

Your Digital Footprint and Why You Need to Manage It by Daniel Burrus

Our always online lifestyle leaves a digital footprint that contains all of your activity online from all of your devices. As a prospective employee, how are you managing your digital footprint?

Your digital footprint is the trail your online browsing habits leave behind but never think about.

As we prepare to enter another year and add even more home appliances to our home internet, maybe it's time to understand the magnitude of our digital trail left behind by our online shopping, browsing or social media as we switch seamlessly from mobiles, tablets and laptops.

I am quite fortunate that there are no photos or videos from my younger, wilder and formative years. However, it is only a matter of time before our future leaders or even presidents will find that their teenage antics on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and Youtube will come back to haunt them when they become successful.

2015 has also seen a dramatic increase in high profile controversial websites such as the Ashley Madison website hack and their details leaked online and searchable for everyone to see. There was even a suggestion that those that frequent the seedier side of the internet could find their entire history displayed publicly, even if they were using their browser's private mode.

The pastime of twitching curtains and spying on your neighbors have already migrated online where everyone judges the lifestyles of others via their social media platform. It's not beyond the realms of possibility that online users will soon have the ability to enter the zip code, email address or online alias of anyone they know and access to their skeleton ridden closet. Think about it for a moment, we have seen these early indications of what happens when our digital footprint becomes public several times this year already.

There is also a flip side to this coin that suggests if you decide to go off the radar and remove your online trail you will cease to exist in a world where individuals are increasingly judged on their number of followers, online engagement or influence. Even employers already routinely check a candidate's online profiles to see if they are a suitable fit for their organization and some are even hired as a result of their high Twitter following.

Social media platforms are evolving to offer millennials an antidote to the increasing privacy concerns. There is a rise of self-destructing content from platforms such as SnapChat or the live video streaming service Periscope where all content will disappear forever within 24 hours and has also attracted interest from the behemoth Facebook, who are watching these changes in attitudes very closely.

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However, there is no escape as even our online searches often reveal more than the delivered results from our queries, when logged into Google, for example, the service tracks every web page and every YouTube visit we found ourselves on. Sure there are those that smile smugly in the shadows of a virtual private network or the multi-layered proxy client known as Tor on their quest for online anonymity, but are they completely missing the point?

Rather than getting too carried away with our so-called personal brand, online image, behaving like our very own PR manager or hiding behind secure VPN's to protect ourselves. Maybe, we should just concentrate on living our life the right way by using technology to selflessly help others on a similar journey and surround ourselves with those that bring out the best in you.

Creating a diluted online version of yourself is possibly the worst thing you can do, and it's important to remember that trying to be someone else is a waste of the person you are. Technology is an enabler that when used correctly can offer each and every one of us a wealth of opportunities with no side effects as long as we simply act responsibly and be the good person that you are both offline and online.

As we head into 2016 with a wealth of technology at our disposal, it appears that honesty and integrity online are paramount just as they are offline, and it's interesting to consider that despite our reliance on gadgets and an online connection, things might not have changed that much after all.

I am very interested in your thoughts or concerns around your own personal digital footprint and how you see our online behaviors evolving, so please let me know by commenting below.