end to because they feel it is an invasion of your privacy to have these kinds of ads following you around. Another example that I gave in our [Six Figure Systems](#) call last night is if you go to visit a site like noom.com, which is geared towards weight loss and healthy living, and then you go to visit Facebook, and all of a sudden you're seeing ads for Weight Watchers, that's third party tracking at work. Facebook knows because you were visiting a site that is about weight loss, that maybe you are interested in losing weight. So they are going to use this information to show you more content about weight loss and healthy living. And that to Apple and to Google is an invasion of your privacy. And again, I'm not here to debate privacy law. I'm not qualified to debate that I am not qualified to tell you what's an invasion of your privacy versus what's an invasion of my privacy.

But this is the theory behind blocking these third party tracking cookies. That's what they do and that's why Apple and others do not want you to be tracked in that way.

Alright, so we know what cookies are, we know what third party cookies are and why some people in some companies are anti third party cookies. But what does that have to do with you as an affiliate marketer or as a course creator who owns an affiliate program? Well, maybe not so much at all. Now, as an affiliate, you know that you grab a link, you share a unique link with your email audience, or you share it on social media, people click on it, they go to the website. And if they make a purchase, you earn a commission. That's basically how affiliate marketing works. You are sharing your unique link, people click it, they go to the site, they make a purchase, you get paid, that is tracked through a cookie. Now, you might think automatically, oh, that must be a third party cookie. Right? But it's not. It's actually a first party cookie. So what does that even mean? What's the first party cookie? What's the third party cookie? How is that even determined? A first party cookie is a cookie that is placed there by the website owner for their own purposes. Those are the cookies that are used to set your preferences to keep track of your session on the site to keep track of the things that you have in your shopping cart. And to keep track of who referred you to the site in the first place if it was an affiliate link, that's a first party cookie, the website owner is tracking something to make your experience better or to make their business run better. They are not sharing that information. They're not using it to advertise to you in other ways. They're not tracking you across other websites. They're only using it on that one website. That's a first party cookie. A third party cookie, on the other hand is used to track you across websites. It tracks all of your browsing history, it tracks where you go, whether you visit Amazon, or you visit disney.com, or whatever website you visit, those third party cookies are tracking your browsing history. First party cookies are focused on what you are doing on one single site. third party cookies are focused on what you are doing across the internet. So that's the fundamental difference there. Affiliate marketers use first party cookies. So well, some browsers and your phone are blocking third party tracking cookies or third party tracking pixels. By default, no browser blocks first party cookies. So those are not blocked in any way. And that's really the important thing that you need to know as an affiliate marketer as a person who might own an affiliate program that these are relying on first party cookies. And first party cookies are not the ones that are in the news all over the place. We are not using as affiliate marketers, we are not using third party cookies.

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The only third party cookies that you might use as a business owner would be to advertise on multiple sites at once. If you are in an ad network, those might be third party cookies, but the tracking that you are using as an affiliate marketer, as a person who owns an affiliate program, that is all first party cookies.

So as I was explaining this on my [Six Figure Systems](#) call yesterday, I had some other questions come up that indicate that people are still confused about this third party cookie thing. So I want to go through some of those questions, because maybe you're wondering as well. So the first question was, okay, but what if I am redirecting my affiliate link, I go to an affiliate site, and I grabbed my unique link, and I run it through pretty links to make a short link out of it. And then I put it in my email. And my email redirects it to so that they can track clicks. Does that make it a third party cookie? Because now it's running through a third site, right? It's running through a third party site through a site that is not affiliated at all with the website that I'm ultimately sending people to. So that must make it a third party cookie, right? No, it does not. The cookie and the link are completely separate issues. The link is just a redirect, it just sends people to the website. It is not the same thing as the cookie. The link is not the cookie, the cookie does not come into existence until the person lands on that website. So for example, if you have ever looked at an affiliate link of mine, if you are one of my affiliates, you will know that the affiliate link has a specific structure. And in that link, there is a number that indicates the product that is being advertised. And your user name is in that link as well. So what happens when you give someone that link and they click on it, that information that's embedded in the link itself, tells my website, how to create that cookie, and what information to put in that cookie. But the link itself is not the cookie, they are two separate things. So it does not matter how many times or where you redirect that link, for example, I have a platform that I use called Switchy, that I use to redirect all of my affiliate links. And I also am sending affiliate links through my email, my email platform [Active Campaign](#) redirects those links as well, so that they can track them. So those links are being redirected twice. And that does not change the nature of that cookie, it is still a first party cookie, just being redirected, does not make the cookie different in any way. Again, because the cookie does not exist until the visitor actually lands on the website. It is the website that generates the cookie, based on the information that it sees in the URL that was clicked.

