

M A V E R I C K A I

THE OLDEST VERSION OF YOU ONLINE

FIND IT, THEN DECIDE WHAT STAYS

Everything you ever put online is still out there somewhere. This is how to go and find it, work out what a stranger would think of it, and get rid of the bits you would rather nobody saw.

The full prompt chain, ready to paste
The old username trick that finds everything else
How to search pages that no longer exist
What a stranger sees when they search your name
How to actually get things taken down, site by site
What this cannot find, honestly
A ten minute clean-up you can do today

2026 Edition

You Left More Behind Than You Think

There is a version of you on the internet from ten or fifteen years ago that you have completely forgotten about. An account you made once and never went back to. A forum you posted on twice. A school or club page with your name on it. A blog you started and abandoned after four entries.

None of it went anywhere. The early internet had no delete button worth the name, and even the pages that did disappear were quietly copied and kept by archives while they were still up. So the stuff you think is gone usually is not gone, it has just stopped being easy to find.

Why bother going and looking

Two reasons, and only one of them is fun.

The nostalgia

Most of what comes back is harmless and genuinely lovely. Things you made, things you cared about, a version of yourself you had stopped thinking about entirely.

The other thing

There is usually one item in the pile that makes you sit up. An old profile with a photo you would rather nobody found. An address on a page from 2011. A comment you left in an argument you had forgotten having. Nobody is searching for it today. But a client might, or a date, or someone about to work with you, and it takes about ten minutes to deal with once you can see it listed out.

A FAIR WARNING

This is more effective than people expect. If you would genuinely rather not know what is out there, that is a reasonable position, and you should stop reading here. Everyone else, carry on.

What To Gather First

Five minutes of prep makes the difference between a boring search and one that actually turns things up. Write these down before you start.

What	Why it matters
Every name you have used	Maiden name, married name, middle name in or out, nicknames
Old usernames	The single most valuable thing on this list. See below.
Old email addresses	Especially the embarrassing one from school or your first job
Old cities and schools	Local pages, club rosters and news sites are full of names
Old phone numbers	Turns up on old listings, classifieds and business pages

The usernames are the whole game

Your real name finds you on the modern internet, where people use real names. It finds almost nothing on the internet you actually grew up on, because back then nobody used one.

You posted as a handle. That handle is the thread that pulls the whole thing loose, because people reuse handles for years and across dozens of sites without thinking about it. If you remember only one thing from this guide, it is that leaving your old usernames out will cut your results by about eighty percent.

TIP

Cannot remember your old handles? Look at your oldest email account and search it for the words 'welcome' or 'confirm your account'. Every sign-up confirmation you ever got is sitting in there with the username in it.

The Main Prompt

This is the one from the newsletter. Use Claude for this, it handles the searching and the sorting well, and paste it with your own details filled in at the bottom.

PROMPT 1: FIND EVERYTHING

Go and find the oldest things about me that still exist on the internet. Search for my name, my email, and any usernames I have used, and look properly, including archived versions of pages that have since been taken down. I want the earliest accounts, profiles, forum posts, photos, mentions on club or school or work pages, and anything from a site that no longer exists. Put it in order from oldest to newest, tell me roughly what year each one is from, and give me the link.

My name is [YOUR FULL NAME], my email is [YOUR EMAIL], and old usernames I have used are [LIST THEM].

Reading what comes back

You will get three kinds of result and they are worth telling apart.

Type	What to do with it
Still live and still yours	You can log in and edit or delete it yourself
Still live, not yours	Someone else's page mentions you. Needs a request, see chapter 7
Archived only	The original is gone but a copy was kept. Hardest to remove

HEADS UP

Check the links before you believe the list. Anything doing a search like this can occasionally produce a plausible looking result that is not actually about you, especially with a common name. Click through.

Going Deeper On The Usernames

If the first prompt turned up a handle you had forgotten, run this next. It takes that one handle and goes looking for it everywhere else.

PROMPT 2: FOLLOW THE HANDLE

Take the username [HANDLE] and check whether it exists on other platforms, including old ones that are barely used now. For each place you find it, tell me whether it looks like the same person as me and what is on the profile. Then tell me every variation of that handle a person might have used, numbers and spellings included, and check those too.

This is how you find the accounts you genuinely do not remember making. People pick one handle at fifteen and use it for a decade.

The email version

PROMPT 3: THE OLD EMAIL

Here is an old email address of mine: [OLD EMAIL]. Work out what it was likely used to sign up for, based on anything publicly visible, and tell me which of those accounts are probably still sitting there. Then tell me how to check whether that address has appeared in any known data breaches.

TIP

The breach question at the end is worth running on its own. An old address in a breach list is how a lot of people find out about accounts they genuinely had no memory of creating.

The Pages That No Longer Exist

This is the layer most people never get to. When a website shuts down, the pages often survive in a public archive, and those archives are searchable.

The main one is the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine at archive.org. It has been quietly saving copies of the web since 1996, which covers almost the entire period you are interested in.

PROMPT 4: THE ARCHIVE LAYER

Now search web archives specifically. Look for archived copies of pages that mentioned me or that I posted on, especially from sites that have since closed down. Try my name, my old usernames, and the names of any forums, clubs, schools or old employers I have told you about. Give me the archived link and the date the copy was taken.

