

# Developing a good digital footprint

## 1. Introduction

Every time we use social media tools, contribute to blogs or forums, or visit websites, we leave a trail of ourselves online. This activity focuses on your digital footprint - what it is, why it is important, and what you can do to make sure it reflects you in a good light.

### Learning outcomes

By the end of this activity you should be able to:

- identify your own digital footprint
- take steps to improve your digital footprint

## 2. What is your digital footprint?

Your digital footprint are the traces you leave behind when you go online. It includes everything on the internet about you, for example:

- Your personal information such as social media profiles from sites such as Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn.
- The photos that you or others have posted online.
- Anything that you said online, e.g. contributions on discussion boards or blogs, or articles.

Each time we (or others) add something about ourselves to the internet, we enlarge our digital footprint.

### Check your own digital footprint

Take a moment to think about the places where you are currently active online. Also think about what might have been put online in the past, either by you, or by others.

Now put your name into a search engine and see what you find. Were you surprised by anything? You may wish to take some notes before reading the feedback below.

## Feedback

You may have found:

- Expected evidence of your activity on Facebook or other social media sites.
- Older information that you had forgotten existed.
- Material written about you by other people.
- Photos that you weren't aware of.
- Instances of where you have accessed certain websites, for example, when looking at details of job vacancies or other people's LinkedIn profiles - many website owners are interested to know who is accessing their pages, so it's worth bearing in mind that what you do is not anonymous.

And of course, depending on how common your name is, you will probably find mentions of other people who are not you!

### 3. Why is your digital footprint important?

You may already have a good idea of why it is important to present a good online presence.

For example:

- Potential employers are known to look online to find out more about candidates, it is therefore important to make a good impression when it comes to getting a job - your digital footprint may be the first thing an employer looks at.
- Your digital footprint showcases your skills, professional experience and interests.

Take a moment and think about whether there are other reasons why a good digital footprint would be important? Then read the feedback below.

## Feedback

Much of the information on the web is public, and you never know who may come across you online. It is important to remember that what goes online potentially stays online. Therefore, it is important to think about what you are happy to present to the world.

For more information, you may wish to read the article, '[Tweet in haste, repent at leisure](#)', which provides an example of the impact of a digital footprint.

## 4. Steps to a good digital footprint

There are several steps you can take to improve your digital footprint:

### Tidy up your existing accounts

- De-activate any online profiles you are not using.
- Think carefully about who you would like to have access to your posts, then check and tighten your privacy settings in all social media sites, e.g. Twitter and Facebook.
- Take down photos that don't show you in the best light (and consider asking others to remove photos you have been tagged in).
- Delete posts that you no longer want people to see. Facebook, for example, provides guidance on how to do this in its privacy and settings area.

### Think before you post

- Consider how your personal views and comments posted online will be read by others. Remember information on the internet can be communicated fast and could be difficult to delete or amend.
- Create separate accounts for your personal and professional profiles.
- Think about who is shaping your digital footprint – is it you or your friends?

### Build a positive digital footprint

- Build up a LinkedIn profile to showcase your achievements (e.g. awards, projects or qualifications).
- Be active on Twitter for your profession or field of interest.
- Read and comment on the blogs of experts in your field.
- Start your own blog, if appropriate to your study or work.
- Be active on sites, for example discussion forums or LinkedIn groups that are relevant to your profession or area of interest.

## 5. Summary

### Summary

In this activity you have looked at what is meant by the term 'digital footprint', thought about your own digital footprint and identified some actions you can take to improve it. You may find it useful to draw up a plan outlining what you will do and when.

If you found material that you are not happy with, it is worth putting some time into developing a positive online profile, using some of the ideas suggested. Over time, the positive will come to the top of your list and outweigh the negative.

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If you are currently looking to get into the workplace or change jobs, you may wish to research the profiles and footprints of others who are successful in your field, to see what you can learn.

## Next Steps

Make a note to check back at regular intervals, so you can be encouraged about how your digital footprint is shaping up.

Take time to familiarise yourself with the privacy settings of the sites you use so you can manage what others can see about you, e.g.:

- [Facebook basic privacy settings](#)
- [LinkedIn account and privacy settings](#)

Consider setting up a [Google alert](#) to send you an email anytime you are mentioned online.

You might like to explore tools to help shape your digital footprint. [Social Sweepster](#) is a tool which shows users how they are perceived across social networks and identifies any inappropriate content.