

Controlling What You Leave Behind



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Content



Venturing into AI: Learning for an Unbounded, Ethical, and Sustainable Europe

Module 6: AI and Digital Footprint:
Controlling What You Leave Behind

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The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others (25 min)

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01

Digital footprint

(10 min)



What digital footprint is?

A digital footprint is the collection of data about a person or organization that is left online as a result of their online activity. It includes social media profiles, posts, comments, browsing history, search queries, and information automatically recorded by websites and apps (e.g., cookies, IP address, location data).



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365



Why does your digital footprint matter?

Your digital footprint can influence:

Privacy (who knows what about you)

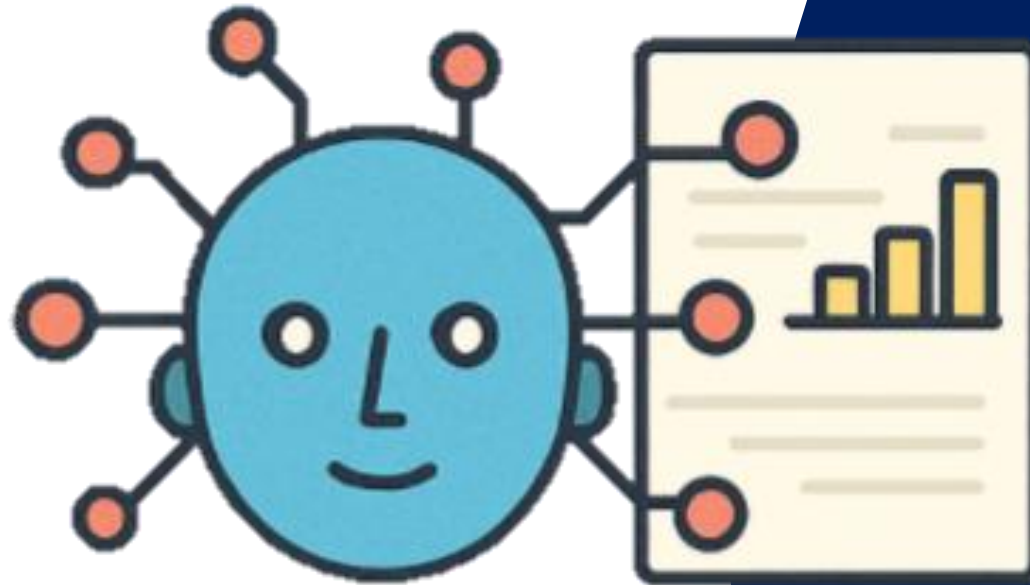
Reputation (how you are perceived)

Safety (what can be misused)

Other people (your posts can expose them too)

You cannot control everything online, but you can control important choices.

Source: Copilot Microsoft 365



Why does your digital footprint matter for AI

**Ask yourself:
Where do I notice
„algorithmic
decisions” in my
daily apps?**



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

AI systems learn from data and make automated decisions based on patterns. Your digital footprint is part of that data environment - so understanding your digital footprint is a core AI skill.

AI connects to your digital footprint because:

AI often uses **behavioural data** (clicks, viewing time, likes, searches) to predict what you want next.

Your **passive footprint** (permissions, location signals, device data) can influence what systems infer about you.

AI can affect **visibility** and reach (what content is promoted, recommended, or hidden).

Your choices also **affect other people’s data** (tagging, sharing images, screenshots).



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Using AI in line with values

Remember:
Ethical AI starts
with everyday
digital choices.



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

Four value questions to guide digital decisions (especially with AI around):

★
Agency: Am I choosing deliberately, or just clicking automatically?

★
Privacy: Am I sharing more data than needed (about me or others)?

★
Fairness: Could this harm or disadvantage someone (now or later)?

★
Transparency: Do I understand who can see it and how it can spread?



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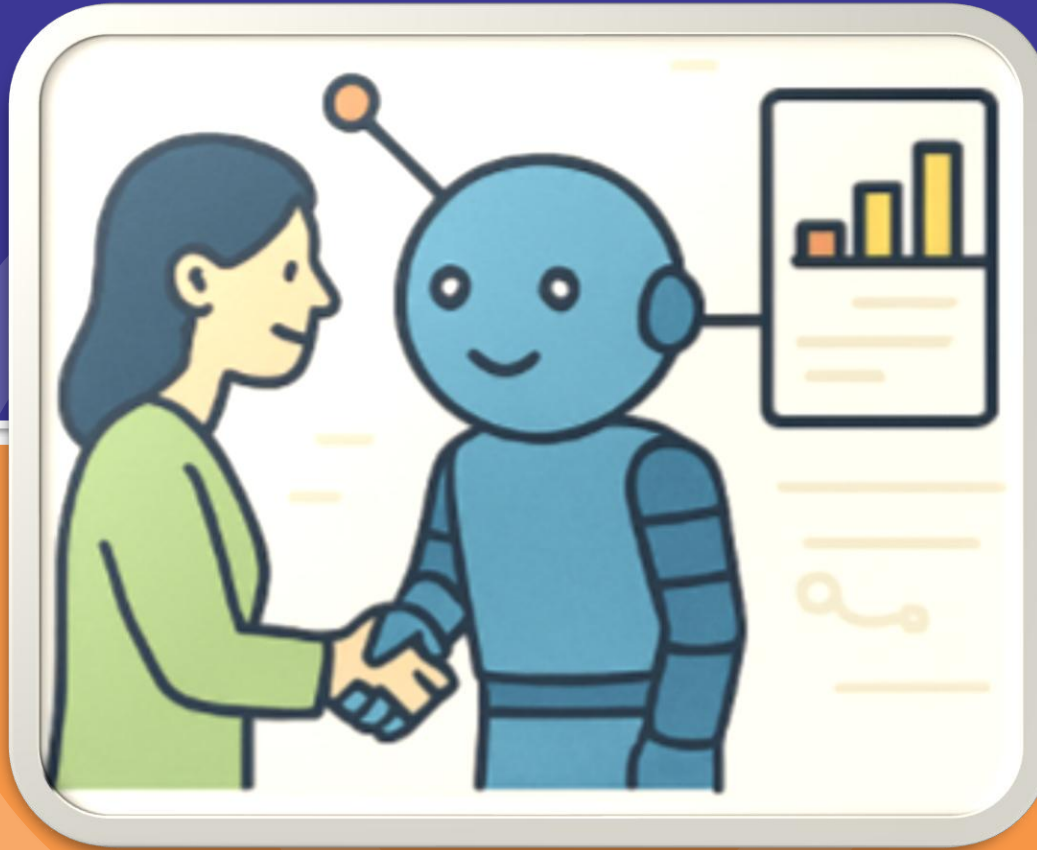
02

