Being digital

Developing a good digital footprint

1: Introduction

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

- takes steps to improve your footprint

2: What is your digital footprint?

Your digital footprint is about the traces you leave online. It includes everything on the internet that is about you, for example:

- profiles on social networking sites such as Facebook or LinkedIn

- photographs that you or others have posted online

- anything that has been written about you, e.g. on discussion boards or blogs.

Take a moment to think about the places where you are currently active online, for example social media, twitter and forums. Also try and call to mind anything else you are aware of that might have been put there in the past, either by you, or by others.

Now put your name into a search engine and see what comes up. Any surprises?

Make a note of anything you would want to change.

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 profile. For example:

- your digital footprint showcases your skills, professional experience and interests

- when it comes to getting a job, your digital footprint may be the first thing an employer looks at, it is therefore important to make a good impression.

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.

Can you think of other reasons why a good digital footprint would be important?

'Tweet in haste, repent at leisure' and I got a job through social media: 5 Millennials Share Their Stories provide examples of the impact of a digital footprint.

4: Steps to a good digital footprint

If you are concerned, there are several actions you can take to improve your digital footprint.

- Make a list of things you want to change about your digital footprint. You might want to go back to the notes you made on page 2 - What is your digital footprint?

- Explore the options you can take to improve your footprint.

Feedback

You can take further steps, using tools, to identify your digital footprint. [Reppler](#) , for instance, is a tool which shows users how they are perceived across social networks and identifies any inappropriate content as well as privacy and security risks. You should think about who is shaping your digital footprint – is it your or your friends?

Top tips to improve your footprint:

- 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, e.g. Twitter and Facebook
- take down photos that don't show you in the best light

- 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

- build up a LinkedIn profile by including 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, relevant to your profession or area of interest.

5: Summary and Next Steps

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.

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.

You may find this [Martin Woods social media profile checking tool](#) useful to keep up to date with the shape of your profile. Download the spreadsheet tool, enter your details and the tool provides a search link for each of the areas where your footprint might appear.

You could set up a [Google alert](#) to send you an email anytime you are mentioned online.

The further reading section provides resources you can use to get additional ideas on how to develop a good digital footprint.

Further reading

[ClickZ – 7 tools to track your digital footprint and shadows](#)

[Me and My Shadow](#) provides tips and tools to help you learn more about your digital traces; reduce your traces and manage your digital shadow.

[45 secret ways social media can land you a job](#)

[The best social media job application ever](#)
Lindsay used a website and social media to land a job. She didn't get the one she wanted, but she was immediately offered a job by another company.