ONLINE PRIVACY

THE NON-TECHIE'S STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO

ELIMINATE UNUSED, UNWANTED (AND UNREMEMBERED) ONLINE PROFILES

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Written by Carmine Connelly and Jeremiah Johnson.

Sign Up for a Free Training Series

Eliminating old online accounts is one of the best steps you can take in when looking to defend yourself and your family online, but there is a lot more to learn. The training videos are set to provide a strong foundation to non-techie people, so they can start to implement better online habits.
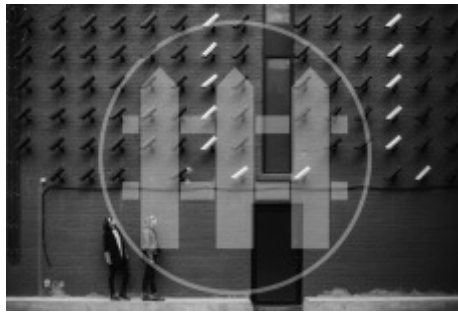
You'll learn:

- Differences in online privacy, anonymity, and security, and how they work together to form a strong strategy to defend your online data
- Debunking 3 myths of online privacy and how to protect yourself
- Why implementing a strong password policy is your first defense, and how to develop a password ecosystem

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1. https://defendyouronlineprivacy.com/training/

The Whys and Whatnots of Online Privacy

The internet has been around for decades at this point. If you're like me, you've had lots of experience with experimenting on different platforms and websites back when the mainstream web was innocent. People cared more about making money via traffic than they did data mining.

At this point, the web has transitioned, and we all know the main companies, FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix, Google), are collecting every little ounce of data they can. The issue is that there are lots of little companies collecting data in order to sell to the main guys or exploit on their own.

All of our experimentation from when the web was young is going to come back to haunt us. It's time to remove all those unused, unwanted (and unremembered) usernames, passwords, accounts, etc.

So, why take the time to go through and delete all these accounts that you don't use (and haven't used in the past 6 years)? Here are a few reasons why you'd want to delete those:

• Most people use just a handful of passwords, and they don't change them out that often. Old accounts, especially on older platforms, are vulnerable to attack. Intruders could get your username and/or password from the old account, compromising current accounts

• It's your data, and you don't want them selling it off. I had an old journaling/blog account on a platform that doesn't exist anymore, but I know my old data didn't just disappear. There was a lot of personal data about me, that someone else owns now.

An Overview of the Process

So, in order to go through and rid our lives of these old accounts, you first have to know about these old accounts. Sometimes this is easy, and sometimes it's hard.

The easy ones will tell us they exist. The hard ones we'll have to find. Either way, this is a two-step process in eliminating these unused, unwanted, and unremembered accounts:

1. Make a giant list of all the accounts you can find
2. Go through and delete them.

Slight caveat here, this will most likely not get rid of *all* your accounts, as there could be some minor ones hanging out somewhere, but this will do the trick for the majority of your old online accounts.

The How's of Making a Giant List

- The Easy Ones -

1. Go to your email account and login
2. Look for all your subscription emails. This is a sign that they have your information (maybe just email address, but maybe more).

Note: for Gmail accounts you can use the "promotions" and "social" tabs for a starting point.

1. Open a text document. Nothing fancy, you can use just good ol' notepad or any other text editor.
2. Write down all the websites/apps/platforms that have sent you emails from subscriptions or updates.

- The Hard(er) Ones -

1. Go to your email account and login.
2. Use the following search terms (keep the quotes) to find other accounts. Search each term individually:

- "account created"
- "confirm email"
- "new account"
- "welcome [first]" - (insert your first name in [first])
- "welcome to "

1. Write down the accounts you find in the same text document as listed before.

Note: It's okay if you duplicate here. You want the list to be as complete as possible!

1. Now you'll want to go through any other email accounts you have access to, whether they're current or old, and continue compiling the list.
2. Do the easy ones first – all your subscriptions
3. Do the hard(er) ones second – all the searches
4. Remember to keep the same list going. The list can get *really* long, but that's okay. We want to be as thorough as possible.

- The Hard(est) Ones -

We're done with your email for now. Take a breath and open up your browser.

1. Open a new window to Google.com[1]
2. Open a new window to Bing.com[2]
3. Open a new window to Yahoo.com[3]

Note: You should have 3 separate windows open. Alternatively, you can do each of these 1 at a time in the same window.

1. Do a search with "[First] [Last]"
2. Do a search with "[First] [Middle] [Last]"
3. Do a search for any previously used names, like maiden names, in above format
4. Do a search for "[username]" with each of your previously used usernames, even if it is [first][last].

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1. https://google.com/

2. https://bing.com/

3. https://yahoo.com/

For each search, open a new tab of any result that looks like it could be one of your accounts. Add each account you find to the ongoing list.

Note: make sure you use quotes around any searches above. If you find that your name brings up a lot of irrelevant results, like you share a name with a politician, use a minus sign to exclude results (i.e. "[first] [last]" -politics -site:cnn.com -site:msnbc.com -site:foxnews.com)

More about advanced searches in Appendix A.