Another question that came up was about affiliate programs themselves. So I run [aMember](#) on my own website. So all of my affiliate links are generated from my

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own website, and the cookie is created on my own website. So it's pretty clear that those are first party cookies. But what if you're using something like ThriveCart or SamCart or Infusionsoft, I guess it's keep now or keep for your affiliate program. Does that make those cookies third party cookies? And again, no, because you are placing that cookie on the visitors website or on the visitors computer, when they land on your website, it doesn't matter what tool you're using to generate that cookie, what matters is where the cookie is placed, and the purpose of the cookie. So just because you are using ThriveCart, or SamCart, or keep or Ontraport for your affiliate program, that does not matter that does not change the nature of the cookie, the cookie is still first party, it's used by you, the website owner for the sole purpose of identifying the referring affiliate partner. So there is nothing about that, that indicates any kind of a third party relationship. But then you might be asking, Okay, but how does a browser know? How do they know that this is a first party cookie or a third party cookie? How do they know what your intention is with it? Well, that's a really good question. And they don't always know. But they do have a system, which they use to identify third party tracking pixels. And I'm going to link to an article that I found on impact.com Impact, if you're not familiar with them, is a large affiliate network. They manage the affiliate programs for sites like LeadPages. So they kind of have a lot of skin in the game in the affiliate marketing world, right. So they know what's going on. They're very technically savvy, and they know what's going on in the affiliate marketing world. And I found an article that they published about this third party tracking information and about this email information. I'm going to link to that in the show notes. It's very technical. But if you are interested in the real techy details about how this works, you might want to give that a read. But basically, what they say is there are three criteria that a cookie needs to meet to be considered a third party tracking cookie. Now, most of your cookies, most of your affiliate cookies are not going to fall into these three criteria. But that's not to say that it's never going to happen. That's not to say that that Apple is never going to miss identify a tracking cookie as being a third party tracker, when in fact it is a first party cookie that can potentially happen. However, if it does happen, if you read that article, what you will see is worst case scenario, they decide that this is a third party tracker, and they put a deadline on it. So instead of that cookie tracking for 30 days or 60 days, it's only going to track for 24 hours. They're not saying that it won't track at all. They're saying we are limiting its reach and that again is the worst case scenario as of right now when I'm recording this, and you can actually test all of this for your yourself. And I want to encourage you to do that. I want to encourage you to test your links as an affiliate marketer, as an affiliate program owner, this is really

important that you do this so that you fully understand how your cookies how your tracking is working. And if something is broken, you'll know how to spot it. And the way that you test this is to simply click on your own link.

So here's what you can do, you go and grab your affiliate link that you are going to promote. So you log into the affiliate dashboard for whatever program, you grab that link, run it through your link shortener, if you're using one or don't, it doesn't matter, send yourself a test email with that link in it. And then before you click it, clear, your cookies clear your browser cache. And how you do that depends on which browser you're using. But clear your browser cache, you can google how to do that for whatever browser you're using. And then open up your email and click on that link. Make sure it goes to the right place. That's the first step right, you want to make sure that you're sending people to the right page. So make sure it goes to the right place. And then log into that affiliate dashboard and see if that link click was tracked, you should see it right there. Any decent affiliate program is going to tell you all of the clicks on your links, and you're going to be able to see them right there, you might see them with an IP address, which you can match up to your own IP address. Or you might just be able to identify it by what time the click came in. But one way or another, you're going to be able to see that that click was tracked. And if that click was tracked, it stands to reason that any sales that are made are also going to be tracked. Now you can also get a whole lot nerdier with this, and you can log into your you can look at your settings in your browser, and actually see the cookies, you can see what information they contain. You can see when they expire. I demonstrated how to do that on our [Q&A](#) call yesterday. I obviously can't do that here because we're on audio. But if you want to know how to do that, I will leave a link in the show notes with some information about how to actually look at the cookies that are in your browser. But the most important thing is just test it and go and look in your affiliate dashboard and make sure that that link was recorded or that that click was recorded.