Types of footprints

(15 min)



Active digital footprint



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

With this type of footprint you have relatively more control over what you share.

An active digital footprint consists of data you intentionally leave when using the internet.

Examples:

- ★
posting messages, comments, photos,
- ★
sharing information in forms and surveys,
- ★
creating and filling out profiles on websites, companies, or platforms.



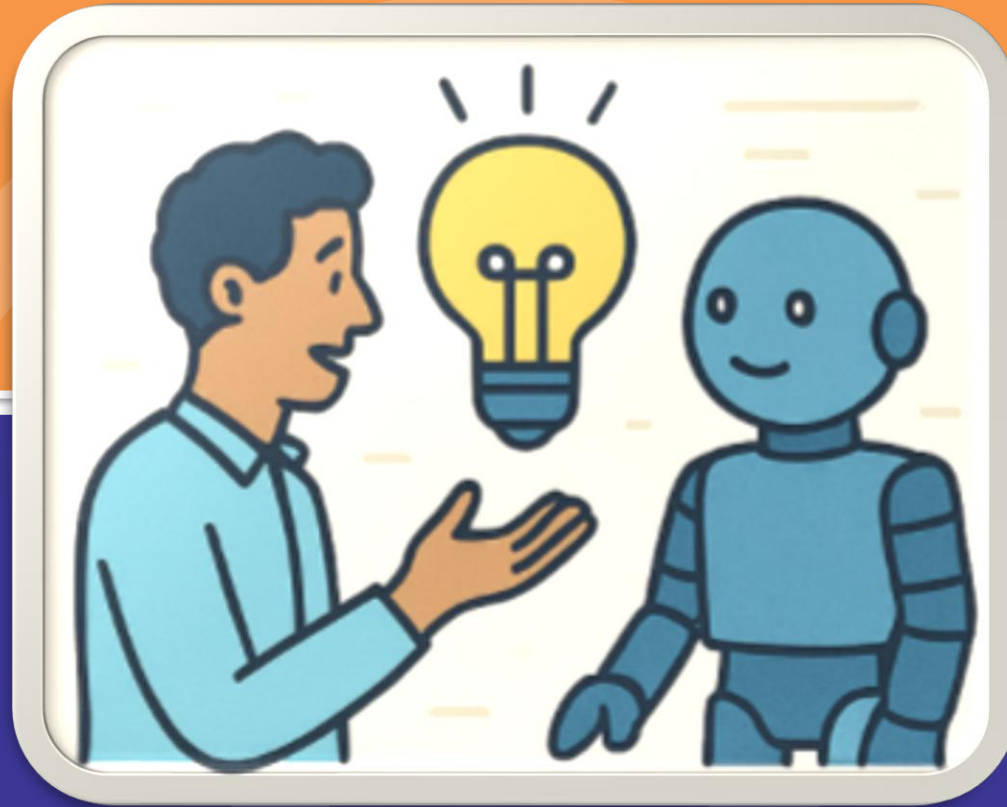
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Passive digital footprint



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

This footprint is usually gathered by analytics, advertising, and tracking systems, and it is harder for users to delete or fully control.

A passive digital footprint is data collected automatically, often without the user's full awareness. Examples:

- ★ browsing history and server logs,
- ★ information stored by cookies and trackers,
- ★ device, system, and location data (e.g., IP address),
- ★ interactions recorded by platforms (clicks, visit time, sessions).



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02. Types of footprints



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

Together, active and passive digital footprints form a person's overall digital footprint, and managing them (clearing history, limiting data, adjusting privacy settings) strongly affects online safety and privacy.



