

CLEAN YOUR PHONE

**A VERY SHORT PRIMER
ON TENDING TO OUR DIGITAL LIVES**

WHY IT MATTERS

Our digital life needs tending, cleaning, and mending just like other parts of our life. I'd argue our digital life actually needs *more* attention than a dirty sink right now.

Many of us think about our tech in binaries:

- Either you're someone who is a "techie" – a coder, a developer, a hacker – or you're a Luddite.
- Either you have everything in a complete perfect privacy bubble – or it's kind of a lost cause.

Both of these sentiments obscure the reality, which is that all of us have the ability and tools to better understand and manage our technology and data.

Even though we may not personally understand our technology – even though we don't see the mess the same way we see dirty dishes – it's there.

THE BASICS

Rule #1: Do a little at a time and don't focus on being "done"

Do as much as you can. Do some cleaning and tending regularly. You're not going to do it all at once. It's not going to be perfect. It's also not ever going to be done – but it can be organized better from the start.

Rule #2: Stop it at the source

"All my data is already out there, why bother?" is a completely understandable feeling. What this misses, though, is that *we are constantly generating new data*.

Facebook and Google aren't getting rich off the photos you posted to MySpace fifteen million years ago — they are getting rich off the data you freely give them every hour of the day — all of which you can reduce, lessen, or even get rid of entirely.

Rule #3: Make it a routine and make it visible

Data and "the cloud" feel invisible to us. They don't pile up on our counter. But they do cause pollution and labor exploitation — even if we can't see it. Find a way to make your digital life visible. Turn your digital cleaning into a routine chore.

DELETE OLD APPS

If you do not use an app regularly, it's time to delete it.

Many apps (even the most innocuous ones!) are using the access granted by being on your device to track and share your data in ways that are completely unrelated to the purpose of the app.

An article from *PC Mag*¹ reported on apps that are the most invasive, with big social media apps topping the list. In reviewing the worst offenders, this is what one researcher² reported on Facebook / Instagram / Messenger/ Threads:

"These apps share a staggering 68.6% of your personal data with third parties, often for targeted advertising purposes...[n]early seven out of every ten pieces of information users provide, from contact details to location, is shared with external companies."

Here are some of the big ones to consider deleting in addition to Facebook's web of apps, especially if you don't use them.

- **Amazon:** use the website! The app invites far more data tracking
- **LinkedIn:** One of the worst offenders for sharing your data with advertisers.
- **Uber:** Download or use it when you need it, or access from the web.
- **Bumble, Hinge, Tinder:** If you're not dating, you have another reason to delete these.

TURN OFF AD TRACKING

Personalized advertising tries to offer us a service of “relevant ads tailored to your experience.” This is a fancy way of saying they are gathering precise data on your behavior and activity, without delivering anything that’s *actually* valuable to you.

Apple:

Settings > Privacy & Security > Apple Advertising and turn off Personalized Ads

Android:

Settings > Google > Ads > Delete advertising ID

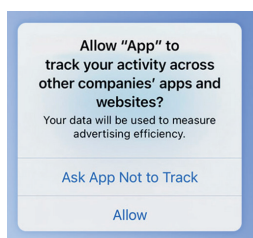
STOP CROSS-APP TRACKING

Apps don’t need to track you even when you’re on different apps. If you’re on an iPhone turn off this setting completely, and it’ll also mean you stop getting the popup “ask app not to track” box every time you install a new app.

Apple:

Settings > Privacy & Security > Tracking and disable “Allow Apps to Request to Track.”

Never get this popup again! Just turn it off.



REMOVE MIC ACCESS

What apps actually need access to your microphone? Not many. Turn it off from the source:

Apple:

Settings > Privacy & Security > Microphone/Camera and revoke access for apps that don't need it. Grant permission only when posting, then revoke it afterward.

BREAK GOOGLE'S DATA LOCK

Got a google account? Most of us do. Google can track detailed location and activity timelines — a great amount of data that they can sell and use. Turn it off in your account.

MyAccount.google.com

Visit Google Account > Data & Privacy > History Settings and disable both Location History and Web & App Activity. This stops Google from building comprehensive behavioral profiles.

DISABLE LOCATION TRACKING

Check in on this. What apps **actually** need your location? Your maps app, sure. Other apps are not providing you an essential service by knowing your location — but they are getting valuable data from you by knowing your location. Turn it off.

Apple gives you the ability to review each and every app's request. Androids turns it off for the entire phone, which is less helpful if you ever *do* need to use location services.

Apple:

Settings > Privacy & Security > Location Services > Review each app *or* turn it off altogether.

Android:

Settings (gear icon) > Location > Toggle off “use location”

DISABLE ANALYTICS

Both Apple and Android report back on your usage to HQ. Turn this off from the source.

Apple:

Settings > Privacy & Security > Analytics & Improvements and turn off all options

Android:

Settings > Google > Device Diagnostics and disable data sharing

KEEP GOING

These are all tasks that can help you start the process of turning data off at the source. But there's a lot you can do to tackle that mound of dirty data dishes in your phone. Here are a few things you can consider doing:

- **Host a party with friends** where everyone cleans, deletes, and organizes our photos. Then share favorites at the end.
- **Get an external hard drive** and put files on it. Make a goal of getting off iCloud or Google (or both) and store your data physically.

Our tools are not always at our beck and call. The less we know about them, the more likely it is that they will command us, rather than the other way around.

Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 1983

Leo Burnett wrote and made this zine.

Check out their website for links,
references, and a lot of other half-done
things: [https://leo-burnett.github.io/
folio/](https://leo-burnett.github.io/folio/)

