BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Requesting and Deleting Your Data — A Plain-English Guide

How to see what companies keep about you, and how to ask them to delete it

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea, if you only have a minute.

Companies collect personal information about you — your name, your emails, your photos, where you have been, what you have bought. The good news is that you can ask to see a copy of it, and in a growing number of places you can ask them to delete it. There are two separate requests, and it helps to keep them straight: asking to see your data, and asking to delete it.

- Seeing it is the gentle first move. The big accounts — Google, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook — all have a built-in tool that packages up a copy and sends you a download link.
- Deleting it means telling a company to erase what it holds. You usually do this through the company's privacy page or by email.
- The law is on your side more than it used to be. As of late 2026, around two dozen US states have privacy laws giving residents the right to see, correct, and delete their data.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> You do not have to do this all at once, and you do not have to be technical. Start by downloading a copy from one account you use. That single, low-risk step shows you how the process feels before you ask anyone to delete anything.

WHAT YOUR DATA IS

2 What 'Your Data' Actually Means

The information you are asking about, in plain terms.

Before you request anything, it helps to picture what you are requesting. 'Your personal data' is simply the information a company has tied to you. Some of it you handed over knowingly. A lot of it was gathered quietly as you went about your day.

- Things you gave them: your name, address, phone number, email, photos, documents, messages, and the posts you wrote.
- Things they recorded: what you searched for, which pages and videos you looked at, what you bought, and when you logged in.
- Things they worked out: where you tend to go, what you seem interested in, and guesses about your age or household used to aim advertising.

Two kinds of companies hold your data. The first are companies you deal with directly — your email provider, your bank, the stores where you have an account. The second are companies you have never heard of, called data brokers, whose whole business is collecting and selling information about people. Both are covered later in this guide, because you ask them in different ways.

> *Most folks are surprised by two things: how much is kept, and how ordinary most of it is. It is rarely a secret file. It is mostly a very long, very dull list of what you did online.*

SEE IT VS DELETE IT

3 Two Different Requests: See It or Delete It

They sound similar, but they are not the same thing.

The single most useful thing to understand is that there are two separate requests, and mixing them up causes most of the confusion. One asks a company to show you a copy. The other asks it to erase what it holds. You can do one without the other.

	Request a copy (access)	Request deletion
What you ask	Send me what you have	Erase what you have
What you get back	A download or report	Confirmation it is gone
Can you undo it	Nothing to undo	Usually permanent

Good first step	Yes, very safe	Do this once you have a copy
Affects your account	No	May close or empty it

A sensible order for most people is to request a copy first, keep that copy somewhere safe, and only then decide whether you also want deletion. That way nothing you care about disappears before you have saved it.

WATCH OUT

Deletion is usually permanent, and it can do more than you expect. Deleting your data from a service can close the account, erase saved photos and messages, or end a subscription. Read what the company says a deletion will remove before you confirm it.

DOWNLOAD A COPY

4 Downloading a Copy From the Big Accounts

Every major account has a built-in tool for this.

The easiest place to start is an account you already use. Google, Apple, Microsoft, and Facebook each give you a tool that gathers a copy of your data and sends you a link to download it. You do not email anyone or fill out a legal form — you click through a few screens and wait for the file.

Account	Where the tool lives	Rough wait
Google	takeout.google.com (Download your data)	Often same day; can be longer
Apple	privacy.apple.com (obtain a copy of your data)	Up to about seven days
Microsoft	The Microsoft account privacy dashboard	Varies by amount

Facebook	Settings, then 'Download your information'	Can take up to about an hour

Doing it with Google, as an example

1. Open takeout.google.com in your web browser and sign in to your Google account.
2. You will see a list of Google products with your data already selected. Leave it all selected, or uncheck the ones you do not want.
3. Choose to receive a download link by email, then start the export.
4. Wait for Google's email. Many people get it the same day, though it can take longer for large accounts.
5. Open the link and save the file somewhere you will remember. The link stays active for a limited time, so download it promptly.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Downloading a copy does not delete anything. Google's own help says the export leaves your data in place on its servers. So this step is completely safe — you are only asking for a copy, not changing or removing a thing.