Doing it by hand

You can also go direct. Open web.archive.org, paste in the address of any site you used to use, and pick a year from the timeline. If you can remember the address of a forum or a personal page, this will often show you the thing itself rather than a mention of it.

WHY THIS FEELS DIFFERENT

Search results tell you that something existed. An archived page shows you the page, laid out the way it was, on the day it was saved. It is the closest thing the internet has to opening a box in an attic.

What A Stranger Actually Sees

Finding it is half the job. This is the prompt that turns a pile of links into a decision, and it is the one I would not skip.

PROMPT 5: THE STRANGER TEST

Now look at all of that the way a stranger would. If someone searched my name tomorrow, a new client, a date, someone I am about to work with, what would they find and what impression would it give them. Tell me honestly. Then tell me which of these I should take down or lock, which ones are actually fine, and exactly how to get each one removed.

Ask for honesty explicitly, because the default is to be nice about it, and nice is useless here.

The three-pile sort

However it comes back, sort the results yourself into three piles before you touch anything.

Leave it

Harmless, or actively good. Old work you are proud of, a mention in a local paper, a photo from a race you ran. Most of it lands here.

Tidy it

Still yours and still live, just out of date or a bit unflattering. Log in and fix the photo, the bio, the privacy setting.

Get it gone

Anything with your address, your phone number, a photo you did not agree to, or something written by a version of you that would not write it now. Chapter 7 is how.

How To Actually Get Things Removed

The method depends entirely on who controls the page. Work down this list in order, easiest first.

STEP 1: It is your own account

Easiest by a mile. Log in and delete it. If you cannot remember the password, run a password reset to the old email address. If you cannot get into that email either, most platforms have an account recovery route worth trying before you give up.

STEP 2: It is somebody else's website

Find a contact address or a contact form and ask, politely and briefly. Say which page, which detail, and that you would like it removed. Plenty of small sites and old forums are run by one person who will simply do it.

STEP 3: It is gone but still in search results

If the page itself has been taken down but the result still shows, Google has a tool for exactly this. Search for Google's Remove Outdated Content tool, paste the address, and it will refresh what it shows.

STEP 4: It is your personal information

Google also has a results-about-you process specifically for personal details like a phone number, a home address or an email address appearing in results. Find it in your Google account settings under Data and privacy, or search for Google Results About You.

STEP 5: It is in a web archive

The hardest one, and be realistic. The Internet Archive will consider exclusion requests sent to info@archive.org, particularly where the material is personal or you own the original site. It is a request, not a right, and it is not guaranteed.

HEADS UP

Do not send angry legal-sounding letters to small site owners. A short polite email works far more often, and threatening a hobbyist forum admin is the fastest way to get your request ignored or talked about publicly.

What This Cannot Do

Worth being straight about, because a guide that only lists the wins is not much use when you hit the limits.

It only sees what is public

Private posts, closed groups, direct messages and anything behind a login are all invisible to this. That is a good thing, it just means the picture you get is the public one, not the whole one.

It will miss things

Search engines never indexed everything, and archives never saved everything. Absence from the results is not proof something is not out there.

Common names are harder

If you share a name with a few thousand people, expect more noise and more false matches. Lean much harder on the usernames and old emails, which are far more unique than your name is.

Removal is not always possible

Some things simply stay up. A news article about a real event, a public record, a page whose owner has vanished. Where that is the case, the practical answer is usually to push it down with newer material rather than to keep fighting to remove it.

THE REALISTIC GOAL

You are not trying to erase yourself, and you could not if you wanted to. You are trying to know what is there and remove the handful of things that genuinely should not be. That is achievable in an evening.

Common Mistakes

Leaving out the old usernames

The single biggest one. Your name searches the modern internet. Your handle searches the one you actually grew up on.

Not clicking the links

Take the list as leads, not as fact, and verify each one before you act on it. Especially with a common name.

Deleting the account instead of the content

On some platforms, deleting your account leaves your posts up with the name removed. If you want the posts gone, delete the posts first, then the account.

Doing it in one sitting and giving up

The finding takes ten minutes. The removals trickle in over weeks because they depend on other people. Keep the list, work down it slowly.

Panicking about things nobody cares about

An awkward photo from 2011 is not a crisis. Almost nobody is looking, and the ones who are do not care nearly as much as you do.

The Quick Reference

The short version of everything above, for when you cannot be bothered to find the guide again.

Step	Do this
1. Gather	Old names, usernames, emails, cities, schools
2. Find	Run prompt 1 in Claude with all of it filled in
3. Follow the handle	Run prompt 2 on any username you had forgotten
4. Check the archives	Run prompt 4, then try web.archive.org by hand
5. Judge it	Run prompt 5, the stranger test, and ask for honesty
6. Sort	Three piles: leave it, tidy it, get it gone
7. Remove	Your account first, then site owners, then Google tools

YOUR TEN MINUTES TONIGHT

Dig out one old username. Run prompt 1 with it included. Then run the stranger test on whatever comes back. That is the whole thing, and it will tell you in ten minutes whether you have anything to actually deal with.

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You cannot delete the past. You can at least go and read it first.