3 ways to start the year with a digital clean slate

Kim Komando, Special for USA TODAY Published 11:07 a.m. ET Dec. 15, 2017 | **Updated 7:34 p.m. ET Dec. 22, 2017**

Columnist Kim Komando tells you how to clean up your digital tracks on Facebook, Google and elsewhere on the Internet. Kim Komando, Special for USA Today

Here's a New Year's resolution for 2018: de-clutter your digital history. Your computer stores a huge amount of browsing data, and in places you might never think to look. This meticulous chronology makes you vulnerable to snoops and advertising trackers. The solution: eliminate it.

Here are three ways to cover your tracks, using two of the biggest services on the Internet. You may be surprised how closely these companies follow you, but you may be even more surprised how much control you have over it. Later at the end of this post, don't miss how to erase your search history on your phone.

1. Erase your Google search history

Google's mission is to know everything, so few are surprised that the world's most famous search engine keeps close records of your browsing history. This might seem harmless at first: Your computer remembers the websites you visit, so it's easier to access them later on, right? What's the big deal?

But here's another way to look at it: The tech giant knows everything you've ever searched. If you have a Google account, the corporation archives it, not just on your computer, but in its own databases. So, you can't just erase your search history from your browser and hope for the best. Google still knows all.

Speaking of tracking, many people are unaware Google also tracks your physical location. You can see where and when you go on a map. Click here to learn about the Google tracking feature you didn't even know you switched on. https://www.komando.com/happening-now/423641/yikes-the-google-tracking-feature-you-didnt-know-you-switched-on

The good news is that you can delete all that data, and you don't have to storm the Googleplex headquarters to do it. Instead, you can clear your history from the comfort of your personal computer, thanks to a little feature called "My Activity."

Google has dozens of basic features, and most people would never notice this option. But if you click My Account in the upper right corner, you can hit My Activity >> Delete Activity By. A little box will appear, and you can change the Delete by Date field to All Time. Google takes pains to remind you how beneficial your search history is, but you now have the option to remove all this data for good.

[Click here for a detailed description of these steps along with visual aides.](https://www.komando.com/tips/397561/how-to-erase-everything-you-ever-searched-for-on-google/all) https://www.komando.com/tips/397561/how-to-erase-everything-you-ever-searched-for-on-google/all

2. Erase your Facebook search history

Would you believe that Facebook keeps the same kind of records at Google? If anything, Facebook's data is even more personal, such as clubs and pastimes, because of the tidbits we share with our social network.

Facebook also mines when you've looked up an ex or a neighbor. If someone accesses your account, even by accident, that information is fully available.

Facebook tracks where you're logged in. You can erase that. Facebook also tracks you in photos. You can review all the photos tagged with you in them. To review these data points on your Facebook account, [click here for the steps along with other hidden Facebook settings to check](#).

Fortunately, you can wipe away your Facebook search history with a few clicks. To clear past searches, log in to Facebook and go to the upside-down triangle in the top-right corner. Click on Activity Log. The Activity Log is where Facebook tracks your actions within the site.

In the left column of the Activity Log, under Photos, Likes and Comments, click on the More link. Then scroll down and click on the Search link. Here you'll see a list of every Facebook search you've ever made, organized by date. You can clear searches individually by clicking the crossed-circle icon on the right.

Then click Remove in the box that appears. To clear every search, click on the Clear Searches link located at the top-right of the list.

[Click here for illustrated instructions](http://www.komando.com/tips/12436/how-to-see-and-erase-your-facebook-search-history-or-else/all). http://www.komando.com/tips/12436/how-to-see-and-erase-your-facebook-search-history-or-else/all

3. Use covert search engines

Google has hundreds of millions of users around the world, and the company's name has become synonymous with "finding information." But remember, you don't have to use Google, and as handy as the service is, there are other ways to navigate around the web.

DuckDuckGo has a mission to keep users' information private and to prevent personalized search results. The search engine includes nifty calculators and other tricks, and you can customize its interface with search shortcuts and an Instant Answers feature.

You might be surprised by the quality of Instant Answers, which easily rivals Google's Knowledge Graph. You can also make DuckDuckGo an extension of your browser and activate more privacy settings to keep your search history as protected as possible.

Ixquick calls itself the world's most private search site. Ixquick doesn't record your IP address, browser information or search history. The real magic of Ixquick is its "search by proxy" feature. This means that websites have no idea what IP address you're using. As a customer browsing their pages, you are basically invisible. This feature does have the potential to slow down your searches, but that will be a small price to pay for people who give their privacy top priority.

Bonus: Keep your browsing history private on your phone

Surfing the web on your computer can leave a lot of breadcrumbs, but many people are even more cavalier about their phones. So much correspondence, banking, and social media flow through the typical smartphone, and much of that information is tracked.

Meanwhile, you're collecting a vast array of cookies and temporary files, and these are reflected in the advertising that pops up on your phone. These ads say a lot about your browsing history, and they are visible to anyone who catches a glimpse of your phone.

So how do you clear your browsing history and secure your privacy going forward? That depends on the device you use. Below are the steps but they might be a tad different for you, depending on the version of the browser you are using.

Apple

Apple's default browser is Safari. You are not able to clear your browsing history directly with Safari; you need to do it through the gadget's settings. Here is how to do it:
- Open Settings
- Tap Safari

- Scroll down and select Clear History and Website Data
- Tap Clear History and Data to confirm

Google Chrome

If you are not using Apple's default browser, there's a good chance you are using Google Chrome. Here are the steps to clearing Chrome's history:

- Open Google Chrome
- Open Settings
- Tap Privacy > History
- Tap Clear on-device History
- Tap Clear on-device History to confirm

Firefox

To clear the history on Firefox, follow these steps:

- Tap the hamburger menu at the bottom of the page
- Tap Settings
- Go to Clear Private Data
- Select items you want to delete
- Tap Clear Private Data again - this will generate a pop-up menu warning that this action can't be undone
- Tap OK to confirm

Opera

Opera is a lesser known web browser but there may be some of you using it. Here are the steps to clear its history:

- Tap the red "O" at the bottom of the browser
- Tap Settings
- Go to Clear. You can clear specific items like cookies or saved passwords, or you can Clear All
- Tap Yes to confirm

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