When Americans reflect back on the previous year and think about their aspirations for 2020, common goals range from getting more exercise to improving finances to eating healthier. At the beginning of a new decade in today’s hyper-connected world, it’s prime time to think about a new, improved digital you. By taking some smart, simple steps, you can greatly impact the safety and security of your online identity.

“In the last few years, millions of digital citizens have become more aware of cybersecurity and how to better protect their privacy. At the National Cyber Security Alliance (NCSA), we remind consumers and businesses about basic information like the critical importance of software and system updates, how to avoid phishing scams and to never to conduct financial transactions using public WiFi,” said Kelvin Coleman, NCSA’s executive director. It is “estimated that in 2020, there will be 20.4 billion connected devices. With this increased interconnectivity, there are some easy-to-implement, tried-and-true practices to keep you safer and more secure. With Data Privacy Day coming up on Jan. 28, we want both individuals and businesses to have a strong head start on protecting their online identity and privacy.”

NCSA’s Top Recommendations for a New Digital You

- **Re-invent yourself with a different online identity.** If a site asks for sensitive, personal information – like your email and/or mailing address, Social Security number, birth date, phone number, etc. – consider “re-inventing” your digital persona by sharing alternative answers to those queries that ONLY you would know. An “alter-internet” persona will help limit tracking by search engines, website and apps. Think of yourself as an actor slipping into a role to help thwart the continuous onslaught of online intrusions. This can also help safeguard you from identity theft.

- **Share with care.** Be aware that when you post a picture or message, you may also be inadvertently sharing personal details and sensitive data with strangers about yourself, family and friends. It is also OK to limit who can see your information and what you share. Learn about and use privacy and security settings on your favorite websites. NCSA has an excellent resource that includes direct links to update your privacy settings on popular devices and online services.

- **Lock Down Your Login.** Create long and unique passphrases for all accounts and use multi-factor authentication (MFA) wherever possible. A strong passphrase is a sentence that is at least 12 characters long. Focus on positive sentences or phrases that are easy to remember (for example, “I love country music.”). On many sites, you can even use spaces. MFA will fortify your accounts by enabling the strongest authentication tools available, such as biometrics or a unique one-time code sent to your phone or mobile device. This additional layer of security makes it harder for bad guys to log in to as if they were you.
Get Started Now

There are some low-lifts that can help jumpstart your New Year, New Digital You at home and/or in the workplace.

- Have a family meeting to discuss the importance of protecting privacy and take action by configuring privacy settings.

- Volunteer at your local senior center to help this vulnerable audience learn basics like creating secure passphrases.

- Post this tip sheet up in the breakroom.

- Talk to a local school group about configuring privacy settings. Help students of all ages understand how to put this information into play in their local communities to “spread cyber cheer, not fear”.

- Host a “lunch and learn” for your staff.

- Post this tip sheet up in the breakroom.

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