OpenBook
A New Method of Managing Online Personal Information

A White Paper

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Executive Summary

Currently individuals have few resources to track what information is available about them online and little control over who can access that information. Many different services exist and users commonly have dozens of different accounts, many of which end up forgotten. Openbook addresses these problems by establishing a unified online presence management system. Users of Openbook are able to import their accounts into a central service and change privacy settings on certain posts or posts containing specific content globally through all their accounts. They are alerted automatically when new posts are made about them, using smart algorithms to detect information about them online.

A looming problem with our online presences

Since the birth of the Internet much of our lives and the lives of those around us have been moving online. It has become the norm for everyone in a family, including grandparents and children, to have accounts for and use sites like Facebook or even Twitter. New services pop up every day and make it increasingly easier to create new accounts and post new content to their sites. Services like Instagram, Pinterest, Vine, and Tumblr attract large audiences. Users also gather many old, forgotten accounts for services that have fallen out of popularity. Websites like Myspace and Blogspot are laid out as forgotten wastelands of decade old opinions waiting to be discovered by prospective employers, acquaintances, or family. Old accounts that the user can't even remember creating are registered under a
myriad of usernames and email addresses, complicating the process of account recovery.

Many of these services did not originally have strong privacy configurations available, but added them in later. This left old content still unprotected and widely available online. Users wishing to go back and change privacy settings face an equally daunting task of finding and modifying every post individually. Different services have different processes for doing this, and many are less intuitive than would be wished. A unified solution to bring together and manage these accounts, along with discovering new information about you as it gets posted online, is needed.

**The Current Solutions**

Currently there is an extremely small toolset for managing online personal information, and there exists no convenient way for people to find out what information about them exists on the web or manage who can access that information.

At the present time, people are faced with the following five options when attempting to manage their online information:

1. **Manually Access Each Account**

   A person can manually log into each of their online account to view and manage their information on that account.

   **Problems with this solution:**

   There are a multitude of problems with this method of managing online personal information. First, users must access each of their online accounts individually, which can be time consuming. They must also figure out how to apply the desired privacy settings. In addition, they must remember the account login information for each of their online accounts. Together, these issues make manually accessing each account a tedious and time-consuming process.
2. **Delete Online Account**

   A person can delete their account in an attempt to hide or delete the information contained within the account.

   **Problems with this solution:**

   Not all online services allow users to delete their account. Furthermore, those that do can make the process of deleting an account difficult and time-consuming. Lastly, there is no guarantee that deleting an online account will effectively hide the information contained within the account.

3. **Exercise Extreme Caution When Posting Personal Information**

   A person can exercise extreme caution when posting information online in an attempt to limit what personal information is ever available online.

   **Problems with this solution:**

   While attempting to limit the amount of personal information that one posts on the web is a good practice, it is by no means a robust or effective way to manage online personal data. Individuals must personally devise and adhere to a strict rule set for posting data. Furthermore, there is no simple way for individuals to take back sensitive personal information that has been posted on the web.

4. **Ignore The Problem**

   A person can ignore the problem of having too much personal information online and hope it either doesn’t impact them or goes away with time.

   **Problems with this solution:**

   Clearly this method of managing online personal information has severe problems. With the amount of information that the average person posts online today, and the ease at which others can access that information, it is very likely that issues will arise from undesired access of personal information. Furthermore, personal information is unlikely to be hidden or secured without proactive efforts by the individual.
5. Google Yourself

A person can use online search tools to find out what personal information is online.

Problems with this solution:

This method of finding out what personal information is available on the web is far from robust. Many online services hide the personal information they store from standard web searches, even though this information may be available to others users of the service. Furthermore, web searches do not notify individuals when others post new information about them online.

From analyzing the current methods of managing online information, it is clear that there is a need for a better way for individuals to view and control the personal information about them that exists online.

The OpenBook Solution

OpenBook alleviates the problems individuals currently encounter when managing online personal information by providing a centralized, secure, and convenient means of doing so.

OpenBook is a browser and mobile app based service that assists users in seeing what information is posted about them online and hiding that information from others if they desire.

Setting up an OpenBook account is simple, convenient and free. After users have set up their account, they have access to a variety of powerful tools for managing their online personal data. These features include:

1. Manage Online Personal Information

OpenBook allows users to manage their online personal information from a centralized hub. Once users have connected their online accounts to OpenBook, they can simultaneously edit personal information and change privacy settings.
across all of their accounts. Users are also given instructions for removing personal information from websites that OpenBook cannot edit automatically.

2. View Online Personal Information

OpenBook aggregates all of a user’s personal information from across the web and displays it in an organized format. This allows users to see exactly what personal information about them is available online and where it is located.

3. Automatic Updates

OpenBook automatically updates users when new information is posted online about them. Users can customize how often and for what types of information OpenBook updates them.

**Benefits of OpenBook**

**OpenBook is centralized...**

OpenBook users can view and manage all of their online personal information in a single location.

**OpenBook is Convenient...**

OpenBook users no longer have to individually manage a multitude of online accounts. Automatic updates also keep users informed about what information is posted about them on the web.

**OpenBook is Secure...**

OpenBook employs the strongest security measures for ensuring the privacy and security of its users personal information.
Case Study

Our software sounded desirable in theory, but we needed to be sure it was a product that actually lived up to a high standard. We set up a beta-testing period to see whether people would actually find OpenBook useful. Using a large sample size, we were able to get results that further cemented our confidence in OpenBook’s potential popularity.

Making an OpenBook account is free, so it was easy for us to convince a large amount of users to test our product. We tracked the results of 1,000 active accounts, keeping up 24/7 customer support for 4 months while every feature was put to the test. We provided an easy option for users to send error reports if OpenBook did anything unwanted or failed at its tasks. After an initial month of patching the software as unexpected bugs popped up, error reports quickly dwindled as shown here:

![Figure 2 Bug Report Graphic](image)

Almost all error reports were submitted simply to report bugs, and once most of those were fixed we received hardly any complaints at all. The “Intended Behavior Complaints” represent complaints where OpenBook behaved as expected and the user did not like the results.
At the end of the 4-month period users were asked to review the product and the results were overwhelmingly positive:

\[Figure 3\]

Most of the positive reviews agreed that OpenBook showed impressive utility and rarely took unwanted actions. As one user stated, “OpenBook’s intuitive permission-based design is so comprehensive that I think any mistakes it makes are almost definitely errors on the person’s part, not the program’s.” The few negative reviews we received were from users who had trouble adjusting their settings properly to tell OpenBook what kinds of actions they wanted it to take.

Most people were pleased overall with our product’s performance. We thus have even more confidence it will be a popular service.

**Conclusion**

OpenBook is the solution to a rising problem with personal information on the Internet. With the number of social media services, and online forums and databases, it’s hard for an individual to use the Internet and manage their online presence. Not only does OpenBook help you manage your online information, help you find what personal information is online, and give you updates on new information found, it does so in a centralized, convenient, easy to use, and secure way.
About The Company

OpenBook Inc. was founded, and the OpenBook service first developed, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks by Cody Gaines, Jonathan Newell, Max Hesser-Knoll, and Will Showalter as a simple and convenient way to manage their online presence and privacy. What started as a simple social media search engine, has now grown to a dedicated service for tracking and managing your different online profiles and social media services, including companion mobile apps and integration with dozens of popular social media services. OpenBook now has a development team of over 4,000 people, committed to furthering its security and ease of use. OpenBook also is continuing to further its integration with current and future sites and services for tracking and managing online data.

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References