

# Amazon knows what you want

By *srlinuxx*

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Amazon.com Inc. has one potentially big advantage over its rival online retailers: It knows things about you that you may not know yourself.

Though plenty of companies have detailed systems for tracking customer habits, critics and boosters alike say Amazon is the trailblazer, having collected information longer and used it more proactively. It even received a patent recently on technology aimed at tracking information about the people for whom its customers buy gifts.

Amazon sees such data-gathering as the best way to keep customers happy and loyal, a relationship-building technique that analysts consider potentially crucial to besting other online competitors.

"In general, we collect as much information as possible such that we can provide you with the best feedback," said Werner Vogels, Amazon's chief technology officer.

But some privacy advocates believe Amazon is getting dangerously close to becoming Big Brother with your credit card number.

"They are constantly finding new ways to exploit personal information," said Chris Hoofnagle of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, an Amazon nemesis since 2000 after the company changed its privacy policy to allow sharing of personal information with companies it buys or partners with.

For years, Amazon has collected detailed information about what its customers buy, considered buying, browsed for but never bought, recommended to others or even wished someone would buy them.

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