WHAT THE LAW GIVES YOU

5 The Rights the Law Gives You

Stated plainly, and honestly about the patchwork.

You may wonder whether a company has to honor your request. The honest answer as of late 2026 is: it depends on where you live, but the trend has been strongly in your favor. There is still no single nationwide privacy law in the United States, so your rights come from the state you live in.

By late 2026, around two dozen US states have passed broad consumer privacy laws. California was the first and is the best known, through the laws usually called the CCPA and CPRA. Ohio, where I am, does not have one of these broad laws on the books as of this writing — but that does not leave you helpless, because the big national companies generally offer the same tools to everyone rather than build fifty different versions.

Right	What it lets you do
Access	Ask to see a copy of what they hold
Deletion	Ask them to erase what they hold
Correction	Ask them to fix information that is wrong
Portability	Get your data in a form you can take elsewhere
Opt out of selling	Tell them not to sell or share your data

GOOD TO KNOW

Even if your state has no privacy law, it is worth asking anyway. Major companies tend to apply their privacy tools nationwide, and a polite request often gets honored regardless of where you live. The worst a company can say is no.

WATCH OUT

Privacy laws, the states that have them, and the exact rights change often. Treat any specific claim in this guide as true as of late 2026 and worth a fresh check. When in doubt, look at the company's own privacy page, which must spell out what it offers.

FINDING THE LINK

6 Finding the Privacy Link and Sending a Request

For companies without a one-click tool.

Smaller companies — a store, a service, a website you signed up with once — may not have a tidy download button. For those, you find the privacy page and send a plain request. It is less polished but just as valid.

1. Scroll to the very bottom of the company's website. Look for a link that says 'Privacy,' 'Privacy Policy,' 'Your Privacy Choices,' or 'Do Not Sell or Share My Information.'

2. On that page, look for how to make a request — often a form, a button, or an email address set aside for privacy requests.
3. If there is only an email address, write a short, clear message stating what you want.
4. Send it, and save a copy of what you sent along with the date.
5. Expect to prove you are really you before they act — see the chapter on verification.

What a plain request can say

You do not need legal language. A request to delete might read: 'I am asking you to delete the personal information you hold about me, and to confirm when it is done. My account is under this name and email address.' A request for a copy is the same idea, asking them to send what they have instead.

TIP

Keep it short and specific, and send it from the email address the company has on file for you. That makes it far easier for them to find your record and confirm it is really you asking.

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.

DATA BROKERS

7 Data Brokers and the California Delete Tool

The companies you never signed up with.

Data brokers are companies whose business is collecting information about people and selling it. You never signed up with them, which is exactly why they are hard to deal with one by one. California built a tool to help, and it is worth understanding even if you live elsewhere, because it shows where things are heading.

Under California's law often called the Delete Act, the state's privacy agency runs a single tool — its Delete Request and Opt-Out Platform, or DROP — where a California resident can make one request that registered data brokers must honor. Consumers have been able to submit requests since the start of 2026, and brokers were required to begin processing them in the second half of 2026.

- It is for California residents. If you live in California, one request through the state tool reaches the brokers on its registry.
- It covers registered data brokers, not every company and not the big accounts you use directly.
- Other states do not have this one-stop tool as of late 2026, though the idea is spreading.

GOOD TO KNOW

If you do not live in California, you can still ask individual data brokers to remove you — most are required to offer an opt-out — but it is a slower, broker-by-broker job. Some people pay a service to do this chasing for them; that is a convenience, not a necessity.

WATCH OUT

Be careful which removal service you trust. A legitimate one explains exactly what it does and never needs your passwords or your Social Security number to opt you out. If a site asks for sensitive details to 'remove' you, step back.

THE BROWSER SIGNAL

8 The Browser Setting That Asks for You

One switch that speaks on every site you visit.

There is a quiet, automatic way to tell websites not to sell or share your information, without filling out a form on each one. It is a setting called Global Privacy Control, and when your browser sends it, participating websites are meant to treat it as you opting out.

In California, businesses that sell or share data online have been required to honor this signal, and a California law signed in 2025 will require web browsers themselves to offer the setting starting in 2027. A few other states treat the signal as a valid opt-out as well.

