

Understanding and Managing Your Digital Footprint



Your digital footprint is the record or trail of everything you do online. Your social media accounts and activity, personal blogs or websites, your browsing history, your online subscriptions, forum comments, any photos and videos you've uploaded — anything and everything on the internet with your name on it.

Luckily, most of the places that store your personal information (like Facebook) can be tweaked, so we share only certain things with the general public. Let's explore that and other tips to help you manage your digital footprint.

- 1. Privacy settings:** You should always read the "Privacy" page for the devices, accounts and services you use to see how your information is being viewed, collected, stored and shared. Every site allows you to choose your privacy settings and most smartphone apps can be denied access to all or portions of your stored data. Decide how visible you want to be and take the time to tweak your settings accordingly.
- 2. Keep a running list of your accounts:** Make a list of every online account you have and keep it current. Delete any accounts you no longer use. Remember your old MySpace or LiveJournal account? Delete it.
- 3. Don't over-share:** Don't post anything that would help others steal your identity — no usernames, physical addresses, etc. Also avoid posting any major purchases you've made, when you might be traveling for an extended period of time or other details that criminals might use.
- 4. Use a password keeper:** It's hard to remember 10 different passwords, let alone more for all of your social sites, storefronts and online services, and every site has their own unique rules, so a password keeper can be valuable.
- 5. Google yourself:** There may be information about you on the internet that you aren't aware of. Some sites can alert you to whether or not your information has been hacked and is available for others to access, which can help you keep track of old accounts that need to be deleted.
- 6. Use a secondary email:** When you are communicating with someone new, or signing up for a new social media platform, it can be useful to have a secondary email address. Avoid using your primary email account for anything other than

the most critical communications to avoid receiving spam mail and other announcements that can fill up your inbox.

- 7. Posting is forever:** Every time you send a message, post or picture, you're publishing it the same way a major news outlet does. The internet never forgets. And just because you take a post down doesn't mean it's gone forever. Someone may save your image or screen grab your post to share without your knowledge.
- 8. Understand that searches are social:** Facebook records your search data and Google does the same search and browsing information. You may want to investigate private browsing windows or search engines with stricter privacy policies if you do not want your searches shared.

In the end, just make sure you consider that what you post, tweet, comment, search or like is probably being recorded somewhere, and possibly forever.