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02. Types of footprints

Quick activity
Sort the footprints

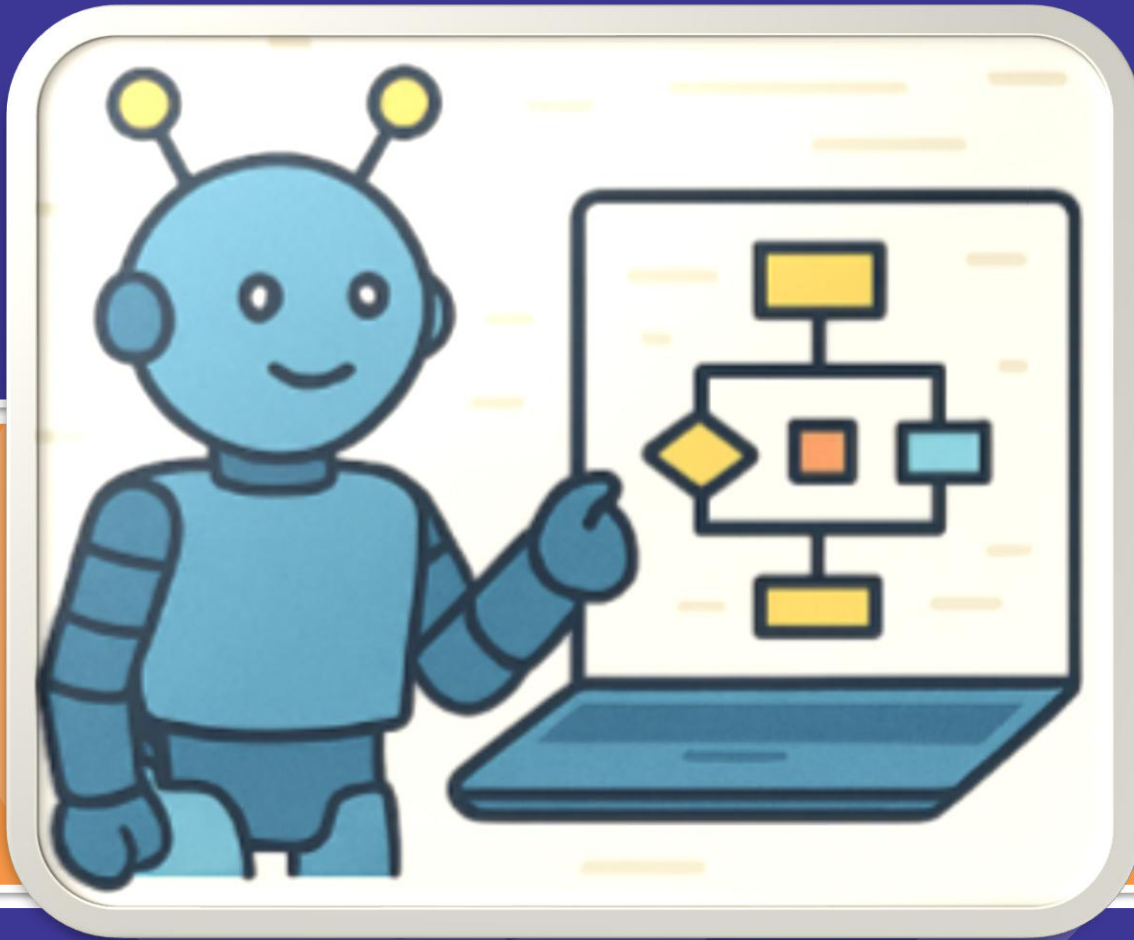
Task (2 minutes).
Selekt one:
Active / Passive / Both?



- Tagging a friend in a photo**
★★★
- App asking for location „always”**
★★★
- Liking a public post**
★★★
- Your device model in a photo’s metadata**
★★★
- Posting a story with a location sticker**
★★★
- Cookies tracking what you click**
★★★
- Screenshotting a private chat**
★★★
- A platform suggesting „people you may know”**



02. Types of footprints



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

Key Takeaway: Most people underestimate their „passive” digital footprint.

★★★

When you think about your digital footprint, you might mainly think about posts, photos, and comments. But a large part of your footprint is created without you actively posting anything, through your settings, device signals, permissions, and browsing behaviour.



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Where AI meets your footprint: everyday examples

You do not need to „build or actively use AI” to be affected by it. Many online services apply AI to personalize content, rank information, and automate decisions—often using footprint signals.



Common AI-driven situations using footprint signals:



Ranking: what appears first in search or in your feed

Targeting: personalised ads and „suggested content”

