Your Digital Footprint: What Does the Internet Know About You?

Small steps can make a meaningful difference.

Your digital footprint is the trail you leave online

Every account, public post, shopping interaction, app permission, and website visit can contribute information about you. Some of this information is intentionally shared; some is collected in the background. Your footprint is not necessarily bad, but it is worth understanding.

Active and passive footprints

An active footprint includes information you choose to post, such as a profile photo or comment. A passive footprint can include information collected as you browse, such as device identifiers, approximate location, or activity used for analytics and advertising.

Why that information matters

Online information can help services work smoothly, but it can also shape targeted advertising, reveal personal habits, or give scammers details they use to sound convincing. Data brokers may assemble information from public records and other sources.

Step 1: Search for yourself

Search your name alongside your city or a past workplace. Look for public profiles, outdated listings, and information you did not realize was visible. Avoid paying an unfamiliar site just to view your own listing.

Step 2: Review account privacy

Open the privacy settings in your social media accounts. Check who can see your posts, profile details, friends list, and contact information. Review old posts and remove information you no longer want public.

Step 3: Check app permissions

On your phone, review which apps can access location, contacts, camera, microphone, and photos. Keep permissions that are necessary and remove those that are not. Exact menu names vary by device and software version.

Step 4: Reduce unnecessary tracking

Review browser privacy settings, cookie preferences, and advertising personalization controls. These settings can reduce some forms of tracking, but no single switch makes your online activity completely invisible.

Step 5: Secure the accounts that matter

Use unique, strong passwords or passkeys, turn on multifactor authentication where available, and keep recovery contact information current. A password manager can help you avoid reusing passwords.

Step 6: Consider data broker opt-outs

Some people-search sites provide opt-out processes. Removing a listing from one site does not erase the underlying public record, and information may reappear. Keep a simple record of requests and revisit them periodically.

A five-minute digital footprint checkup

Pick one account today. Review its public profile, privacy settings, and connected apps. Make one improvement, then choose another account next week. Progress matters more than perfection.