

How to Stop Google from Spying on You

By

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After becoming the victim of an embezzlement scheme, I admit that I am now pretty paranoid. I have had growing concerns over the years about these very large Internet companies that appear to have monopolies over our online lives. For example, when you consider Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, Google, YouTube (also owned by Google) and Microsoft, you have a handful of businesses that control most of the Internet. To have a full grasp of what this means, we have to really go beyond the Internet to consider the wider implications. I would suspect that you agree with me that having six companies controlling our "online lives" is bad enough, but the reality is that the lines have become blurred between our online and offline existences.

Let's take, for example, the world of smart phones. Most cell phones today have operating systems from Apple, Microsoft, or Google (Android). This may make sense from a technological perspective, in light of the fact that cell phones have morphed into mobile computers. The reality is, however, that by carrying around a smart phone you have now decided to take the online world with you everywhere you go. Even within the world of social media, it has become a regular part of the process of authoring a post to be asked whether or not you also want to share your physical location. Well, how do you think your smart phone is able to share your location in these posts? The reality is that with on-board GPS, your phone can track your exact location. When I say exact, I mean within just a few yards of where you may be sitting or standing right now.

Some people may comment that they really don't mind being tracked by these major Internet companies, or even the government. After all, they say, if you are not doing anything wrong, why should you mind being tracked? This is a very slippery slope and is not simply about standing up for a general principle; it is about the ability for you to lose complete control of your life in an instant. We know from the Edward Snowden incident that the government is not only tracking us, but is also

archiving this information. So, while you may not be a target of the government today, who is to say that you won't become one down the road? And, at that time, based on what we now know, the government may be able to go back for years and produce a detailed history of everywhere you've been, every Internet search you've done, every website you visited, every movie or book that you've purchased, and on and on... This, to me, is simply unacceptable in what is supposed to be the freest country in the world.

Simple Ways to Minimize Your Digital Footprint

SmartPhone

When you install a new social media application on your smartphone, the default settings give the app the permission to track your location. This is why most people are being tracked and don't even realize it. Admittedly, there is a *somewhat* interesting element to this that allows your friends to see where you are. This might allow them to stop in and join you for a surprise visit while you are at Starbucks, but it also is likely that every place you go throughout the day is being tracked and probably archived somewhere. If you go into the settings of your smartphone and click on 'location services,' you will see where you can turn off the ability for your apps to track your location.

Google

You may not realize it, but every search you perform on Google is stored on their servers. This also includes searches on YouTube and Google Maps. You may notice that whenever you do a Google search, you are often inundated with ads for a day or two related to that search. This is most likely the reason that Google is tracking you, but, despite the commercial motives, we can't discount how this information may be used for other, more ominous purposes at some time in the future. By monitoring your searches Google can pick up quite a bit of information about you. This would include your

hobbies, medical conditions, places you have visited, your occupation, even if you are having marital problems (have you ever used Google to find relationship advice?). If you stop and think about it, the amount of information that can be gathered on you from your Google searches is frightening. Check out this link <https://www.google.com/history> to see your own Google search history. As you review your own search history, imagine what you could glean if you had access to the search history of some of your friends or co-workers. While you are viewing your history, you can delete any items that you choose. If you want to get rid of everything, click on the 'gear' icon in the upper right hand corner of your screen and then 'settings.' You will see in the first paragraph there that you can click on 'delete all' and remove your entire search history from Google. The bad news is that your information is still being stored on Google's servers and they can internally access it if they need to or are requested to provide it to the government.

Turning Off Google History

If you are logged in to your Google account you can go to <https://history.google.com> and you will see the option on this page to turn your web history off. Remember, however, it is still likely that Google is tracking your searches on their server even though they are not being stored in your own account. Even if you don't have a Google account you are still being tracked by a small file placed on your computer (called a cookie).

Anonymous Browsing – Your Best Defense

[DuckDuckGo](#)

[iXQuick](#)

[StartPage](#)

Incognito Browsing

An additional option is to check if your browser has the capability of incognito or private browsing. By turning on this option, your browser will not accept cookies and your browsing history will not be recorded. I am not 100% convinced that private browsing is foolproof but it will make it much harder for you to be tracked.

Vary Your Routine

It is smart to vary your routine. Don't use the same browser all of the time, mix it up. By employing a variety of the above strategies your digital footprint will be substantially diminished, although it is always smart to assume that every online search you perform may be monitored.

E Mail Spying

If you use Google's e mail service, Gmail, you should also know that it has been widely reported that the information in your e mails is being harvested for advertising purposes. I have read articles that gave examples such as an individual sending an e mail reflecting his thoughts about divorce then being peppered by divorce ads the next time he went online. I don't doubt this at all, and we don't know for sure how much Google may be spying on your e mail account. Again, we might look at this and conclude it is just for commercial purposes, but if it *is* being archived at all, that means it can be retrieved later for more sinister purposes. With the recent revelations of the Edward Snowden case, we know that the government may have in place a massive system monitoring all of our e mails, regardless of the service that we use.

I have a Gmail account that I don't use often, but it is part of the suite of services that go along with having a free Google account.

E Mail Encryption

An additional step you can take is to encrypt your e mail. Here is a great article that I found to be very helpful – [e Mail Encryption](#).

Encrypt Your Computer Hard Drive

You may have seen the CSI episodes where they storm into a home and take away the computer of a suspect. Law enforcement can gain quite a lot of information from a computer hard drive. Most people don't know that even deleted items are really not gone and can be retrieved with special software. An additional measure is to encrypt your hard drive. An encrypted hard drive may be close to impossible to access without the password. Here is an [excellent article on how to go about it](#).