

How to erase yourself from the internet

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Can you delete yourself from the internet? We all know it's possible to wipe our browser history or deactivate a social media account, but how far can you go? This guide will take you through all the necessary steps to erase your online presence.

How to remove personal information from the internet

If you've been using the internet for years, untangling your information from the Web won't be easy. When you share something online, you usually give up control of that piece of data. It may still belong to you, but it's very difficult for you to limit who has access to it and what it's used for.

The first step will be to understand what's out there so you know what you'll have to scrub away to disappear.

- **Data scraping:** There's now a whole industry built around "data scraping" — companies will take the information you put online, store it in databases, and then sell it on to other businesses and organizations. Deleting your data from their databases may be very difficult or impossible, but we'll discuss a few potential methods below.

- **Old accounts:** It's easy enough to track down and delete, anonymize or hide accounts you use every day. But what about old accounts on forgotten or defunct sites? Will you be able to delete them all – if you can even find them?
- **Caching:** Let's say you delete a page with information about yourself. It may still take a while before mentions of that page (and your data) disappear from search engine results. That's because that data may be stored in their caches for quick access when people search for you.

Internet scrubbing is a challenge, but it's not impossible and it is your right. We'll go over everything step by step.

Delete social media and online shopping accounts

Deleting yourself from the internet is a long journey. The first place you need to visit is your social media. The companies behind these platforms hoard your data, and your social profiles will often be the first ones to come up in Google searches.

Delete your social media accounts

Below you'll find links to various guides, each covering the deletion process for a different social media account. This is a great place to start if you want to delete your online presence. As long as you keep using these accounts, you'll continue to generate data and maintain an online presence for yourself.

Delete online shopping, dating, and other services

Social media is just one piece of the puzzle. You can also follow our guides for deleting online shopping accounts, dating sites, and any other services you might have signed up to.

- [Delete your Skype account](#)
- [Delete your Dropbox account](#)
- [Delete your Tinder profile](#)
- [Delete your Uber account](#)
- [Delete your Amazon account](#)

Remove your information directly from websites

Deleting accounts is relatively easy, but there's plenty more to do. The next step is to start auditing and cleaning up any websites that host your information. Start by making a list of all the sites you remember actively engaging with (creating logins, leaving comments, replying to forum posts, and so on). Here are a few areas to focus on:

- Close websites you own

- If you own a domain, whois.com probably has a record of that. Maybe you once opened a free blog on WordPress. Go over and close any sites you owned or registered with your email. Scrub yourself from forums
- On some forums, deleting your account will also remove your messages. This isn't always the case, though. Use the search function to find your posts and edit them, leaving only a dot in the place of your original message. Also, check to make sure your details weren't mentioned in other people's posts. Lastly, you can delete your account. Use search engines

Run your information through search engines. Putting your email address, your phone number, or your name into Google's search bar can bring up old accounts and posts you forgot existed. This can also flag up other websites that may have cloned or logged your information.

Opt-out of data brokers

Scraping the internet for people's personal data and selling it is a lucrative industry. There are two ways to approach this: manual and automated.

You can start manually opting out of data brokers, one by one (this is easier if you have a lot of patience and plenty of coffee). For example, contact companies like BeenVerified, Acxiom, and PeopleFinder directly, either by email or through a pre-made form, and opt out of their data collection practices.

You can also use services like DeleteMe that let you opt out of data brokers automatically. But they are not cheap and some, like DeleteMe, only work in the U.S.

Remove unwanted search results

Fighting with Google may seem like an impossible task but they actually already have the tools to help you wipe unwanted results from the web. For example, if someone exposes your sensitive data, Google has a process in place to remove that information from search results.

On the other hand, you can always email the owner of the site and ask them to remove certain data. If you're in the EU, you can use GDPR's Article 17 (also known as the right to be forgotten) to force sites to take down personal information.

Deactivate your email accounts

This is one of the last steps in the process because you will need your email to complete the previous steps, especially when trying to delete accounts associated with your email address. However, it's an essential stop on this journey, and should be relatively straight-forward.

Keep in mind that if you use [Yahoo](#), you need to log into your account and set it for termination, which won't happen right away. In most cases, the data will be removed within 180 days.

[Click here for a full walk-through](#) of how to delete your Gmail, and your Google Account as a whole (you'll need to do both to remove information from Google completely).

How to avoid data collection in the future

Removing yourself from the internet completely only really works if you never use the internet again. Assuming that you don't want to use this nuclear option, there's still plenty you can do to limit how much of your data is shared and spread online.

- **Limit social media use:** If privacy is your priority, social media is not your friend. The rise of biometric data scraping (some corporations build their facial recognition databases using images scraped from Facebook and Instagram) demonstrates that social media is a huge threat to personal privacy.
- **Use privacy-focused browsers:** Google Chrome may be the biggest browser on the market, but it's not the only option. Browsers like Brave and DuckDuckGo offer a more [private browsing experience](#), blocking ads and trackers.
- **Use a VPN:** A [VPN](#) encrypts your browsing data and masks your IP, so companies can't spy on your data if you don't want them to. While [bad internet habits](#) can still get you in trouble, a VPN goes a long way to keeping your internet activity private and secure.

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Malcolm is a content writer specializing in cybersecurity and tech news. With a background in journalism and a passion for digital privacy, he hopes his work will empower people to control their own data.

