

# LEAVING FOOTPRINTS

Imagine you are walking in the sand on a beach somewhere, or through deep snow on a mountain. As you walk, you leave footprints where you've been. Later, of course, the footprints disappear. But imagine if they didn't – if your footprints stayed there forever. And imagine, too, that you left footprints everywhere you walked, including in your home and in your town – so that someone could see everywhere you've been. How happy would you be about that?

Well, that's what happens when you use technology – computers, mobile phones, tablets. It's your digital footprint – a record of where you've been and what you've seen that you leave when you go online. Your comments on social media, your retweets, the apps you use, the emails you send, everything you've searched for – all of them are part of your digital footprint, and other people can see your footprint, or it can be tracked in a database.

Does this matter? Why would anyone be interested in what you write on Twitter or post on Instagram? Well, companies who sell things are interested, that's for sure – they want to send you adverts for things they want you to buy. But apart from businesses, there are other reasons why your digital footprint should matter to you.

## 1 HOW PEOPLE SEE YOU

Of course, you have nothing to hide, but if people get information about you, they might pick bits to make you look good – or bad. Perhaps one day you write something silly online. Maybe you make a bad joke. Years later, it's found by the university you're applying to, and they don't think it's funny. Then what? Maybe they decide you're not the 'right' kind of person for them.

## 2 YOUR PRIVATE INFORMATION

Everyone has information about themselves that they don't want everyone to know (for example, you might share your school reports with your parents but not friends), but the internet doesn't make the same decisions that you would.

## 3 KEEPING YOUR MONEY SAFE

There are plenty of people looking at information about you, and some of them want to steal from you, but the less information you put out, the harder it is for them. Bank details, card numbers, passwords or PINs – none of them should be written in emails, text messages or anything else.

Overall, the message is: remember that you have a digital footprint, and think carefully before you click 'send' or 'post'. No one can go online and not leave a footprint – but with care, you can control it.

## THINK values

### Responsible online behaviour

6 Read the statements. Write them in two lists under *Do* and *Don't*.

- 1 Say bad things about other people online.
- 2 Talk to your teacher or another adult if you get bullied on social media.
- 3 Think carefully before you write a post about yourself or other people.
- 4 Write a post about someone when you are angry with them.
- 5 Write posts containing personal information about your family.
- 6 Think before you post a photo of yourself or someone else.

7 **SPEAKING** Work in pairs. Compare your lists. Think of at least two more statements for each list.