How it works for you

- You turn it on once, in your browser's privacy settings or by adding a small privacy add-on that sends the signal.
- From then on, it speaks for you automatically on every site you visit, with nothing more to click.
- Where the law requires it, a site should show that your opt-out was honored.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> This signal only tells sites not to sell or share your data going forward. It does not delete what they already hold. Think of it as closing a tap, not emptying the bucket — useful alongside the deletion requests in this guide, not a replacement for them.

CLOSING ACCOUNTS

9 Deleting an Account You No Longer Use

The old logins quietly holding your data.

Some of the data out there sits in accounts you forgot you had — an old shopping site, a service you tried once, a social account you stopped using. Closing those accounts is one of the cleaner ways to reduce what is held about you, because deleting the account usually deletes the data with it.

1. Sign in to the account. If you cannot remember the password, use the 'forgot password' link to reset it first.
2. Look in Settings for 'Delete account,' 'Close account,' or 'Delete my data.' It is often tucked near the bottom.
3. Download any copy you want to keep before you confirm — photos, receipts, anything you would miss.
4. Confirm the deletion. Many services send a final email or wait a short grace period before erasing everything.

5. Save the confirmation so you have a record it was done.

GOOD TO KNOW

A password manager, or even the saved-passwords list in your browser, is a handy map of accounts you forgot you had. Scrolling that list often turns up two or three logins worth closing.

WATCH OUT

Closing an email account is a special case. Other accounts may rely on that email address to reset their passwords, so close the email last, after you have moved anything important to a new address.

FIX AND LIMIT

10

Correcting Mistakes and Stopping the Sharing

Two gentler requests, short of deleting everything.

Deletion is not the only tool. Sometimes what you want is smaller: to fix information that is simply wrong, or to keep an account open but stop the company from selling your data to others. Both are ordinary requests, and both are less drastic than erasing everything.

Correcting wrong information

If a company has the wrong address, an old phone number, or a mistaken detail, you can ask it to correct the record. This matters most with data brokers, where a wrong detail can follow you from one place to another. Use the same privacy page you would use for any request, and ask for a correction rather than a deletion.

Stopping the sharing without deleting

If you like a service and want to keep using it, but you do not want your information sold or shared, look for the 'Do Not Sell or Share My Information' or 'Your Privacy Choices' link. That opts you out of the selling while leaving your account and its usefulness intact.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Think of these as settings on a dial rather than an on-off switch. You can keep an account, fix what is wrong in it, and still tell the company to stop passing your details around — all without losing the service you actually wanted.

READING THE REPLY

11 Reading the Reply and Keeping a Record

What comes back, and what to hold onto.

After you send a request, a few things usually happen. First, the company asks you to prove you are really you — often by confirming something only you would know, or clicking a link sent to your email. This verification step protects you; it stops a stranger from requesting your data. Then, within a period set by law in many states, it replies.

Read the reply carefully. A good response tells you plainly what was done: what was deleted, what was kept, and why anything was kept. Companies are sometimes allowed to hold on to certain records — for example, information they need to keep for tax or legal reasons — so 'we kept some records we are required to keep' is a normal and legitimate answer, not a brush-off.

A simple record is enough

- The date you sent the request and who you sent it to.
- What you asked for — a copy, a deletion, a correction, or an opt-out.
- The reply you got back, and the date it arrived.
- Any confirmation number or email they gave you.

> **TIP**
>
> A single note on your computer, or one folder in your email, is plenty. If you ever have to follow up or remind a company, having the original date and wording in front of you turns a frustrating call into a short one.

A SENSIBLE PLAN

12 Doing a Few at Once Without the Overwhelm

How to make real progress in an afternoon.

It is easy to feel that your information is scattered across a thousand companies and the task is hopeless. It is not. A little goes a long way, and the point is not to reach zero — it is to clear the ones that matter to you. Here is the order I suggest.

1. Download a copy from the one or two big accounts you use most, so you have your own records safe.
2. Close two or three old accounts you no longer use, using your saved passwords as a map.
3. Turn on the browser privacy signal once, so it works quietly from then on.
4. If you live in a state with a data-broker tool, make that one request.
5. Put a light yearly reminder on the calendar to repeat the parts that matter.

