BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2006

Updated November 2026

Private Browsing, VPNs & Ad Blockers — What Each One Hides

What each one actually hides — and what it quietly doesn't

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

All three, side by side, in a breath.

Three tools, three different jobs. Private browsing (incognito mode) works on your own device: it stops your browser from saving your history, so the next person to use your computer or phone cannot see where you went. It hides nothing from websites or your internet company.

A VPN works on the network: it scrambles the traffic between your device and the internet, so your internet provider and anyone on your local Wi-Fi cannot read what you are doing, and websites see the VPN's address instead of yours. It does not clear your history or block ads. An ad blocker works inside your browser: it strips out ads and many trackers as pages load.

It does not hide your traffic or your address. And here is the honest headline above all three: none of them makes you anonymous, and none replaces plain good sense about what you click and trust.

- Private browsing: hides your history from others on your device.
- VPN: hides your traffic from your internet provider and local network.
- Ad blocker: strips ads and many trackers from the pages you visit.
- None of the three makes you anonymous or replaces caution.

TOOL ONE

2 Private (Incognito) Browsing

A clean slate on your own device — and only that.

Private browsing — called Incognito in Chrome, Private in Safari and Firefox — opens a browser window that forgets. When you close it, it does not save the pages you visited, the things you typed into search boxes, or the little login files called cookies. The next person who opens the browser sees no trace of that session. That is genuinely useful, and it is the entire extent of what it does.

What it hides, and from whom

It hides your activity from other people who use the same device. That is the right tool for shopping for a gift on a shared family computer, or using a library machine, or signing into your email on someone else's tablet without leaving yourself logged in.

What it does not hide

This is where people get fooled. Private browsing does not hide what you do from the websites you visit, from your internet provider, or from your employer's or school's network. It does not stop you from being tracked across the web by other means, and it does nothing against viruses or a 'keylogger' secretly recording your typing. It is a local eraser, not a cloak of invisibility.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> The biggest myth: private browsing does not make you anonymous to the world. Your internet provider and the websites themselves can still see your activity. It only keeps the record off your own device — nothing more.

TOOL TWO

3 A VPN

A private tunnel across the network.

A VPN — short for 'virtual private network' — works at a different level entirely. Instead of forgetting things on your device, it scrambles the connection between your device and the internet, sending it through the VPN company's server. Think of it as a sealed tunnel: the people who run the roads around it can see there is a tunnel, but not what is traveling through it.

What it hides, and from whom

Two things. First, it hides the content of your activity from your internet provider and from anyone sharing your local network — which is why a VPN is genuinely worthwhile on public Wi-Fi at a coffee shop, hotel or airport, where you do not know who else is watching. Second, it hides your device's address from the websites you

visit; they see the VPN's address instead of your real one, which also makes it look as if you are somewhere else.

What it does not hide

A VPN does not clear your browser history, and it does not block ads. It does not make you anonymous: websites can still recognize you if you log into your accounts, and there are subtler tracking methods it does not stop. And crucially, while it hides your traffic from your internet provider, the VPN company itself can see it — so you are trusting them instead. Choose a reputable, paid provider with a clear privacy policy; be wary of 'free' VPNs, which often make their money from your data.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The clearest reason for an ordinary person to use a VPN is public Wi-Fi. On your own home network you already trust your provider as much as you are going to; it is the strange networks away from home where a VPN earns its keep.

TOOL THREE

4 An Ad Blocker

A cleaner page, and fewer trackers.

An ad blocker is a small addition to your browser that stops ads from loading. As a page tries to assemble itself — pulling in text, pictures, and the advertisements — the ad blocker intercepts the requests for the ads and the tracking bits and refuses them. The page comes up cleaner, faster, and with far fewer of the little trackers that follow you around.

What it hides, and from whom

It hides you from many of the advertising trackers that websites carry — the ones that note what you looked at so the same product can chase you across other sites. As a bonus, blocking all that clutter makes pages load faster and look far less cluttered, which is reason enough for many people to use one.

