

How to Delete Your Digital History

This short guide helps human rights activists erase their digital footprints. When covering digital tracks and erasing your digital profile remember there are various ways the authorities can try to attack you. These include compiling a public post history of “offending content,” and compromising your private accounts and contact lists.

Completely cutting yourself off from all email, encrypted chat, and social media tools is pretty drastic. It’s hard not to have any online presence, but be sure to check out our guide on thwarting digital surveillance ([English](#)) to ensure you are doing as much as possible to protect yourself from the authorities.

Note: If you find information on Wikipedia or other Wikimedia projects which could cause harm to you or other people in Afghanistan, please email ca@wikimedia.org and put AFG in the subject line.

Here are some key things to consider:

1. Do you want to delete an entire account or specific parts of it: for example, do you want to delete individual tweets or your whole Twitter account?
2. It’s likely that when you delete individual posts or selected content, you’ll miss something which could be copied somewhere else, like in the inbox of someone you sent an email to.
3. Even if you delete your entire account, in some cases platforms have data retention policies that archive the data for law enforcement or government purposes. Other data may have been screenshotted by the authorities already or stored by service providers and platforms. It may not be possible to completely erase your information.
4. Your data may be retained locally, on your laptop or mobile device, and retrievable by law enforcement using special tools. This guide will not cover topics such as completely removing all physical media.

Start with a list of what content and accounts you want to delete. Consider the broad categories of where your information may be stored: 1) email, 2) social media, and 3) chat applications. You may find it useful to search for your own name on search engines in order to determine what information is publicly available. One way to recall where you have accounts online would be to go through your saved passwords and to carefully comb through the list there. Bottom line: be methodical and patient in your approach.

Section 1: Deleting Select Content

1. Facebook:
<https://www.pcmag.com/how-to/how-to-quickly-delete-old-facebook-posts>
2. Twitter: several services offer automated mechanisms for deleting posts:
<https://tweetdeleter.com/> and <https://tweetdelete.net/> are two. Change your password before logging into these services.
3. Signal: <https://support.signal.org/hc/en-us/articles/360007320491>
4. Telegram: <https://telegram.org/faq#q-can-i-delete-my-messages>
5. Facebook Messenger:
<https://www.facebook.com/help/messenger-app/194400311449172>
6. Removing yourself from Google Search:
<https://support.google.com/websearch/troubleshooter/3111061?hl=en>
7. LinkedIn
 - a. We've received some reports of potential phishing attacks happening on LinkedIn. You may find it necessary to hide your LinkedIn activity.
 - b. To reduce your account's visibility without hibernating it, review settings here: <https://www.linkedin.com/psettings/>

Section 2: Deleting Entire Accounts

1. Delete or Deactivate Unused Accounts.
 - a. Recover any email account you've used in the last 10 years to see what websites you may have signed up with using these. If you no longer need access, delete them.
 - b. Use the search function in your email and look for phrases such as "Sign up" or "Welcome" and delete or deactivate the accounts associated with them. In most cases, you'll be able to find an appropriate link in a 'Privacy' or 'Security' section. This [site](#) will show you almost all of the accounts that

you created using a specific email address (only available for Gmail and Outlook users).

- c. Guides for deleting accounts on social media platforms:
 - i. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/help/224562897555674/>
 - ii. Instagram: <https://help.instagram.com/448136995230186/>
 - iii. Twitter:
<https://help.twitter.com/en/managing-your-account/how-to-deactivate-twitter-account>
 - iv. LinkedIn:
<https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/63?lang=en>
 - 1. To more fully hide your activity on LinkedIn, here is a guide to hibernation:
<https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/118565/hibernate-your-linkedin-account?lang=en> and a direct link to begin the process:
<https://www.linkedin.com/psettings/account-management/hibernate-submit>

Hibernation makes it so that your connections aren't visible from other accounts and even your comments/likes/etc. will show as "a linkedin community member". Accounts cannot be de-hibernated within 24 hours of activating hibernation. If you log back into a hibernated account *after* the 24 hour limit, it *immediately* de-hibernates your account, so to prevent accidental de-hibernation we suggest deleting the app from phones and clearing site data/history on browsers as minimal additional security.

- d. Guides for deleting accounts on chat applications:
 - i. Signal:
<https://support.signal.org/hc/en-us/articles/360007061192-Unregister-or-Delete-Account>
 - ii. Telegram: <https://my.telegram.org/auth?to=delete>
- e. How to remove yourself from email accounts:
 - i. Google

Even though you have removed your accounts, when people search your name and location, there is cached information/links about you. The solution is called [Google Console](#). You can request for them to delete/update their search engine to remove those cached results if you provide a link to each.

- ii. Yahoo: <https://en-global.help.yahoo.com/kb/SLN2044.html>
- iii. Microsoft / Hotmail:
<https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/12412/microsoft-account-how-to-close-account>
- iv. Protonmail:
<https://protonmail.com/support/knowledge-base/delete-account/>
- f. Some organizations or groups that you may no longer want to be affiliated with may maintain email lists.
 - i. Unsubscribe from mailing lists using [Unroll.me](https://unroll.me) or manually via their unsubscribe links usually located at the bottom of the emails
- g. For some services, you may want to purge all content and messages before you delete the account as it may be archived and accessed later on.

2. Securing Existing Accounts

- a. You should use unique passwords for every account and use two-factor authentication when applicable.
 - i. A password manager like [LastPass](https://lastpass.com) can help with remembering several different passwords. For more, see our earlier guides on thwarting digital surveillance ([English](#), [Chinese](#))
 - ii. Multi-factor authentication is the number one piece of advice we can give about ensuring no one is surveilling your information. Preferred methods are to use app-based protocols such as **Authenticator** or **Authy** and physical tokens such as **Duo** or **Yubikey**. While SMS-based multi-factor is less secure, it is better than not having it at all.

Section 3: Searching for Remaining Sensitive Information

Again, it is difficult to be completely comprehensive in your efforts, depending on the length of your online history. Following this guide to conduct a “self-doxx” to determine what, if any, information was missed during a first sweep:

<https://guides.accessnow.org/self-doxing.html>

For Assistance With Account Deletion:

<https://www.accessnow.org/help/>

Automated Social Media Account Deletion see:

<http://www.suicidemachine.org/>

Paid service (not an endorsement):

<https://joindeleteme.com/>

Database of various sites you may want to consider for deletion:

<http://justdelete.me> and <https://www.deseat.me/>

Sources

1. <https://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/security/how-to/a7380/how-to-disappear-completely-from-the-internet/>
2. <https://lifelife.com/how-to-commit-internet-suicide-and-disappear-from-the-w-5958801>
3. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2575745/How-DISAPPEAR-internet-9-step-guide-helps-people-vanish-without-trace-surf-anonymously.html>
4. <https://inteltechniques.com/book7.html>
5. <https://lifelife.com/how-to-commit-internet-suicide-and-disappear-from-the-w-5958801>
6. <https://www.pandasecurity.com/mediacenter/mobile-news/disappear-internet/>
7. <https://www.whoishostingthis.com/blog/2013/12/12/how-to-disappear-online/>