

Digital footprint – what info of yours is public

I do a lot of work with students about creating their online presence, especially senior year students who are about to go off into the world and begin life as freelance artists and practitioners. One of the first things I do, before we get onto the fun tasks of building websites and social media feeds is to take a look at their digital footprint or a I call it, their online brand.

I was inspired to write a blog post about this as part of my digital capabilities adventure with [23 things](#) so feel free to go off and take a look at that and see if it inspires you.

Digital footprint – what on earth is that?

So let's start at the beginning of class, what the heck is a digital footprint? You'll kick yourself cause it really is a simple and obvious one when you know – your digital footprint is basically all the traces of you which you leave behind online. So all those old social media accounts you no longer use but didn't deactivate and delete? The forums where you once went to comment on poor customer service. Or how about the work photo of you that you hate but your boss insists on having on the company website?

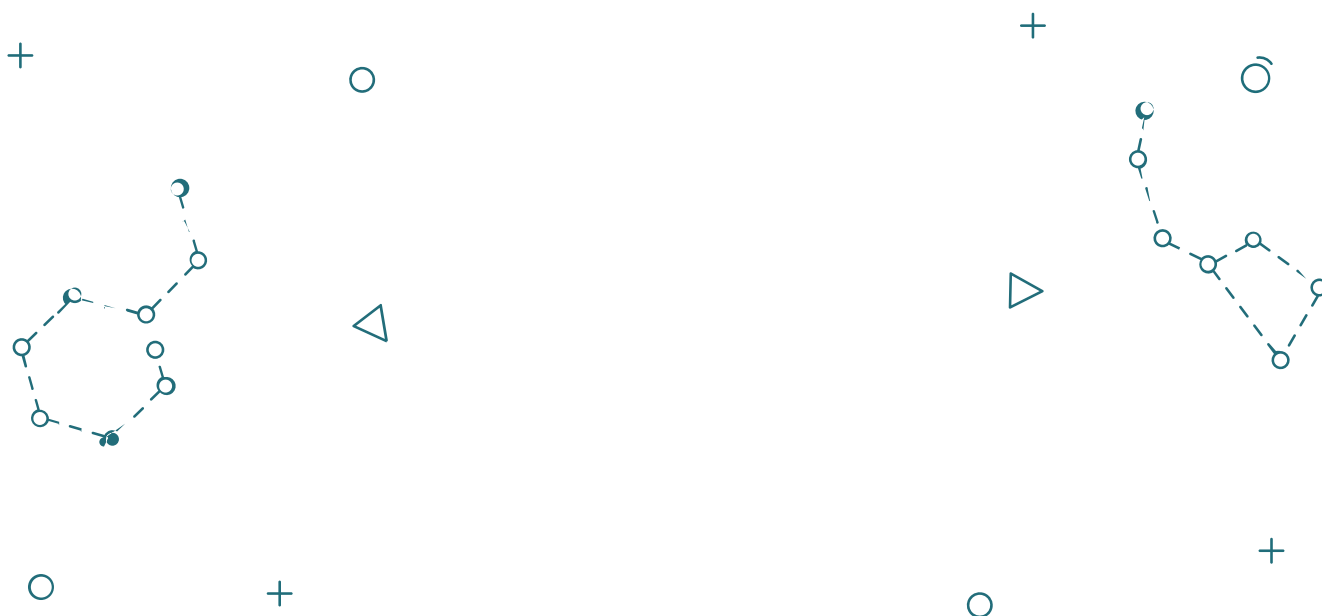
All of this and more are the digital traces of you online and it's easy to find info that people will use to find out about you and possibly make judgements on you.

About me

So here is a simple and relatively quick way you can find out what your digital footprint looks like. Google yourself.

Yeah I know, but seriously, no egos here, go google yourself and see what comes up, not just the first page either, keep going.

So here is what comes up when I google me.



Now I've been through this process a few times so there's nothing that shocks me, but a few things to be aware of. My hobby blog comes up on the same page as my work profiles and

blog. So something to consider, do you want these things linked in your digital footprint? If not, you might want to consider not using the same names etc for both.

Also, images... I bet you didn't think of that did you? Do you want the same image of you for both types of things? It means at least visibly they are linked. Also, what images come up, are you happy with them?

For me, there are a lot of images of me and by me which appear in a search, probably due to the fact that I am a blogger, youtuber and a photographer, but this is something I like to make the students aware of, do you want that drunken night out photo of you appearing when someone googles you for a job? Now here is a wee interesting twist on this same task. Do the same thing again, have a search but use a different search engine. See what comes up then? You will probably be surprised to find that the different search engines pick things up in different ways.

This is a really basic and easy way to begin making students aware of their digital footprint and how important it is to think about the image you are creating of yourself online. For my students, their online presence is their online brand so it's really important to them that they are showing the professional side that they want to be seen (professional is in context).

You might be thinking yeah but I don't need an online presence, this isn't important to me and you might be right, but it doesn't do any harm for you to be aware of this. Sometimes something appears online you weren't expecting. One example I have is of a student who found his full name and

address appear online because of something someone else posted. Just be aware.

So there is something else to consider, it may not be as clean cut about the image of yourself you portray, but what about info you maybe don't want out there on the web. Does your facebook page show up in a search? In which case, can you click on it and see all the posts you've shared, liked etc? Are you happy that these are public?

What about you Eli, are you happy with your online presence?

Ah ha! Sneaky way for me to raise another thing to think about. My online presence is carefully created. It may not look like it, but I have made deliberate decisions about the directions people travel in when lost in my digital footprint. Let me explain.

My hobby blog is full of people who are interested in cooking or gardening etc. I also have a twitter account that I use for it. However, I didn't have a separate twitter account for work or study things so gradually, my personal / blog twitter account became full of people who wanted to connect with me for digital education reasons. Not what my blog followers were interested in so it became a bit of a muddy puddle.

I chose then to make a very obvious distinction between my hobby twitter feed and my work life one. I created a separate account for digital education Eli and named in a very obvious way (LearningTechEli).

Now I mentioned different directions? Sometimes people who know me as LearningTechEli might also be interested in gardening etc so I have left breadcrumbs so they can, if they choose, go over to the twitter feed or blog for my hobbies and vice versa. I've made it so the option is there to "co-mingle" but I've made it so that it has to be a deliberate choice for that person to do rather than they get lost in a mass of nonsense that they didn't come to see. That way people get a choice of the types of waffle by Eli that they read and the version of Eli online that they are interested in.

This is all how I work with my digital footprint, it is by no means the only or correct way to do things. After all, I know plenty of people who keep everything together as one, because to them, you take all of them or none of them and they don't want to separate their work online fun with their general "things that are important to them" online fun. ☐ And you know what, that's ok cause they have made that conscious decision.

So have a google and a think about what you find. Are you happy or is it time to make some changes?