Another way that you can test this is to actually compare the click stats that you're getting from your email platform, and from your link shortener to what shows up in your affiliate dashboard. So let me give you an example. I recently was promoting the Coach To Profit 4.0 bundle from Info Stack. I had an affiliate link, I took that affiliate link. And I redirected it through my link shortener, which, as I mentioned, is Switchy. So I redirected that affiliate link through Switchy. And then I promoted that affiliate link in my emails that week. So I can go into my [Active Campaign](#)

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account. And I can see how many clicks were on that link, because Active Campaign tracks this, I can go into Switchy. And I can see how many clicks happened on that link, because Switchy tracks it for me. And I can go into ThriveCart, which is the affiliate program for Info Stack, I can log into my ThriveCart account. And I can see how many clicks happened on that link during that week. And when I compare those numbers, they should all be around the same. They're not going to be exact, because no tracking is ever exact, but they should be close. And looking at my numbers, I can see that Switchy tells me that I had 550 clicks. And ThriveCart tells me that I had 560 ish and [Active Campaign](#) tells me that I had around 540. So those are all within a reasonable range. So that tells me that those affiliate links are tracking properly. And it doesn't matter that I redirected them on a third party site. And I'm saying that with air quotes because that does not mean third party tracking. So it doesn't matter that I redirected them through Switchy it doesn't matter that I redirected them or allowed Active Campaign to redirect them in order to track them. I still got credit for all of those clicks. So you can test this for yourself with your own campaigns. You can test it by actually clicking a link and going and look in the affiliate dashboard to see if that click was recorded, or you can test it by comparing your stats across those tracking platforms. And I want to encourage you to do both of those things, if for no other reason than to make sure that the affiliate programs that you are promoting are properly tracking, and also maybe to put your mind at ease about all of the scary things that we're hearing about third party tracking, and email tracking, no longer working. And just so you know, that none of that is really worth getting uptight about. Things are still working in the affiliate marketing space. There's really nothing to be concerned about when it comes to Apple's recent changes to their iOS platform or to Androids recent changes to their platform, or to the recent scuttlebutt, where you're hearing about third party tracking, none of that impacts us as affiliate marketers, or as people who own affiliate programs.

So I hope that has been helpful to you. I know it got a little nerdy, and I want to be here for you. If you have other questions. If you have other concerns. If you have a specific scenario you want to walk through, please drop me a comment below this episode, I would love to help you out and help make sense of how affiliate tracking works for you, and how these things might or might not impact your business. You'll find the show notes for this episode at tinycourseempire.com/50. And next week, we're going to be talking about being more visible online. So don't forget to join me for that. And as always, if you're enjoying the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, I

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would love it so much, if you would share it with a friend who needs to hear this information as well. That would just mean the world to me. Thank you so much for listening today. I appreciate you and I will talk to you again next week.

If you like what you hear on the Tiny Course Empire Podcast, you're going love all of the courses and workshops and support you'll find inside [Six Figure Systems](#). That's my monthly program where we dig into online marketing for regular people like you and me. We don't do big launches. We don't have the big headaches and we don't have the big expenses that come with them. Instead, we focus on creating repeatable, sustainable systems that continue to grow over time, and that don't suck up all of our energy or require a 10 person team to manage. You can come see what we're all about at [sixfiguresystems.com](#) and I'll see you on the inside

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