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RE: Skipscreen Functionality on MediaFire

Dear Mr. Bango:

I represent Worcester LLC, publisher of the SkipScreen add-on for Firefox. As you know, on October 1, 2009, MediaFire, a file download site, sent a letter asking Mozilla to take SkipScreen out of Mozilla's add-on library. MediaFire's complaints against SkipScreen are baseless. SkipScreen, like many other add-ons, simply automates certain browser tasks in order to improve the user experience..

SkipScreen automates button clicking and form-submission (including waiting) via mechanisms exposed by the host domain on any given page. In other words, despite the name, SkipScreen does not actually "skip" screens -- instead, it automates the user-experience, much like scripts for GreaseMonkey or iMacros, other add-ons that Mozilla offers.

After a user downloads and installs the SkipScreen add-on, she can go to MediaFire to download a file. When she clicks a link (usually on a third party site or derived from a search engine) to download a file from MediaFire, Skipscreen recognizes that the user has arrived at a MediaFire webpage containing a download button. The software recognizes download buttons on this and subsequent MediaFire pages by searching for the div labeled "download_link". SkipScreen executes the code connected to the button directly, activating the identical process that the user activates when she manually clicks the button. Whether the user clicks the link herself, or allows SkipScreen to do it for her, the standard Firefox download mechanism handles the process. In other words, SkipScreen is entirely user-directed and simply automates the process after the initial click. Downloading a file from MediaFire using SkipScreen takes up no more bandwidth than downloading a file without SkipScreen.

Moreover, contrary to MediaFire's claims, SkipScreen does not present content from another page or domain as its own. All content from the host page is presented as content from the host page. The software, without redirecting, does add a temporary html element that defines space on a webpage (called a div) that displays "on top" of MediaFire's page, obscuring it. It is clear to users that this content comes from SkipScreen and not from MediaFire, as it makes several mentions of SkipScreen, and includes information from the extension sponsors. At the upper-left of the page, the "back" button invites the user to continue their experience by returning to the host-page. Clicking this button removes the div and returns the user to the MediaFire experience. In other words, the user has the

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option not to display the div.

At the bottom of the page, the user has the ability to share the extension via Twitter or Facebook. At the upper-right, a link to the extension's home site is displayed. The extension also inserts a small box in the lower-left, to indicate to the user when it is active. At other times, it may insert or overlay additional information about waits or delays.

On the MediaFire pages (and only some of them) there is sometimes a checkbox. If it is checked when the user clicks the download button, Mediafire opens a new window with an ad (e.g. a popup). The popup makes page behavior unpredictable, so SkipScreen blocks it. The user can block this popup herself, without Skipscreen, by unchecking the checkbox before clicking download. In blocking this popup, SkipScreen does not do anything that the user cannot do herself. Many browsers (including Firefox), browser add-ons, and other kinds of tools have built-in functionality for blocking popups, and Mozilla distributes these programs.

In some use-cases, SkipScreen can behave in slightly different ways from what we've described here. However, none of the things that SkipScreen does take up any more of MediaFire's bandwidth than when the user downloads by clicking the buttons manually. SkipScreen does not bypass MediaFire's website or present its content as SkipScreen's own. Nor does SkipScreen cause users to breach any contractual acceptable use policy ("AUP"). It does not appear that those who use MediaFire simply to download files enter into any contractual agreement with MediaFire when doing so. Absent a binding contractual promise, website owners have no right to control a user's browser plug-ins. Any other rule would imperil dozens of plug-ins hosted by Mozilla (and the Firefox browser itself, should some site operators decide to prohibit site visitors from using it).

We hope that Mozilla will continue to host SkipScreen on its add-on page. SkipScreen, like many other add-ons, simply automates certain browser tasks in order to improve the user experience. Please feel free to contact me if you need any additional information about SkipScreen.

Sincerely,

ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION

JENNIFER S. GRANICK
Civil Liberties Director