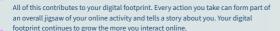# What is a digital footprint?

A digital footprint is the trail of information that you leave behind online when navigating between your favourite apps, websites, and online games. For example, when:

• Streaming music,
• Posting pictures on social media,
• Liking someone's posts online,
• Tagging yourself in places, or
• Buying a pair of trainers.

All of this contributes to your digital footprint. Every action you take can form part of an overall jigsaw of your online activity and tells a story about you. Your digital footprint continues to grow the more you interact online.

What can your digital footprint reveal about you?

Very often, you're aware of the kind of information that you hand over when you go online. For example, when you post videos or photos of yourself, your friends, or your family, or when you give your email address to a website to get presale access for tickets to a gig.

But, your digital footprint also includes information about you that you might not even think of. For example:

• Websites collect information about how many times you've visited a site, about your location and your IP address.
• Social media platforms use your likes, shares, and comments to target you with specific content that they think you'll want to see.

All of this information about you can also be tracked.

Why do certain companies want to collect all of this information about you?

Some companies collect this information in order to personalise services for you. For example:

• TV streaming platforms collect your personal data to remember what episode you are up to on a particular series, or to suggest shows based on what you've watched already.
• Music streaming services do the same to create suggested playlists for you.
• Social media platforms use your data to show you content that they think You're interested in.

But remember, your information is extremely valuable to these companies. They use this information to show you more of the content that you want to see, and keep you on the app or platform for longer.

For this reason, always keep in mind that 'free' apps and services are never really free as you're paying with your information.

Is leaving behind a digital footprint a bad thing?

Leaving behind a digital footprint is not necessarily a bad thing – there can be benefits to it. For example, you get distracted when shopping online and when you return all of the stuff you picked is still in the basket. So, it can be very helpful in some ways.

But the main thing is to be aware of your digital footprint because it is relatively permanent and can shape your digital reputation, which is just as important as your offline reputation.

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How to limit your digital footprint

Be honest about your real age
Social media platforms must have specific protections in place for the personal data of young people. That's there to improve your experience and make it better, not to limit it. So take advantage of those protections by declaring your real age when signing up to social media accounts.

Check your personalisation settings
If you don't want platforms to show you content based on your activity on the app, you can turn this off in your privacy settings. This limits the amount of information collected about you, while still letting you scroll through content that's trending.

Don't get nudged
Sometimes, apps will try to 'nudge' you into sharing more information than they actually need. For example:
- The button they want you to click on is pre-selected and is bright and colourful, while the other option, that requires less information, is more faded and difficult to read.
- An app uses fun, motivational language to encourage you to hand over information like 'Share a photo and let the world see how great you are!'

Always choose the option that you're happiest with, not just the one that's easiest to click on.

Turn off location tracking
Think twice about checking into places or tagging yourself as somewhere. Sharing your location online can be risky so turn off your location settings if you don't need them.

Go Private
Think about setting your profile to 'private', so that only your friends can see what you like, post and share. Remember, if your account is public, everyone and anyone can see what you're sharing and talking about online, even people who don't have an account on that platform. Anything can go viral, and once it's out there, it's out there for good.