Wolfson Academic Skills
Developing a Digital Footprint

There will already be information about you on the web and so you have a duty to curate your personal and professional image online. Take control of what others can see about you by surveying your current footprint and working on making you and research more visible.

Why develop an academic digital footprint?

- Showcases you and your work within and outwith academia, which is important for making an impact with your research
- Increases the chances of finding collaborators and them finding you
- Means that you are prepared in case a potential employer uses it in recruitment

It takes time to get in order but is a very straightforward process and much can be copied between platforms.

Surveying your current footprint

Your digital footprint comprises the traces you leave online and that others leave about you. It includes:

- Profiles on social networking sites
- Profiles on websites e.g. department, clubs/societies
- Photographs, slides, posters
- Text on blogs, papers, discussion boards

It relates to your work, volunteering, and your social life. While you may reserve certain behaviour for particular platforms, those who view them won’t necessarily make that distinction. We therefore recommend that you delete out-of-date profiles and posts/photographs that you consider inappropriate for colleagues/peers/family to see.

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Discover your digital self

Search for yourself, a peer or supervisor to find out what the web says about them. Are there any surprises? Is it current? If it is about you, is there anything that you want to change/delete? Consider using duckduckgo.com, a search engine that doesn’t track your searches, store personal information or follow you with adverts. Unlike Google it will deliver the same results to everyone, regardless of your search history.
E-professionalism

“This is the way you engage yourself online in relation to your profession, including your attitudes, actions and your adherence to relevant professional codes of conduct.”

The University of Edinburgh, Managing your Digital Footprint

Developing a professional presence online requires regular reflection on the use of social media, the sites and language used and the automatic links between online accounts. Your online conduct should be underpinned by integrity, respect, dutifulness, honour and accountability.

Code of Conduct

Consider following an online code of conduct, such as this one from the University of Leeds:

https://tinyurl.com/leedscodeofconduct

Planning

As you already have a web presence, it makes sense to improve the quality and quantity of that information so that visitors to sites get a representative picture of you.

Think about what you want to communicate: personal life, current work, potential employment, wider set of skills, or content e.g. a blog. Secondly, consider your potential audience: peers, colleagues, potential employers, academy, or the wider public?

Structure your entries by providing a headline to grab attention, a summary for more information, and evidence to demonstrate what you done and are currently working on.

Make yourself more visible

Aim for consistency as there’s bound to be someone with a name like yours. Do you want to use a formal or informal version? Will you include initials? You should register for an ORCiD, which is a unique academic identifier to include on your published work, so you will always be attributed, even if your details change.

Use a photograph to help people recognise you at conferences. Consider situating this in your workplace or in the field, using it to demonstrate your skills

When tidying up your profiles, update:

- Education
- Past experience
- Awards
- Publications
- Media

When the profiles are up-to-date, you can increase traffic to them by adding links to your email signature.

Tools

There are plenty of platforms to choose from: University of Cambridge or departmental profile, LinkedIn, Academic networking sites such as Research Gate, Google Scholar citations, blogs, Twitter, ORCiD, Slideshare to name but a few. However, it is best to keep a select few profiles to maintain, rather than start one on every site but then leave outdated information lingering on the web because to don’t have the time to keep them up-to-date.