

The Best Way to Remove Yourself From the Internet

Data brokers are constantly harvesting your personal information, mostly without your consent. Your name, address, phone number, and more are all being bought and sold behind your back by marketers, scam artists, and brokers of all varieties. Removing your presence from the internet isn't an easy process, nor is it a one-off event. Removing yourself from the internet is a constant struggle to remove your data as it's collected in order to keep you safe.

Why Data Brokers Gather Your Personal Data

In short, it's all about money. Your personal data has value, and the more complete that data is, the more valuable it becomes.

Every time you visit a website, accept cookies, download an app, or sign up using your email, your data is likely being harvested. The longer this goes on, the worse it gets. Old accounts, out-of-date

privacy settings, and default browsers only exacerbate this issue.

How Your Personal Data Gets Used Against You

This collected data is used against you in a wide variety of different ways. At its most benign, data brokers have been known to sell your phone number to spam calling companies, but your data can also be used for much more insidious means as well.

Some data brokers have been charged with conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud by deliberately selling data lists of the elderly and vulnerable to scammers. Others have had their data stolen by cybercriminals for the purpose of taking out huge, fraudulent loans.

People Search Sites

People search sites are collections of massive amounts of personal information, which are then sold or published online for free. This includes

information about property, criminal records, background information, and more.

This information can be accessed by anyone, meaning that your address, contact details, and household information can be found by anyone who is willing to look for it.

This exposes people to higher risks of stalking, online harassment, and digital redlining. Similarly, this information can be used by health insurance companies to raise your rates based on your online activity.

Marketing and Recruitment Data Brokers

Marketing data brokers collect data on your online browsing habits and sell it to companies for the purposes of marketing, while recruitment data brokers create background reports that are then sold off to HR officers.

These reports are used as part of a screening service and can be the difference between getting called back for an interview and missing out on your dream job.

Risk Mitigation and Financial Information Brokers

Data brokers can affect your financial situation as well. Banks and credit companies use financial information from data brokers in order to adjust their rates and offers.

Similarly, businesses and investment companies often use background data collected from police and court records by risk mitigation brokers to inform their decisions.

What You Can Do About It

While there are plenty of reasons to be worried about how your data is collected and used against you, there are still plenty of things that you can do to fight back.

Uninstall Unnecessary Apps

The apps on your phone collect information about you. Some of this is required in order for the app to run. A camera app needs to have access to your photos, for example.

Most of the information that apps collect isn't required, however. In fact, it's not at all uncommon for apps to be collecting as much data about you as humanly possible. This data is then sold off to brokers, who sell the information to people search sites, and the like.

The easiest way to prevent this is to simply remove apps that you don't need or use regularly. Simply put, an app needs to be on your phone if it's going to collect your data off of it. By uninstalling unnecessary apps, you prevent this from becoming a problem.

Update or Delete Social Media Profiles

Social media profiles are largely public. That's the social part of the media, after all, and while this can be a great way to connect with others, it's important to be careful about what information you're making publicly available.

If your social media profile isn't private and contains your email, name, age, or mobile number, then that data has likely already been harvested. If you have multiple social media accounts with the

same identifying information, then that can also be used to build a larger data set.

To avoid this, either set your profile to private or simply remove the data from your profile entirely.

Use a Data Removal Service Like Incogni

Incogni is an automated data removal service that allows you to largely remove your presence from the internet. This is an imperfect method, naturally, but it is significantly better than just about any alternative out there. According to Google Trends data, Incogni is also one of the most popular data removal services worldwide.

The process is simple. All you need to do is create an account and fill Incogni in with the details about whose personal data it is that you're trying to remove. This is useful if you have an older relative that you're worried about being taken advantage of via telephone scams, for example.

From there, all you need to do is give Incogni the right to work for you, and you're good to go. Incogni handles the interactions with the data brokers,

which is quite a lot of interactions when you consider that it has hundreds of data brokers on its contact lists across the US, UK, EU, Switzerland, and Canada.

Incogni will handle the follow-up communications and any rejected claims from data brokers, and the data deletion process will take place in a fraction of the time. Moreover, where many data removal services focus only on people search sites, Incogni offers data removal for a huge range of different data broker types.

When it does come to people search sites, however, Incogni excels here as well. This is thanks to its unique algorithm, which is capable of checking through people search sites for any personal information that matches your user profile.

As you continue to browse the internet, your data will continue to be collected. This is why Incogni offers a subscription-based service to ensure that your data stays off the market. This takes place in the form of repeated, ongoing removals via opt-out requests, continual searches, and ongoing contacting of data brokers.

As a result, the process is taken entirely out of your hands, meaning that you can rest easy knowing that your data is as safe as can be.

On top of this, Incogni's prices are some of the most competitive on the market. A yearly plan would only cost you \$6.49 a month, thanks to the fact that Incogni's annual plan comes with a 50% discount.

Even better, however, is this exclusive deal. HowToGeek readers can get an additional 5% off for 55% off Incogni's annual plans by using the code **GEEK55**. This makes Incogni even better value for money than ever before.

Make Your Presence on the Internet Safe

In truth, there's no way to completely remove your online presence in the digital age. No matter what you do, you will always leave a trace that some shady group or individual can pick up from your browsing.

That's why a consistent, regular removal of your online presence is such an appealing idea. It can

take more than 300 hours to individually remove all of your personal information from data brokers' databases, but when it comes to privacy, the most important thing is to make sure that you and your loved ones are safe.