Filtering & moderation: content flagged, reduced reach, or removed

Pattern detection: unusual login alerts or „suspicious activity” prompts

Recommendations: „For you” feeds, suggested videos, music, or products



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03

The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

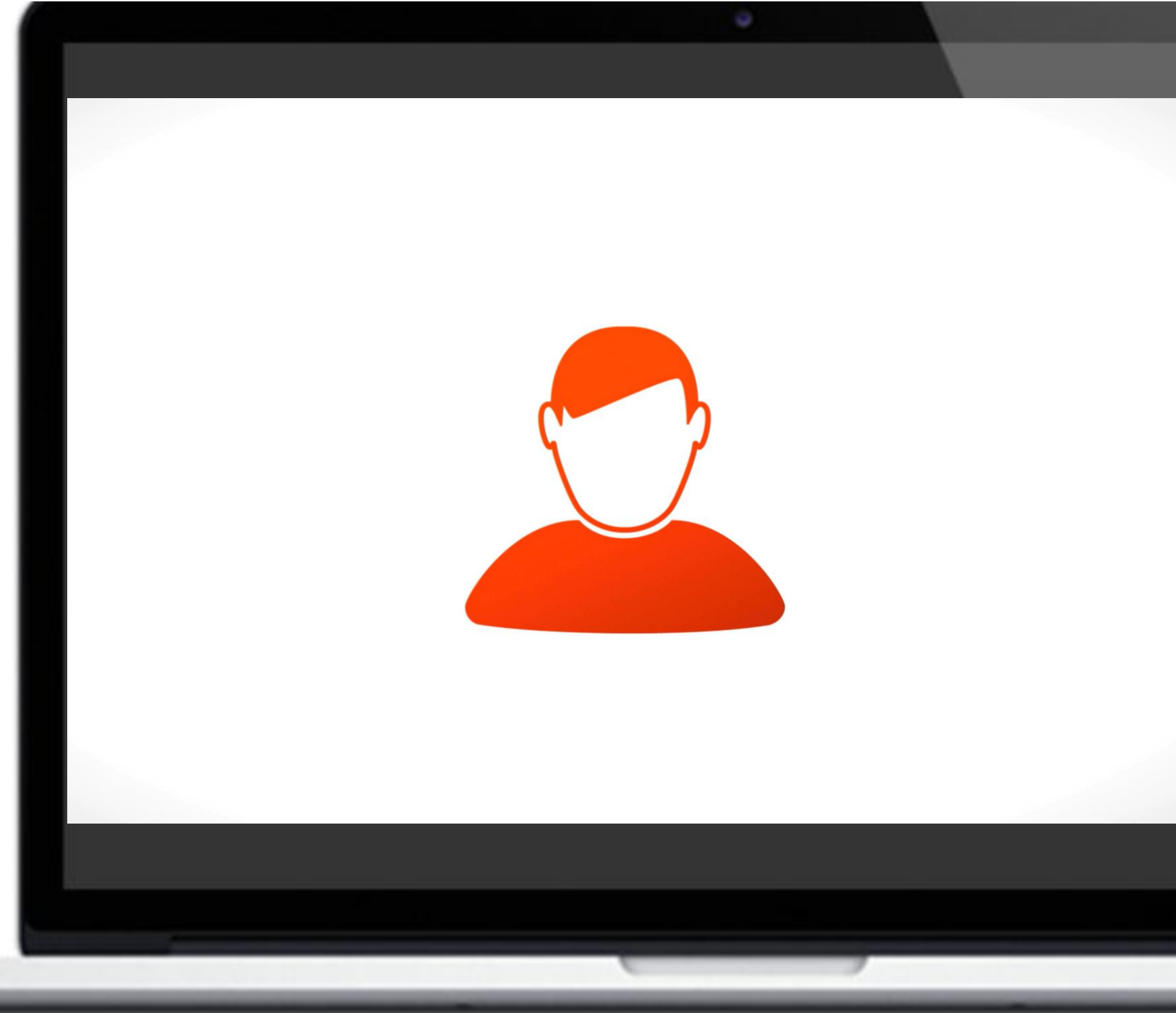
(25 min)



03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

The „ripple effect”: online actions travel further than you expect

Online content can move quickly across people and platforms. Even small actions (a comment, a tag, a screenshot) can spread, lose context, and remain accessible longer than intended.



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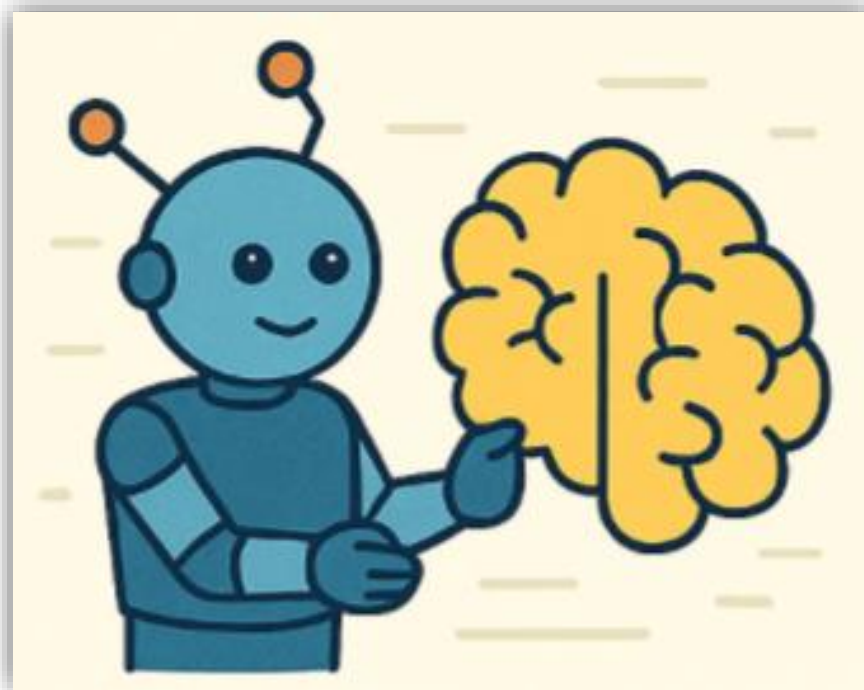


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03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

The „ripple effect”: online actions travel further than you expect



Source: Copilot Microsoft 365

One post can lead to:

★★★

Copies: screenshots, forwards, downloads

★★★

Context loss: jokes or emotions get misunderstood without explanation

★★★

Long lifetime: old content can resurface months or years later

★★★

Wider audience: friends-of-friends, groups, or public sharing

★★★

Impact on others: people visible in your content may be affected too (probably without their consent)



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03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

Consequences for you: privacy, reputation, safety, and wellbeing

A digital footprint is not automatically “good” or “bad”. It depends on context and choices. However, certain patterns (oversharing, open settings, impulsive posting) can create avoidable risks for your privacy, reputation, and even your safety.

Privacy (who can learn what about you)

★★★

Public profiles, tags, location and permissions can reveal more than intended.

Reputation (how you are perceived)

★★★

Posts may be seen without context; first impressions can form quickly and stick.

Safety (what can be misused)

★★★

Overshared details can enable scams, account takeovers, or unwanted contact (not limited to your digital life).

Wellbeing (stress and conflict)

★★★

Arguments, harassment, or regret after posting can affect confidence and mood.



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03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

Consequences for YOU: privacy, reputation, safety, and wellbeing



Source: pixabay

Example:

A photo with visible location + open profile settings can reveal where you are, who you are with, and your routine—without you explicitly writing it.

