

Dept. of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection: Take data privacy into your own hands

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Editor's Note: Data Privacy Day (Monday, January 28th) is an annual international campaign that aims to raise awareness of data privacy best practices and to get consumers thinking about how they share information online.

MADISON – Digital privacy is one of the great challenges of our connected age, and it is important that we all take action to protect our information to the greatest extent that we can. While we cannot keep watch over all of our personal and financial data that is stored online, we can limit our oversharing and take steps to bolster the security around our accounts and devices.

In recognition of Data Privacy Day (1/28), the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection asks consumers to consider the scale of their “digital footprints” (their online presences and the information stored in their accounts). Do you have accounts that you no longer use? Close them. Do you make a habit of providing complete personal details during the sign-up phase for a new account? Stop offering more than is required. The best way to take control of your information is to limit the amount that is stored around the internet.

This Data Privacy Day, strengthen the security around your digital footprint:

Delete apps you no longer use. Having an abundance of unused, out-of-date apps can create vulnerabilities that could threaten your accounts and your devices.

Purge the application permissions list in your social media accounts. Many people

use their social media accounts to log into other services rather than creating usernames and passwords for those apps. These connections could give the third-party service the right to reuse information from your social account such as your name, birthdate, contacts and even your messages. This could put your social accounts at risk if a linked service is compromised.

Review the settings of each app to see which services it accesses in your device. Some apps may use your device's camera, seek your physical location (using information from GPS, cellular and Wi-Fi networks or Bluetooth), or access your device's mobile pay features. Turn off any connections you are uncomfortable with or delete the app altogether.

Pay close attention to requests for data or device services that appear during the setup stage for a new app or online account. If you are uncomfortable with any of the data or services that the program will utilize, deny the request.

Update passwords. Be sure they are long and strong, with a combination of at least eight uppercase and lowercase letters, numbers and special characters. Use different passwords for each online account.

Update all web-enabled devices to the latest operating system and antivirus package in order to protect against the newest viruses and vulnerabilities.

Remind friends and family members not to click on links in unsolicited emails or social media posts and to avoid completing unsolicited surveys that ask for personal details.

For additional information or to file a complaint, visit the Consumer Protection Bureau at <https://datcp.wi.gov>, call the Consumer Protection Hotline at 800-422-7128 or send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wi.gov.

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