What it does not hide

An ad blocker does not scramble your traffic or hide your address the way a VPN does, and it does not clear your history. It works only inside the browser, on the pages you view. It is about a cleaner, less-tracked web experience, not about network privacy.

GOOD TO KNOW

A good, reputable ad blocker is one of the most quietly worthwhile things you can add to a browser, especially for someone who finds the modern web overwhelming — fewer flashing ads, fewer traps to misclick, and fewer trackers. Stick to well-known names and install them only from your browser's official add-on store.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

SIDE BY SIDE

5 The Three at a Glance

One table that sorts out the confusion.

Lined up together, the three tools stop overlapping in the mind. Each works at a different place and hides a different thing.

Tool	Works where	Hides what, from whom
Private browsing	On your device	Your history, from others using the same device
VPN	On the network	Your traffic, from your provider and local network

Ad blocker	In the browser	Ads and many trackers, from the pages you visit

Read down the 'hides what' column and the division of labor is plain. If your worry is a family member seeing your search history, private browsing is the answer. If your worry is strangers on the café Wi-Fi, a VPN. If your worry is ads chasing you and cluttering pages, an ad blocker. They are not competitors; they are three different tools for three different jobs, and you can use all three at once if you like.

WATCH OUT

One technical caution if you combine them: do not run two VPN-style tools at the same time. Some ad blockers work by acting like a VPN on your device, and your phone or computer can only run one VPN connection at a time — so a VPN and that kind of ad blocker may fight. A normal in-browser ad blocker and a VPN get along fine.

THE REAL LIMIT

6 None of These Is a Force Field

The honest truth that matters most.

It would be lovely if flipping on one of these made you safe and invisible. None of them does, and believing otherwise is itself a risk — because a false sense of security makes people careless. Here is the plain reality to carry with you.

- None of the three makes you anonymous. Logging into your accounts identifies you no matter what is running.
- None of them protects you from scams, bad links, or giving your information to a fraudster — those defeat every tool.
- None of them removes a virus or stops one you invite in by clicking something you shouldn't.
- Each hides its one thing well and nothing more — which is plenty, as long as you know the edges.

The tools are worth using for exactly what they do. But the single most powerful privacy and safety tool is still the one between your ears: thinking twice before you

click, declining to hand over information to anyone who contacted you first, and keeping your accounts well guarded. The software helps; your judgment protects.

QUESTIONS

7 Plain Questions and Answers

The things people ask most.

"If I use incognito, can my internet provider still see me?"

Yes. Private browsing only keeps the record off your own device. Your internet provider, and the websites you visit, can still see your activity. To hide from your provider, you would need a VPN — a different tool for a different layer.

"Do I really need a VPN at home?"

For most people, not especially — at home you already trust your internet provider about as much as you are going to, and a VPN mainly shifts that trust to the VPN company. Where a VPN clearly helps is on public Wi-Fi away from home, where strangers might be watching the network.

"Will an ad blocker break the websites I use?"

Occasionally a site asks you to turn it off, or a piece of a page does not load. Good ad blockers let you switch them off for a single site with one click. For the few sites that need it, you allow them; everywhere else you enjoy the cleaner web.

"Is a 'free' VPN fine?"

Be careful. Running a VPN costs the company money, so a free one often earns its keep another way — frequently by collecting and selling the very data you hoped to protect. For a VPN, a reputable paid service with a clear no-logging policy is the safer choice.

WRAP UP

8 Three Tools, Three Jobs

Match the tool to what you actually care about.

Private browsing, a VPN, and an ad blocker are easy to confuse and simple to tell apart once you see where each one works. Private browsing keeps your history off your own device, hiding it from others who use that device. A VPN scrambles your traffic across the network, hiding it from your internet provider and the local Wi-Fi — most valuable when you are out in public.

An ad blocker strips ads and trackers from the pages you load, for a cleaner, less-watched web. Use whichever matches the worry in front of you, or all three — but remember the honest limit that binds them all: none makes you anonymous, and none replaces the good judgment that keeps you truly safe.