★★★

Ask yourself: Which risk is most relevant to me right now: privacy, reputation, safety, or wellbeing? Why?

★★★

Small changes (audience settings, permissions, pausing before posting) can significantly reduce these risks.



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03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

Consequences for OTHERS: respect, consent, and fairness



Source: pixabay

Digital responsibility is not only about protecting yourself. Your posts, tags, photos, and screenshots can also reveal information about other people, sometimes without their permission, and can harm them even if you did not intend it.

Before you share, ask (3 quick questions):

Is another person included (image, name, message, location)?

★★★

Do they agree to this being shared—and to this audience?

★★★

Could it harm them later, even if it feels harmless now?



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Consequences for OTHERS: respect, consent, and fairness



Source: pixabay

Common ways we expose others online:

Posting or sharing content where others appear

★★★

Tagging/mentioning someone (linking them to content)

★★★

Sharing screenshots of private chats

★★★

Revealing someone's location, schedule, or personal story

★★★

Sharing content that could cause conflict later



03. The „ripple effect”: consequences for you and others

Consequences for OTHERS: respect, consent, and fairness



Source: pixabay

Concrete example

A “funny” screenshot from a private chat can be forwarded, misunderstood, and used against someone - because the original context disappears.

Mini self-check

Ask yourself: Would I be okay if someone shared the same type of content about me, without asking?

Protecting privacy includes other people’s privacy: consent and respect are part of acting responsibly online.



Mini-scenarios: choose the most responsible option



Real-life digital decisions are often “quick moments.” This exercise helps you practise choosing an option that protects privacy, reduces harm, and respects other people, especially when content can be copied or reshared.

Scenario: A Private screenshot

A friend sends you a screenshot of a private chat and says: „This is hilarious - send it to others.”

- Option 1:** Forward it immediately (it is funny).
- Option 2:** Keep it private and ask what your friend wants to achieve by sharing it.
- Option 3:** Do not share it unless the people involved agree, and if in doubt, do not share.



Mini-scenarios: choose the most responsible option



Source: pixabay

Real-life digital decisions are often “quick moments.” This exercise helps you practise choosing an option that protects privacy, reduces harm, and respects other people, especially when content can be copied or reshared.

Scenario: A Private screenshot

A friend sends you a screenshot of a private chat and says: „This is hilarious - send it to others.”

Your task (30–60 seconds):

Choose 1 / 2 / 3

Write one sentence: „I chose ___ because ...”



What the example about:

AI systems analyze data from everyday activities (e.g. social media, browsing, online shopping)



Personal data becomes input for training and improving AI models



Even simple online behaviors can be combined into detailed user profiles





04

My choice: a simple checklist + my action plan

(15 min)



04. My choice: a simple checklist + my action plan

My choice tool: STOP-THINK-CHECK-CHOOSE

This checklist is a simple habit for safer, fairer online decisions. Use it before you post, share, tag, forward a screenshot, or accept app permissions, especially when you feel rushed or emotional.

STOP (pause for 5 seconds): Am I posting fast, bored, angry, excited, or under pressure?

THINK (purpose + audience): What is the goal (inform, joke, show off, ask for help)? Who will see it now and who might see it later?

CHECK (privacy + people + data): Is the audience setting correct (public / friends / close friends / group)? Does it include other people (faces, names, messages, locations)? Does it reveal extra data (location sticker, background details, metadata)?

CHOOSE (best next step): Post / edit / crop / blur / limit audience / ask consent / do not share.



04. My choice: a simple checklist + my action plan

Scenario 1. Practice: use the checklist before posting

You create a passive digital footprint not only by browsing, but also by what you allow apps to access. This scenario helps you practise choosing permissions that are necessary, and declining the ones that collect more data than needed.

Scenario: You install a new app (e.g., photo editor, game, or learning app). During setup it asks for: **Location / Contacts / Microphone / Photos**

STOP: Am I clicking „Allow” automatically just to finish setup quickly?

THINK: What does the app actually need to do its main job? Could I use the app with fewer permissions?

CHECK: Location: does it need location „always,” „only while using,” or not at all? Contacts: is access really necessary, or only „nice to have”? Microphone: is it needed for a feature I will use? Photos/Media: can I choose „selected photos only” instead of „all photos”?

CHOOSE: Give the minimum permission needed. Prefer „only while using” over „always.” Review and change permissions later if a feature truly requires it.



04. My choice: a simple checklist + my action plan

Scenario 2. Practice: use the checklist when other people are involved

When your content includes other people, your choice affects them as well. This scenario helps you practise making a decision that respects privacy and consent, because sharing, tagging, and forwarding can be difficult to undo.

Scenario: You have a group photo from a meeting, event, or night out. You want to post it and tag your friends. One person in the photo has previously said they do not want to be posted online.

STOP: Am I about to post quickly because I want to share the moment right now?

THINK: What is the purpose of posting? Is tagging necessary? Who will see it now—and who might see it later?

CHECK: Consent: Has everyone agreed to be shown or tagged / Audience: Is this public, or limited to a small group / Risk: Could this photo harm or embarrass someone later?

Alternatives: Can I crop, blur, or choose a different photo?
CHOOSE: (pick the best next step): Ask the person first / post without them visible / blur or crop / limit audience / do not post.



Scenario 3. Practice: use the checklist for app permissions

You create a passive digital footprint not only by browsing, but also by what you allow apps to access. This scenario helps you practise choosing permissions that are necessary and declining the ones that collect more data than needed.

