

How to maintain a clean digital footprint and why it matters

Author: Kudzai Derera . January 2020

Digital footprint, also known as a digital shadow, is a trail of data one creates which is traceable while he/she uses the internet. This includes the activities, actions, contributions, emails sent, information submitted online and communications done on digital services. This information exists as a result of the users' activities and it is for that particular user. Digital footprint has a huge impact as hiring managers use this information in recruiting. They say that they discover some important information about the candidates online which they often use to decide the candidate to win any desired position. This can be a drawback to some of the candidates if they do not keep a clean digital footprint. Other than employers, the digital footprint can also be traced by schools, creditors, etc.



Since your digital footprint includes all traces of your online activity, it is very important to keep a clean digital footprint. But why does it matters to keep a clean digital footprint? It is crucial because it is your online identity and reputation which makes you unique. It searches will be viewed by anyone who looks for you including recruiters. You can check if your current digital footprint is clean by searching for yourself on multiple search engines and viewing what information is being seen by the world. Make sure you create and maintain a digital footprint that is clean, for instance, if you want to be considered as a thought leader you need to create a clean digital footprint that will make your audience see you as one. This includes the people you tag, posts you comment, the way you interact with others and your contributions on their own. The digital footprint is a growing portrait of who we are online so make sure

you know what kind of trail you are leaving and the effects it can have.

What is my current digital footprint?

It has always been said a lot of times that once you put something on the internet it will be there for good. This includes content that can actually damage your reputation from photos or videos shared on social media platforms, inappropriate opinions commented on blogs or posts, your address, credit card information, etc. The more information there is about you the more interest hackers want to steal your identity. We live in a world where almost everyone's personal information is available to everyone and most of the time people end up saying they have nothing to hide. Nevertheless, it is important to always keep track and know the trail of data you create online and controlling it from time to time.



Organisations such as the Family Online Safety Institute recommend taking steps to control your digital footprint. However, to control your digital footprint you need to be aware of what it contains. You can get your current digital footprint and protect it by running a name search on different search engines and see what comes up. Always take note that Google and other sites archive websites at times so the information you might think you deleted might still be visible. However, this information will likely disappear over time as Google updates its results. The majority of the results may be as a result of social media since it is the heel of most people's digital footprints. If there is information you might want to remove you can simply delete it or if it is an account you can deactivate it to keep your digital footprint clean.

How to clean up and maintain your digital footprint?

- Do not say inappropriate and disrespectful things online
- Add positive aspects of your life online such as achievements, accomplishments, learning experiences or articles
- Avoid inappropriate or questionable things
- Always think before you click or comment
- Make sure your footprint is positive
- Use digital tools to manage your digital footprint
- At least skim the terms and conditions before agreeing when signing up
- Monitor linking accounts – accounts linked to your social media accounts e.g. games
- Do not overshare
- Be kind, helpful and understanding to others online

Your digital footprint can reveal a lot about your personality, interests, and behaviour which you should make sure is positive. Clean up your current digital footprints and always remember that what you put out there is permanent therefore you always have to leave a positive impression online.

Kudzai Derera is the Business Systems Manager at Industrial Psychology Consultants (Pvt) Ltd, a management and human resources consulting firm.

LinkedIn: <https://zw.linkedin.com/in/kudzaiderera>

Phone: +263 242 481946-48/481950

Mobile: +263 773 523 084

Email: kudzai@ipcconsultants.com

Main Website: www.ipcconsultants.com

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