Now, it's important to note that some people have very common names, so when doing the "name" searches from the previous page you will get a lot of irrelevant results.

In doing your searches, it might take a little more time to go through the results.

- Find profiles that come from sites that look familiar, where you would have created an account.

- Look for numbers you might have added to the end of a profile (i.e. JohnSmith1981).

- Add a location you've lived to narrow down the results (i.e. Raleigh North Carolina)

- Use your email address, or other common profile information to narrow down the results

The "Now-what" of Post-List Building

At this point, you've got a big list of all these old accounts. Now you're going to go through the list and split them into the following categories:

- Terminate
- Unsubscribe
- Retain

"Terminate" are the accounts you don't want or don't need. These are items marked for deletion.

"Unsubscribe" are the accounts you don't necessarily need to delete, but you don't want a ton of emails from them anymore.

"Retain" are the ones you're good with and don't want to make changes to at this point.

Slight Pause: A Few Quick Notes

Note that just because you delete your account, there's a good chance your data will *not* be deleted. The key here is that you don't want to provide any new, additional data.

Deleting your account is a step forward, as this lowers your online footprint. When the account is deleted, it becomes less vulnerable to 3rd parties.

You have to assume that anything you've ever put online will still exist in some form. That's just the game we're playing.

Wouldn't it have been nice to have that written in the "warning" label before getting online the first time?

Anyways, now it's on to Step 2: Deleting the Accounts

The How's of Deleting Your Accounts

- The First Ones -

1. Start with the top of your list, but make sure you skip the following accounts (if you plan to delete them). These are what we call leveraged accounts, since you can use the below accounts to sign-in to 3rd party accounts. Don't delete it if you need it in the future.

- Facebook
- Google
- Twitter

1. Log in to your account
2. Go to something like "Account" or "Settings" or "Billing"
3. Select the option to delete your account. It could be:

- Delete, Terminate, Deactivate, Suspend, etc.

Note: if you can choose something with finality, like "delete" or "terminate" ... Bravo!

If it's something else, like "deactivate" or "suspend", it's a good sign that you could still be able to login and reactivate your account.

This is not what we want. We want closure.

Don't choose that option. We'll get there momentarily. For now, just make a note on your list (use an asterisk or something), so you can come back to them with another step.

- The Second Ones -

If they don't have an "easy" option for deleting your account, you'll have to contact support. Yipee.

You want to use a "chat" function if possible. Secondarily would be to email support or open a support ticket.

Note: Be courteous and kind! They'll be more inclined to help if you treat them with respect.

Use some version of the following format:

"*Hey, I'd like to terminate my account. I'm trying to reduce my online footprint. Please delete my account and all data associated with my account. Thanks!*"

This will work for chat, email, or support.

- The Follow-up -

For those other accounts that only gave you the option to deactivate or suspend your account, you'll need to contact support too. The messaging is a little different.

Again, you'll want to use a "chat" function if possible. Email or a support ticket could also work. Same thing goes here with being respectful.

Use some version of the following format:

"*Hey, I'd like to terminate my account. I'm trying to reduce my online footprint. I only saw an option to deactivate, but I'm looking to completely terminate my account. Please delete my account and all data associated with my account. Thanks!*"

This will work for chat, email, or support.

The Aftermath

As you go through and delete your accounts, make sure to keep track of them in your list. Mark them off as you get them deleted.

If you have to contact support, make sure you note that as well. This will allow you to follow-up if you don't get a response.

Sometimes they will say your account has been "deactivated", and you'll want to follow-up and tell them to delete the account, not just deactivate it.

There will be some accounts you can't delete. Try to fill it in with "dummy data" to minimize *your* footprint and online visibility.

Follow-up and Follow-through

Once you get everything deleted (or as deleted as possible), go back through your search options again to make sure nothing slipped up.

This is just the start to taking back your privacy in this digital age. Again, there's no way to ensure all your information has been deleted or is fully protected, but you can take measures to put up your own "privacy fences."

It's your information. It should be up to you who has it and how it's being used. Make this your new start in being proactive in protecting your information.

To sign up for our free training course, go to: https://defendyouronlineprivacy.com/training/

For questions or assistance, visit our Minds group: http://DefendYourOnlinePrivacy.com/minds

Good luck out there, and be safe!

Appendix A: Advanced Search

There are two main ways to do advanced searches

1. Look for advanced search options. Google has an advanced search[1] option. This will allow you to complete multiple search boxes on items to include, omit, limits, sites, etc. Some other search engines have advanced search as well.
2. Use syntax to perform advanced searches. Here are some guides per search engine:
    a. Google Syntax[2]
    b. Yahoo Syntax[3]
    c. Bing Syntax[4]

1. https://www.google.com/advanced_search

2. http://www.searchcommands.com/google/

3. http://www.searchcommands.com/yahoo/

4. https://www.lifewire.com/bing-advanced-search-3482817