Scenario: You install a new app (e.g., photo editor, game, or learning app). During setup it asks for: **Location / Contacts / Microphone / Photos**

STOP: Am I clicking “Allow” automatically just to finish setup quickly?

THINK: What does the app actually need to do its main job? Could I use the app with fewer permissions?

CHECK: Location: does it need location “always,” “only while using,” or not at all? Contacts: is access really necessary, or only “nice to have”? Microphone: is it needed for a feature I will use? Photos/Media: can I choose “selected photos only” instead of “all photos”?

CHOOSE: (a safer default approach): Give the minimum permission needed. Prefer “only while using” over “always.” Review and change permissions later if a feature truly requires it.



04. My choice: a simple checklist + my action plan

Three high-impact controls: small changes, big effect

You do not need to master every privacy setting to improve your digital footprint. These three controls have a strong impact across most platforms and apps—and they are realistic to check even if you are short on time.

Your digital footprint improves fastest when you control audience, location, and discoverability.

Core content (self-study guidance, generic—not platform-specific)

- ★ Audience visibility (who can see your content): Check whether your default is public, friends, close friends, or private. Remember: “friends of friends” or open groups can still be a wide audience.
- ★ Location sharing (when your location is revealed): Avoid sharing real-time location publicly. Prefer location access “only while using” (or switch it off if not needed). Watch for hidden location clues in photos (background, landmarks, routine places).
- ★ Discoverability & contact syncing (how people can find you): Review whether your profile can be found by phone number/email. Check whether apps sync your contacts by default. Decide if you want to be searchable, or only reachable by people you choose.





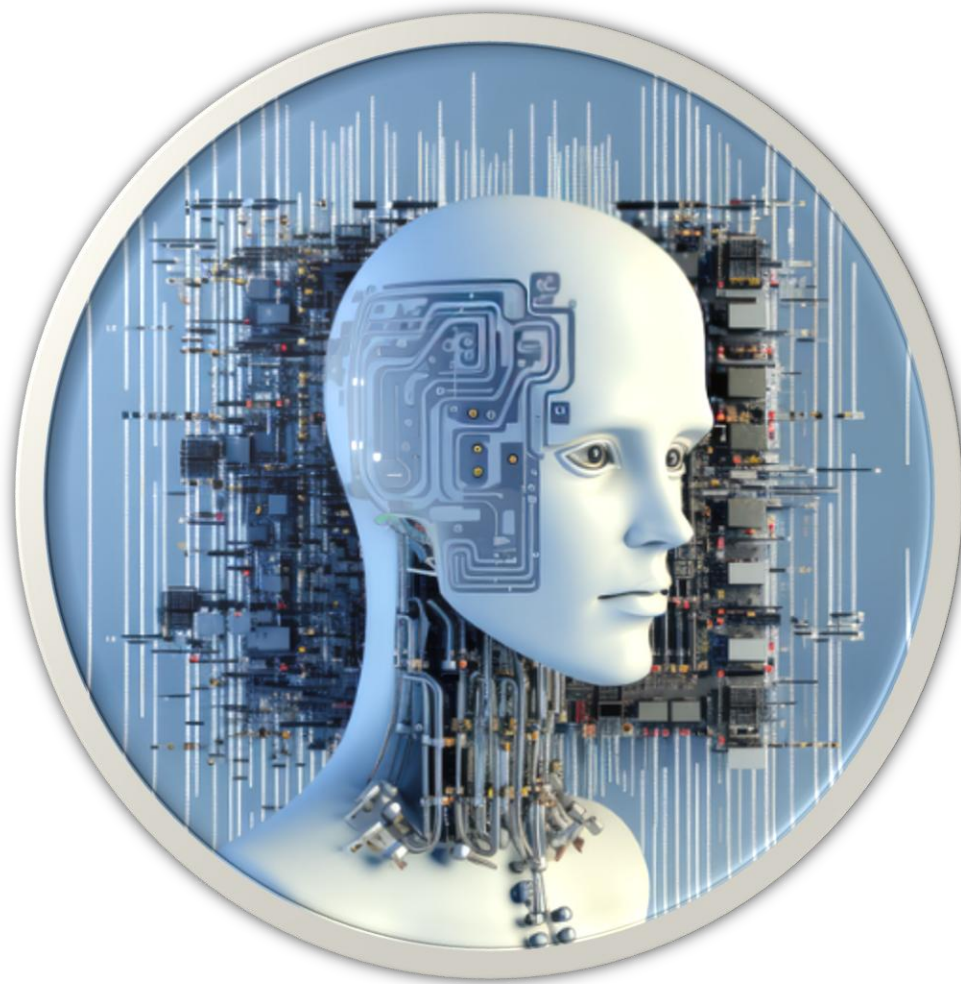
05

How to protect your digital footprint

(10 min)



Practical rules



Source: pixabay



Limit shared information on social media.



Tighten up privacy settings on social media.



Limit the amount of data placed on the internet.



Occasionally clean browser cookies, and other tracking files on your personal devices.

