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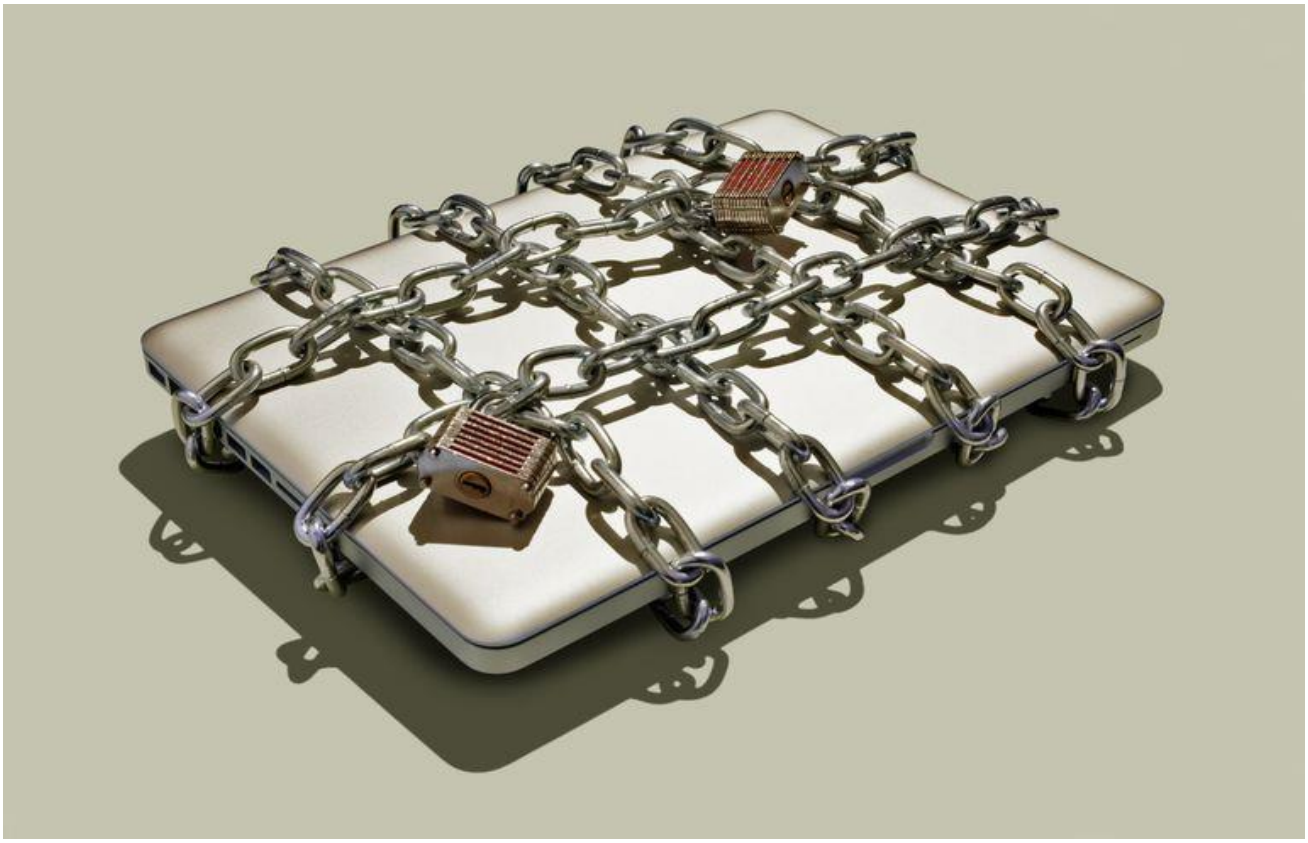
Ten Ways to Protect Your Web Privacy

by Wendy Boswell January 25, 2017

Privacy on the Web: How to Make Sure You're Protected



Your personal privacy on the Web might be less secure than you think. Web browsing habits are tracked via cookies, search engines routinely change their privacy policies, and there are always challenges to Web privacy by both private and public organizations. Here are a few common sense tips that can help you guard your Web privacy and stay safe online.

