Managing Chrome Browser Extensions Safely

Lilly Cordova - 2025-02-12 - Comments (0) - Browsers and Search Engines

What Are Browser Extensions?

Browser extensions are small software programs which integrate directly into your web browser, such as Chrome, in order to enhance and expand its functionality. Not unlike traditional desktop software applications, they are dedicated tools that integrate directly into the browser, offering features such as ad blocking, password management, or productivity enhancements. However, extensions often require permissions that may allow them to access or interact with data you enter in your browser. While they can provide valuable tools and convenience, extensions also carry security risks if misused or developed with malicious intent.

Best Practices for Browser Extensions

OIT recommends reviewing your browser extensions periodically, as malicious extensions have been used to compromise millions of devices. These extensions often claim to enhance productivity or offer innovative tools but instead steal sensitive information such as credentials and browsing history. Follow these best practices to protect your data and devices:

- Only Install What You Need
  Be selective about which extensions you install. Limit your extensions to those that provide a clear and necessary benefit.
- Research the Developer
  Before installing an extension, investigate who created it. Extensions from well-known and reputable developers are generally safer. Check reviews, ratings, and any feedback from other users.
- Be Wary of New Trends
  Extensions tied to emerging trends like AI or productivity tools often appear rapidly and may not be adequately vetted. Exercise caution when installing extensions related to new or developing technologies.
- Evaluate Permissions
  Extensions often request permissions to access certain browser functions. Be cautious of extensions that ask for excessive or unnecessary permissions, as these could indicate malicious intent.
- Uninstall Suspicious Extensions

If an extension behaves unexpectedly, demands excessive permissions, or seems suspicious, remove it immediately.

How to Review Installed Extensions in Chrome

Extensions are managed through your browser settings. Though the process is similar across browsers, there may be nuanced differences.

- Open the Extensions Menu
    - Click the three-dot menu in the upper-right corner of Chrome.
    - Navigate to Extensions → Manage Extensions.
- Review Your Installed Extensions
    - Browse through the list of installed extensions.
    - Here you can view additional details about your installed extensions such as its description, its permissions, and the sites it has access to.
    - A link to the extension's Chrome Web Store entry is also displayed here, which will provide you with more details about the extension's developers and any reviews from the community it might have.
- Uninstall Extensions
    - To remove an extension, click the Remove button beneath its listing.
    - Confirm the action when prompted.

OIT's Perspective on Browser Extensions

Users have the flexibility to customize their browsing experience, but this also places the responsibility on individuals to evaluate and manage extensions wisely. Always remain vigilant, skeptical, and proactive in protecting your data.

If you have questions or concerns about a specific extension, do not hesitate to contact the IT Service Center via help@brown.edu. By adhering to these best practices, you can maximize the benefits of browser extensions while minimizing potential risks.