Source: An insider's digital footprint and associated risks. Job aid. Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (CDSE), 2022, <https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaid/insider/insiders-digital-footprint.pdf>



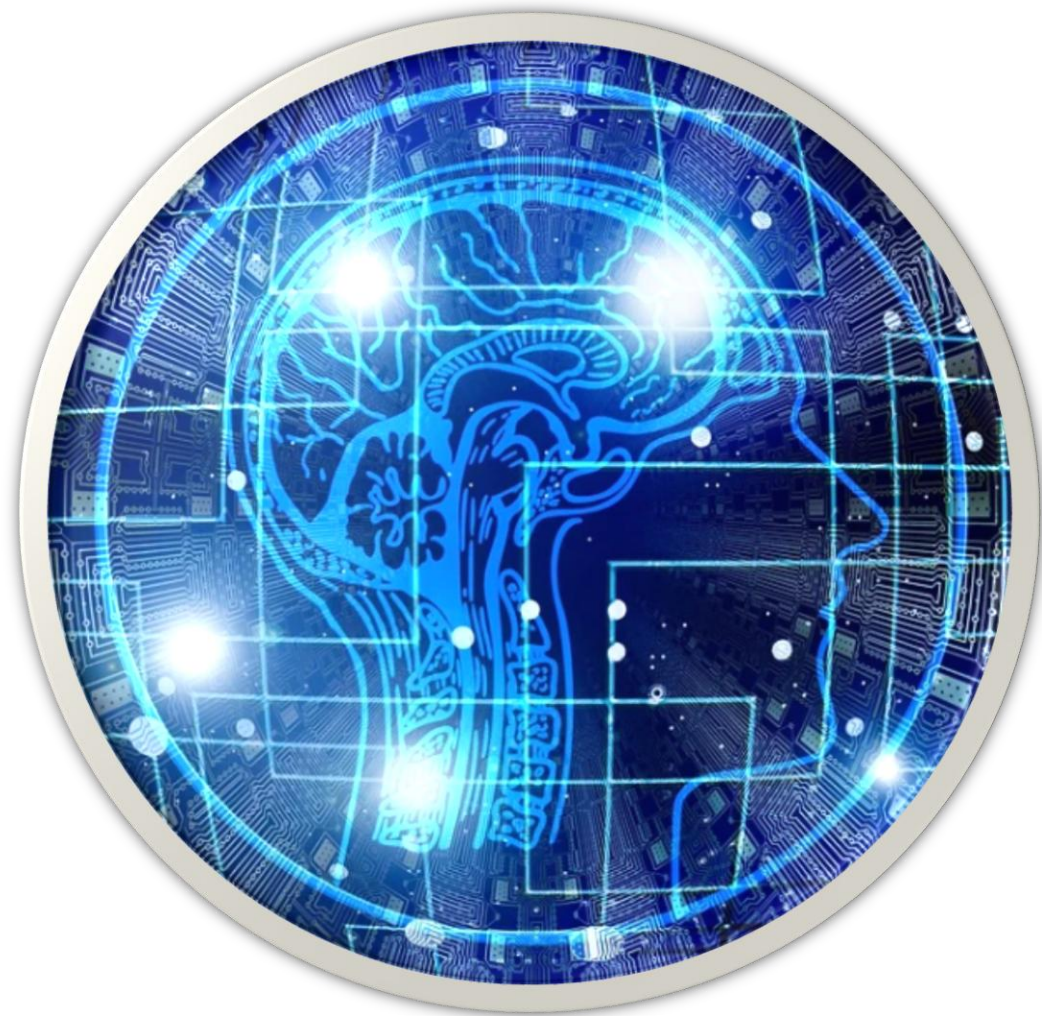
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Practical rules



Source: pixabay



Use VPN services, if and when possible.



Anonymize, disallow, or restrict location access of tracking by applications.



Install and keep antivirus software updated on personal devices.



Periodically review both financial/credit and medical/health information.

Source: An insider's digital footprint and associated risks. Job aid. Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (CDSE), 2022, <https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/insiders-digital-footprint.pdf>



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05. How to protect your digital footprint

Practical rules



Source: pixabay



Do not open attachments or access links from unknown or questionable sources.



Setup credit reporting notifications.



Continually update passwords and password protections, especially after being informed of a data breach.

Source: *An insider's digital footprint and associated risks. Job aid.* Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (CDSE), 2022, <https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/insiders-digital-footprint.pdf>