Avoid Unnecessary Forms Online - Don't Give Out Too Much Information

A good Web safety rule of thumb is to avoid filling out forms that require personal information in order to keep anything from being entered into public, searchable record, aka Web results. One of the best ways to get around companies getting your personal information is to use a "dummy" email account - one that you don't use for personal or professional contacts - and let that be the one that filters things such as contest entries, websites that require registrations, etc. That way, when you get the inevitable commercial follow-ups that usually trail right after giving out your information, your regular email account won't be over-cluttered

Clean up your search history

Most Web browsers keep track of every single Web site you type into the address bar. This Web history should be periodically cleared out not only for privacy's sake, but also to keep your computer system running at top speed. In Internet Explorer, you can delete your search history by clicking on Tools, then Internet Options. In Firefox, all you need to do is go to Tools, then Options, then Privacy. You can also clear your Google searches very easily by following these simple steps. Don't want Google to keep track of you at all?

Read How to Keep Google From Tracking Your Searches for more information

Log out of search engines and websites when you're finished

Most search engines these days require you to create an account and log in to access the full array of their services, including search results. In order to best protect your privacy, it's always a good idea to log out of your account after executing your Web searches.

In addition, many browsers and search engines have an **auto-complete** feature that suggests endings for whatever word you might be typing in. This is a very convenient feature, however, if you're looking for privacy it's something you'll want to get rid of.

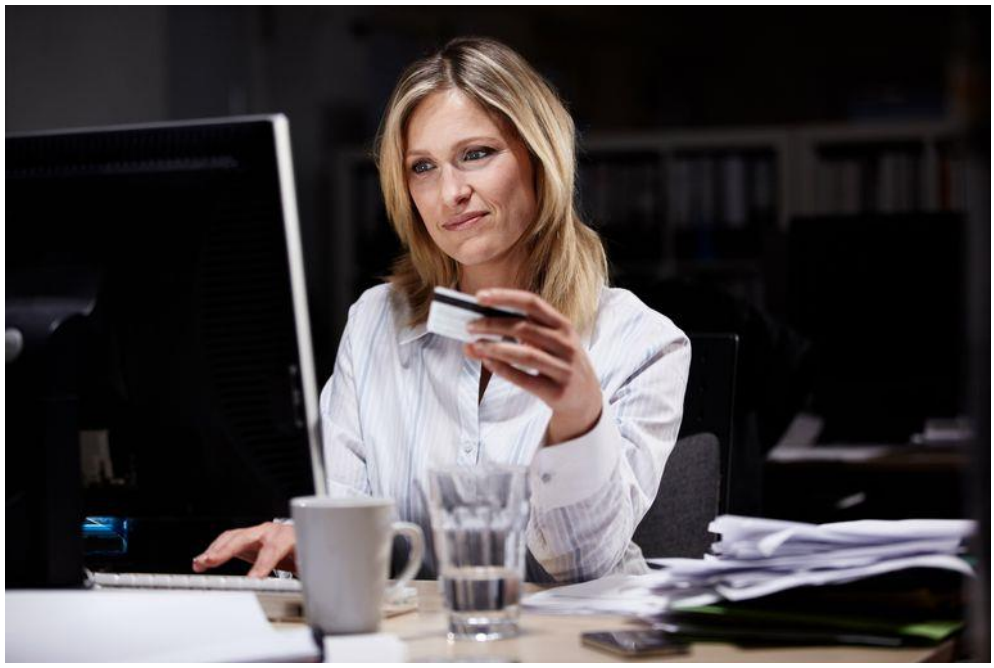
Watch what you're downloading

Be extremely cautious when downloading anything (software, books, music, videos, etc.) from the Web. This is a good idea for privacy advocates, but it's also a great way to keep your computer from freezing up and malfunctioning. Be very cautious when choosing what to download from the Web; some programs include **adware** that will report your surfing habits back to a third-party company that will then use that information to send you ads and unwanted emails, otherwise known as spam.

