

Hello Spring: Tidy up Tech

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Spring is not only a good time to clear out the dust and clutter in your closets and home, it's also a good time to tidy up your digital stuff.

A messy digital life makes personal information and data vulnerable to bad actors. Here are some tips on how to clean and organize your devices and the information they store.

Clean Up Your Passwords and Find a Password Manager

Chances are you have some old, unsecure passwords needing to be cleaned up, or you are using the same password for multiple accounts. If the idea of going through every website you use seems overwhelming, use a password manager. Most smartphones (iOS, Android) have a built-in password manager, as do several web browsers.

Password managers not only store passwords and suggest strong ones; but the best options, alert you if you are using a duplicate or weak password, and prompt you to change it. This is a great way to toss out unsecure passwords and replace them with fresh, strong ones.

Delete or Cancel Unused Accounts

You may be surprised how many online accounts you have and do not use. Reduce the number of places and ways you may be at risk by deleting unnecessary account clutter. Think of it as clearing out a junk drawer of gadgets you forgot you had.

Look through your bookmarks. Critically review the sites and services associated with them. If you have not used an account in some time, log in one last time, remove all personal info, and deactivate it.

Unfortunately, major breaches happen regularly, and you may not be aware a site you used has been hit. Meanwhile, your name, password, and info associated with that account (such as your credit card) are in the hands of hackers. Limit your exposure. Close those old accounts.

Unsubscribe and Archive Email

Remember those unopened emails, lurking in your inbox? Unsubscribe or opt-out of lists no longer serving your interests. Be sure to empty the trash folder and archive any emails in your inbox you do not need but want to store for future access. Evaluate your email folders and filters and decide whether they are sorting messages in a way that works for you, or if you need to update.

Delete Old Photos You Don't Need

Photos. Estimates show the number of photos taken globally, in 2023, was around 1.6 Trillion (Rise Above Research). Photos and videos are the most common culprit, taking up storage space on your device.

Instead of letting them sit there, make something special with them. Create an album, wall hanging, or pop them into a digital picture frame for your kitchen or living room. Although, it can be difficult to delete all those cute photos of your dog, start small. Delete old screenshots, duplicate videos, and blurry photos to help free up space.

Delete Old Apps You Don't Need

The most surefire way to declutter your device is to remove apps you no longer use. Apps can take up a wide range of space in your device's internal storage. Some apps, such as online games, can take up to 1 GB of storage space.

Before you delete an old app, be sure to close the account, associated with the data. Delete the username and password as well. This ensures the data, associated with the app, is taken out of circulation.

Once the account is closed, then delete the app. Follow the same procedure for computers and laptops, as they too may have account data stored elsewhere other than on your device.

Update Your Computer and Mobile Device Software

Microsoft, Apple, and Google release new versions of their operating systems every one to two months. These updates not only provide critical security patches but can also improve your device's functionality by increasing speed and providing new features.

Software updates should not be ignored as they usually include important security improvements to protect your devices against the latest cybercriminal tactics. Step away from the 'remind me later' button and update your software.

Securely Dispose of Old Device

Don't throw your old electronics in the trash. Not only is it bad for the environment, it also contains old data and personal information. It is not enough to just delete your data. You must wipe it from your devices. To do this:

- Perform a factory reset on your phone or other devices (where applicable).
- Remove any memory cards or hard drives.
- Consider using a disk cleaning software on your computer.

Once you have wiped your old device, take it to an e-waste recycling location to securely dispose.

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