My Digital Footprint

A brief guide

ONLINE BANKING
PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING SITE
ONLINE SHOPPING SEARCH ENGINES
EMAILING ONLINE PHOTO SHARING

National Protective
Security Authority

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My digital footprint: what is it?

A digital footprint is the data that's left behind **whenever you use a digital service**. Whether you access the internet using a mobile phone, tablet or laptop, each time you go online, you're leaving a trail of information behind you.

For example

- Emailing
- Social media
- Messenger
- Banking
- Dating
- Photo sharing
- Gaming
- Shopping
- Geolocation services
- Applications
- Professional networking

All these online activities can add to your digital footprint.

Digital footprints are created in two ways: **passively and actively**. A passive footprint is created when your data is collected, usually without you being aware of it. Common examples are search engines storing your search history whenever you're logged in, and web servers logging your computer's IP address when you visit a website.

An active digital footprint is created when you voluntarily share information online. Every time you send an email, publish a blog, sign up for a newsletter or post something on social media, you're actively contributing to your digital footprint.

My digital footprint: who else contributes to it?

It's **not only you** who can influence your digital trail. Your friends, family, colleagues, associates, and the clubs and societies you're a member of can also add to it every time they mention you online.

Even people you don't know can contribute to your digital footprint. For example, corporate and public sector bodies can add to it as well, when they list public information about you on the internet.

Do you know what your digital footprint looks like?

It could include information about you, your home and your work that others, including those with malicious intent, can easily gain access to. Make sure you know what it comprises.
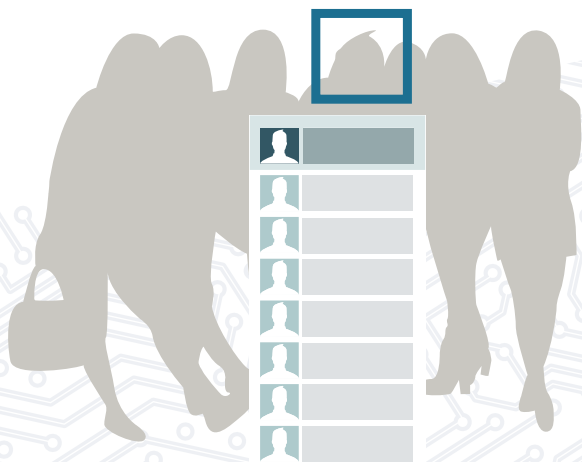
Did you know that?

- There are more than **3 billion** internet users around the world and **2 billion** of them are active on social media.

- LinkedIn has **187 million** active monthly users.

- Twitter has **284 million** active monthly users tweeting **7,200 times** every second.

- Facebook has **1.39 billion** active monthly users sharing **2.5 billion** pieces of content every day.

- **86%** of internet users have taken steps online to reduce their digital footprints.

- **21%** of internet users have had an email or social networking account compromised or taken over by someone else without permission.

- **11%** of internet users have had personal information stolen, such as their credit card or bank account details.

SOURCES:

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My digital footprint: why care?

Once something is shared online, it's there **forever** – and what happens to this information may not always be under your control.

Social media channels, websites and apps are just some examples of online services that regularly change their privacy policies and security settings, making it difficult to keep track of what's available for public consumption and what isn't.

This means that the personal messages, information and data that we post online can end up being viewed by far more people than we ever intended.

For example, be careful of the following:

- Automatic profile settings that mean anyone on the internet can view your posts, photos and status updates.

- Apps that run analytics to monitor, collect and use your personal information for advertising purposes.

- Privacy policies that require access to users' locations, calendars and contact lists.

And for those of us who work for organisations where our roles give us privileged access to sites, information or assets – be it organisational processes, systems, finances, research projects, technology, designs, equipment, materials, staff data, public data, intellectual property or intelligence – we need to be extra vigilant.

Our digital footprint may be of more interest to those with malicious intent. Criminals, violent protest groups, foreign intelligence services and terrorist groups can all benefit from gaining access to information about us, our work and who we associate with; and they can exploit that information to cause harm to us, our families, our organisation, our communities and the wider public.

Don't make it easy for just anyone to gain access to information about you.

A badly managed digital footprint could mean the 'digital you' makes the 'real you' vulnerable. But, by taking some practical steps you can minimise the security risks while still making full use of the many digital services available.

My digital footprint: what should I do?

Each one of us has a digital footprint, and this is normal, but we need to know how to manage it. These three simple rules will help you actively manage the data trail left behind each time you use the internet.

1. Own it

- Know what your digital footprint looks like.

- What information is out there about you? What can someone learn about you, your family, your work and your interests?

- And remember, it's not just you creating your digital footprint. Make sure you know who else is posting about you online as well.

2. Shape it

- Be proactive and shape your digital footprint into something that you and your organisation are happy with.

- Review your passwords and privacy settings on devices, apps and social media sites.

- Review what personal and work related data is available online about you. Can you delete parts or ask for them to be removed?

- Think carefully about what you share – you don't always know who's looking at it.

3. Monitor it

- Looking after your digital footprint is an ongoing job, so monitor it regularly.

- Social media privacy settings change, the devices you use change, and the information about you online changes as you and others add to it.

- Keep an eye on your digital footprint to ensure you, your friends, your family and your organisation stay safe.

For further information about how to look after your digital footprint please speak to your organisation or see NPSA's 'Tracking my Digital Footprint – A guide to digital footprint discovery and management' booklet.