Use common sense when online

This is pretty self-explanatory: don't go to places on the Web that you would be embarrassed to have your wife, husband, children, or employer see. This is a very low-tech way to protect your Web privacy, and yet, out of all the methods on this list, might be the one that is most effective.

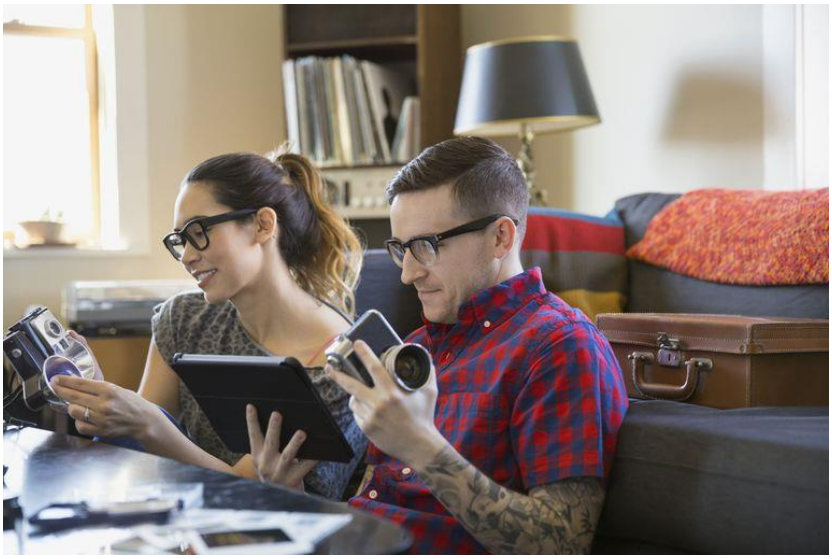
Guard your private information



Before sharing anything online - on a blog, website, message board, or social networking site - be sure it's not something you would mind sharing in real life, off the Web. Don't share information that could identify you in public, especially if you are a minor. Keep identifying details, like user names, passwords, first and last names, addresses, and phone numbers, to yourself. Your email address should be kept as private as possible, because an email address can be used to track other identifying information

(see How to Find Information Using a Reverse Email Search).

Use caution on social media sites



Social networking sites such as Facebook are extremely popular, and for good reason: they make it possible for people to connect with each other all over the world. It's important to make sure that your privacy settings are set appropriately and that what you share on social networking sites would not reveal anything of a personal or financial nature. For more on how to keep yourself safe on Facebook, try reading How to Block Searches of Your Facebook Profile, and Protect your Facebook privacy with ReclaimPrivacy.org

Watch out for scams online

If it seems too good to be true, than it probably is - and this especially applies on the Web. Emails promising free computers, links from friends that seem legit but lead to virus-laden websites, and all sorts of other Web scams can make your online life quite unpleasant, not to mention add all sorts of nasty viruses to your computer system.

Think carefully before following links, opening files, or watching videos sent to you by friends or organizations. Watch for signs that these might not be for real: these include misspellings, lack of secure encryption (no HTTPS in the URL), and improper grammar. For more information on how to avoid common scams on the Web, read Five Ways You Can Check Out A Hoax on the Web, and What Is Phishing?

Protect your computer and mobile devices

Keeping your computer safe from harmful content on the Web is simple with a few precautions, such as a firewall, appropriate updates to your existing software programs (this ensures that all security protocols are kept up to date), and antivirus programs

(see 101 Free Online Alternatives to Popular Desktop Software for a few free antivirus programs).

Keep a close eye on your online reputation

Have you ever Googled yourself? You might be surprised (or shocked!) to see what is out there on the Web. You can control much of what is out there on the Web with the precautions laid out in this article, as well as keeping track of what is found about you in at least three different search engines on a regular basis (you can accomplish this process on auto-pilot using news alerts or RSS).