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06

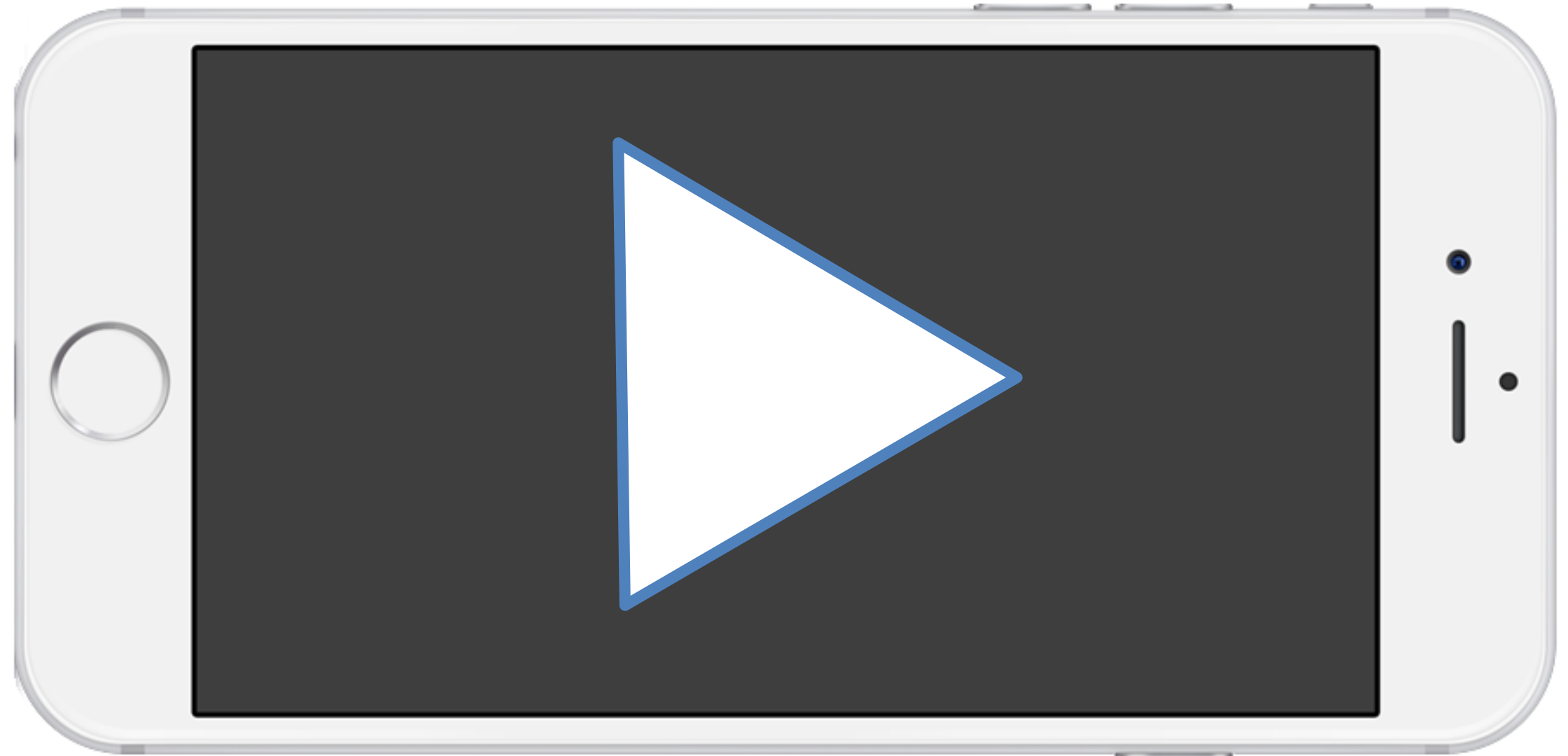
Audit, quiz and test

(20 min)



Quiz

This quiz helps you practise safer digital footprint decisions in realistic situations (privacy settings, location, permissions, discoverability, and respect for others).



Test. Check your digital footprint

Unsure about your digital footprint? Answer “Yes” or “No” to the questions below, then calculate the total number of “Yes” answers to determine the complexity of your footprint.

RESULTS

- Yes Answers <5 = A digital footprint that is less complex than most internet users
- Yes Answers 5 - 12 = A digital footprint that is average for most internet users
- Yes Answers 12+ = A digital footprint that is more complex than most internet users

- 1 Do you make purchases online?
- 2 Have you signed up for coupons by creating an account?
- 3 Have you registered or subscribed to newsletters or blog updates?
- 4 Have you downloaded and used shopping apps?
- 5 Have you opened a new credit card account?
- 6 Do you use a mobile banking app?
- 7 Have you bought or sold stocks?
- 8 Have you ever registered your email address with a gym?
- 9 Do you receive health care?
- 10 Have you ever used apps to track your activities and workouts?
- 11 Do you subscribe to an online publication or news source?
- 12 Have you ever reposted articles and information you've read?
- 13 Do you use social media on your computer or devices?
- 14 Do you interact with friends online?
- 15 Have you ever shared information, data, and photos with your online connections?
- 16 Have you ever joined a dating site or app?

Source: An insider's digital footprint and associated risks. Job aid. Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (CDSE), 2022, <https://www.cdse.edu/Portals/124/Documents/jobaids/insider/insiders-digital-footprint.pdf>



Digital Footprint Audit

Now you will practise recognising common footprint risks and choosing practical improvements. You can also complete this without sharing personal information by using a fictional example, or optionally by checking one setting on your own device privately.

Private own-device check

Check one privacy/permission setting on your device or account. If you are working in a group, do so without sharing your screen or details.



Source: pixabay



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Digital Footprint Audit

Complete these three lines:

Risk 1 → Fix 1: _____ → _____

Risk 2 → Fix 2: _____ → _____

Risk 3 → Fix 3: _____ → _____

First action (today): _____

Choose one of your Social Media Apps

Step 1: Identify 3 footprint risks

- Public visibility too wide (posts/profile discoverable)
- Location revealed (real-time or routine places)
- Tagging/mentions without consent
- Permissions too broad (contacts/microphone/location „always”)
- Personal details visible (school/work, phone, email, routine)

Step 2: Choose 3 Improvements (Match one to each risk)

- Limit audience / switch to private / review default visibility
- Remove or limit location sharing
- Ask consent before tagging or posting others
- Reduce permissions to „minimum necessary”
- Remove sensitive details from profile

Step 3: Decide your „first action“

What is the one change you would make first if you had only 2 minutes

The goal is not to delete your online life—it is to reduce unnecessary exposure and make your footprint intentional.



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Digital Footprint Audit

A digital footprint improves through small, consistent actions—not one perfect setting. This short plan helps you turn today’s audit into concrete steps you can actually complete.

★★★

1) One change I will make today (5 minutes)

Examples: limit profile visibility • remove location sharing • reduce one permission • review discoverability

Write: Today I will: _____

2) Two changes I will make this week (10–20 minutes total)

Examples: review privacy defaults • clean old public posts • check app permissions • update password settings (if relevant)

Write: This week I will: _____

3) One habit rule I will follow going forward (daily choice)

Examples: „I will use STOP–THINK–CHECK–CHOOSE before sharing” • „I will ask consent before tagging” • „I will avoid real-time location”

Write: My rule is: _____

★★★

Make it doable: If your plan feels too big, reduce it to one setting + one habit.

Your digital footprint is built by habits. A small plan you follow is better than a big plan you forget.





Thank

you

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