



Digital Footprint

Information for Students



What is your digital footprint?



Every time you do anything online, whether it's visiting a website, making an online purchase, having a conversation on an online game, using a search engine or posting on social media, leaves a digital trail or 'footprint'.

This footprint creates a permanent record and is potentially visible to anyone. Anything you do online can be copied, shared or saved by others, meaning that embarrassing picture of you your friend's shared on social media could be spread far and wide and not easily deleted. And parts of your digital footprint – those details you share when signing up for free apps and services – can be used for commercial purposes by others.

Would you want family members or future employers seeing your comments, pictures, videos or posts? Do you know what happens to your personal data in exchange for free apps and services? We've compiled a few top tips below to help you.

Help to build a positive digital footprint by bearing in mind these key points:



The things you post online can have an impact on your reputation in real life – once it's out there, you can't take it back



When you post something online, it can be easily copied or shared, meaning you could lose control over it. This can impact on your right to privacy as an individual



Everything you do online is of value to companies looking to target their advertising. For instance posting pictures of yourself with your pet dog or searching online for 'dog food' identifies you to advertisers as someone who is interested in dogs. You can view your apps' permissions in the settings on your phone and device to check you're happy with what you're sharing



There is a 'Right to be forgotten', meaning that a person can ask for particular URLs to be deleted from search results, but even if they decide they want to take something down, others could have copied it or saved it. Things you post today could last for a long time



Your digital footprint can affect your privacy – think about the people who can see the places you're checking into online or personal information like your email address, age or home address

There are things you can do to improve your digital footprint and minimise any negative consequences:



Set your privacy settings to make sure you're only sharing things the people you want to see them



Think before you post. Are you giving away information that could be used in a negative way? What impact might this have on others? What impression does this post give to others about you?



Google your name to see what comes up – it's a good idea to be aware of what information others can see about you



Make sure your Facebook settings are adjusted so that you can check pictures or posts you're tagged in before they appear on your profile



Get into the habit of asking for your friends' permission before posting a picture or video of them online – remember, the things you do online can affect their digital footprints too



Be honest when signing up to sites or apps – social networks, blogs and other services have minimum age limits to protect their users from marketing and inappropriate content



Did You Know?

Almost half of recruiters across Europe look for information about potential candidates on social networking sites*. Use your social network profiles to your advantage by sharing positive posts, filling in information about your hobbies and interests and thinking before you post something which could be taken the wrong way. This will help you to develop an online presence that will help – rather than hinder – you in the future.

* Source: Microsoft®, January & February 2010.

Spotlight on: Personal Data

Ever heard people talking about personal data and wondered what it actually is?

The EU says that “personal data” is “any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person”. In other words, if there’s a piece of information that relates to you and could identify you as who you are, that’s an example of data. So your name, address, date of birth, and characteristics are all examples of data. These things can either identify you on their own (like your full name), or can be combined to create a profile of who you are.

So why you should be interested in what happens to your personal data online?

Personal data is what makes the internet go round and it’s what allows both advertisers and free online services to make money. Advertisers pay to access the information you give when using apps or social networks so that they can target their advertising to you. Some people mind that this happens, others don’t – but the key thing to know is that it’s happening and to understand how your data is being used by these companies.

“When our interests and profiles are combined with location, advertisers have a unique opportunity to show us something we are interested in at the time and place that we are most likely to respond – like a coupon for pizza at exactly the time that we’re searching for a lunch spot and passing the pizza joint.” –Vodafone

[Digital Parenting Magazine](#)