- Private browsing: history off your device, from others who use it.
- VPN: your traffic hidden on the network — best on public Wi-Fi.
- Ad blocker: ads and trackers stripped from the pages you visit.
- Don't run two VPN-style tools at once; a browser ad blocker plus a VPN is fine.
- None makes you anonymous — your own caution is the real protection.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you would like help setting up the right tool for what you actually worry about — a good ad blocker to calm down a cluttered browser, a trustworthy VPN for when you travel, or just getting comfortable with private browsing — I am glad to sort it out with you, and to be plain about what each one will and won't do.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this…
Hide history from housemates	Private browsing — it clears local history on your device
Hide activity from your internet provider	A VPN — it scrambles your traffic across the network
Stop ads and many trackers	An ad blocker — it strips them out as pages load
Know the limit	None of these makes you anonymous or fully safe
Stay safe from scams	No tool replaces caution; don't click bad links
Avoid conflicts	Don't run two VPN-style tools at once
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

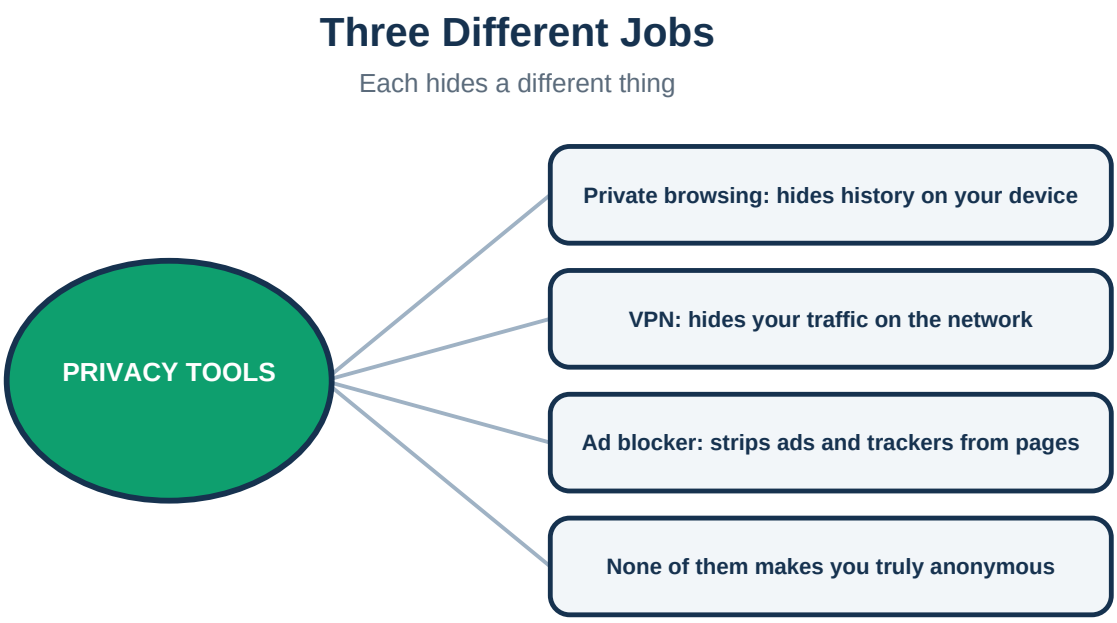


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

Picking the Right One

Match tool to worry

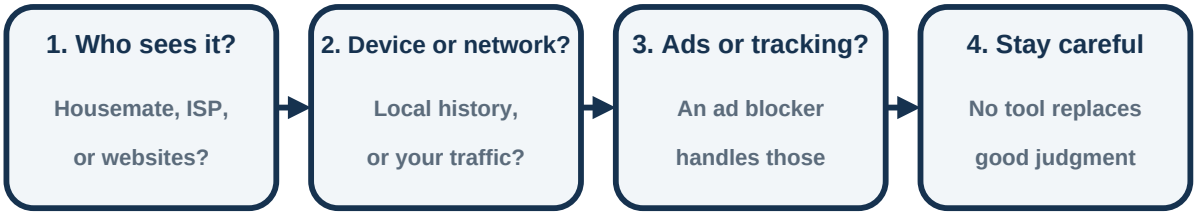


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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