> *Think of each request as closing one more tap, not as draining the whole tub at once. Do a handful that matter to you, and you have done the lion's share of the good.*

GOOD TO KNOW

After an initial afternoon, a light yearly check is plenty for most people. New accounts accumulate slowly, so a once-a-year pass keeps things tidy without it becoming a chore.

QUESTIONS AND HELP

13 Common Questions — and How I Can Help

The things people ask me most.

Will deleting my data close my account?

Often, yes. For many services, deleting your data and closing the account are the same thing. If you want to keep using the service, ask to stop the selling or sharing instead, and only delete the account when you are truly done with it.

Do companies really have to do this?

It depends on your state's law, and around two dozen states have one as of late 2026. But in practice the big national companies offer these tools to everyone, so it is almost always worth asking regardless of where you live.

Is it safe to download all my data?

Yes. Asking for a copy does not delete or change anything. The only caution is to save the downloaded file somewhere private, since it contains your personal information by design.

Do I need to pay a service to do this?

No. Every step in this guide you can do yourself for free. Paid services that chase down data brokers are a convenience for people who want it handled, not a requirement, and a trustworthy one never needs your passwords.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If this feels like a lot, it does not have to be done alone. I am glad to sit with you and download a copy from your main accounts, close the old logins you no longer use, turn on the browser privacy setting, and send a clear request or two — so seeing and tidying your data feels like a calm afternoon's project rather than something to dread.

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
Download your Google data	Go to takeout.google.com, pick what to include, get an emailed link
Get a copy from Apple	Sign in at privacy.apple.com and choose to obtain a copy of your data
Download Facebook data	Open Settings, then 'Download your information'
Ask a company to delete	Find its privacy page and use its 'delete my data' form or email
Stop data brokers (California)	Use the state's DROP tool at the privacy agency's site
Keep a record	Save the date, what you asked, and the company's reply
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

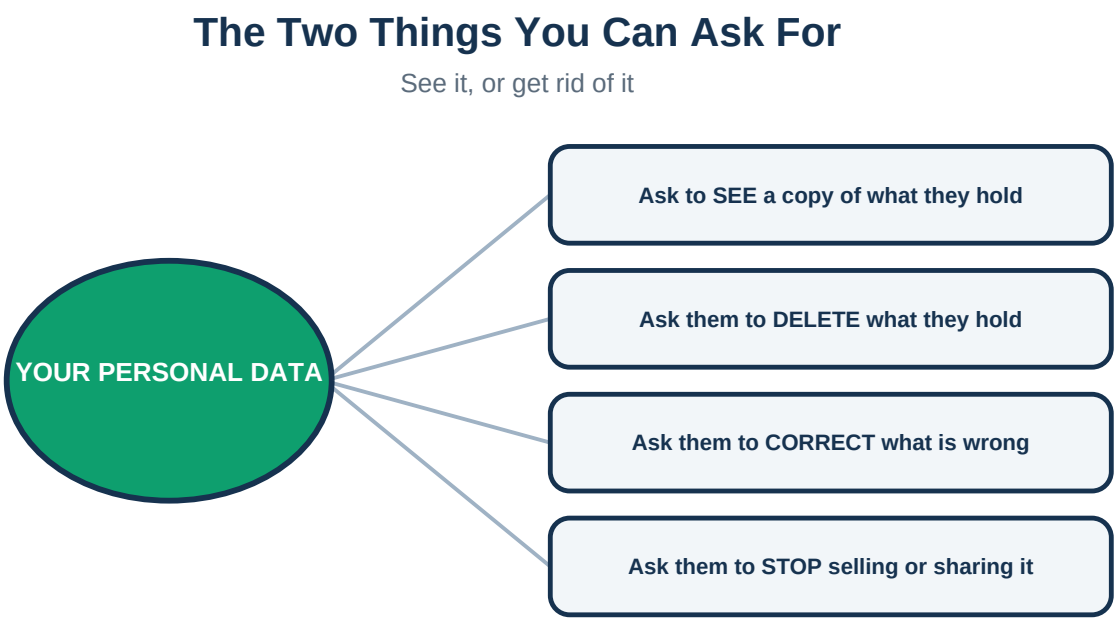


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

How a Request Usually Goes

Calm and predictable



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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