EXTREME PRIVACY: WHAT IT TAKES TO DISAPPEAR

MICHAEL BAZZELL

FOURTH EDITION

Extreme Privacy

What It Takes to Disappear

Fourth edition

Michael Bazzell

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Due to the use of quotation marks to identify specific text to be used as search queries and data entry, the author has chosen to display the British rule of punctuation outside of quotes. This ensures that the quoted content is accurate for replication. To maintain consistency, this format is continued throughout the entire book.

The technology referenced in this book was edited and verified by a professional team for accuracy. Exact tutorials in reference to websites, software, and hardware configurations change rapidly. All tutorials in this book were confirmed accurate as of March 22, 2022. Readers may find slight discrepancies within the methods as technology changes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL BAZZELL

Michael Bazzell investigated computer crimes on behalf of the government for over 20 years. During the majority of that time, he was assigned to the FBI's Cyber Crimes Task Force where he focused on various online investigations and Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) collection. As an investigator and sworn federal officer through the U.S. Marshals Service, he was involved in numerous major criminal investigations including online child solicitation, child abduction, kidnapping, cold-case homicide, terrorist threats, and advanced computer intrusions. He has trained thousands of individuals in the use of his investigative techniques and privacy control strategies.

After leaving government work, he served as the technical advisor for the first season of the television hacker drama ***Mr. Robot***. His books ***Open Source Intelligence Techniques*** and ***Extreme Privacy*** are used by several government agencies as training manuals for intelligence gathering and privacy hardening. He now hosts the weekly ***Privacy, Security, and OSINT Show***, and assists individual clients in achieving ultimate privacy, both proactively and as a response to an undesired situation. More details about his services can be found at **IntelTechniques.com**.

Fourth Edition Preface

The previous (third) edition of this book was originally written in early 2021. Soon after publication, I declared that I was taking a break from writing, which I did. In 2022, I was asked to update this book, as it is required reading for numerous training courses and government academies. I never want stale or inaccurate information being presented within training programs, so I created this revision. In the previous editions, I only published a new version once I had at least 30% new material and 30% updated content. The recycled material was kept to a maximum of 40%. With this edition, I have deviated away from that rule. I estimate that 30% of the content here is new or updated with the remaining 70% repeated from the previous edition. Much of the third edition content was still applicable and only needed minor updates to reflect changes since 2021. If you have read the previous edition, you will find most of those overall strategies within this book. However, I have added many new privacy strategies which complement the original text in order to cater to those who always need accurate information. I also removed a lot of outdated content which was no longer applicable. I believe there is new value within this text. The majority of updates within this edition are in chapters 1, 2, 3, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 22. The other chapters possess minor updates throughout each.

The first two editions accepted the fact that most of my clients demand Apple products, iCloud accounts, overt payment methods, and easy communications. I accommodated this realization and tried to offer steps which could increase privacy while settling for inferior options. This is no longer the case. In this edition, I assume you want maximum privacy and security. Together, we will embrace Linux on our computers; possess mobile devices without embedded Apple or Google software; create masked payment options; sanitize our past public lives; never associate our names with our homes; and rely on completely encrypted communications from open-source projects. I have no regrets from my previous writings, as I believe they served a valuable purpose at the time. Today, we must take our privacy and security to another level. After all optimal solutions are presented, I still provide alternative options for those who do not want to commit to an extreme level of privacy and security. However, I always encourage you to push your comfort level and force yourself to make the best decisions.

I conclude most chapters with a "Typical Client Configuration", or summary page, which outlines the steps most commonly taken when a client needs the services discussed in that chapter. A valid criticism of previous editions was that I provided too many options without clear guidance of the best path toward privacy. While I can never navigate every reader through their own unique situations, I can summarize the typical strategies for most clients. I believe this may simplify the decisions required during your own application of the content. I also added a new final chapter within this edition outlining the chronology of an actual client's full privacy reboot.

Please consider the following technical note in regard to this book. I typically push my self-published titles through five rounds of editing. The fees associated with editing a book of this size (over 320,000 words) are substantial. This edition was put through only two rounds of editing, so I expect a few minor typos still exist. If you find any, consider reporting them to errors@inteltechniques.com. My team can correct anything for all future printings. The decision to restrict editing was mostly due to hard deadlines for courses, but book piracy also played a strong role. We have seen a drastic shift from most readers purchasing the book to the vast majority downloading illegal free PDF copies available a few weeks after the initial release. If you purchased this print edition, I sincerely thank you. You represent a shrinking part of society. If you downloaded this book from a shady site, please be careful. Many readers reported that poorly-scanned PDFs of the previous editions were infected with trackers and malicious code. Never download or open a document from any source which you do not fully trust. Please consider purchasing a legitimate copy for yourself or someone else. Sales of this book directly support the ad-free podcast which delivers updated content.

I have poured every tactic, method, and experience I have into this new edition. Please approach the content slowly and methodically. There is a lot to digest. This book was accurate as of March 2022. **If, or more likely when, you find techniques which no longer work, use the overall lessons from to modify your own strategies.** Once you develop an understanding of the content, you will be ready to adapt. I hope you find something valuable here which will protect you from a growing number of threats. I am truly excited to introduce a new level of privacy and security. ~MB

INTRODUCTION

EXTREME PRIVACY

Maslow's hierarchy of needs prioritizes our most fundamental requirements as basic physiological demands, physical safety, and then social belonging. Many have simplified this as food, shelter, and love. Most of my clients adapt this to anonymous purchasing options, a ghost address, and a clean alias. I should probably back up a bit here and explain some things about myself and my career. I spent over twenty years in government service. After eighteen years in law enforcement as an investigator for various agencies, I spent four years focused on extreme privacy strategies as a major part of my privately-held company and as a contractor in the intelligence community. During the majority of my career, I was a sworn task force officer with the FBI, where I focused on cyber-crime cases and creating a software application for automated Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) gathering. My time with the FBI made me realize how exposed we all were, and that privacy was dying.

In 2002, I developed a strong interest in privacy and eventually wrote a book titled ***Hiding from the Internet*** which helped people clean up their online lives and become more difficult to find. After working covertly with criminal hackers, I was concerned about a growing phenomenon called "doxing" which happened to many of my coworkers. Doxing is the act of publishing complete personal details about a person online. This usually includes full name, home address, telephone numbers, family members, date of birth, social security number, and employment details. Others can then use this information to wreak havoc on the person with prank calls, delivered packages, and occasionally personal visits. I did not want to ever be on the receiving end of this, so I took action to remove all publicly available details about me from the internet. I never expected it to become my occupation.

I began teaching large crowds about these techniques which went as far as completely disappearing from any public records and becoming "invisible". I was determined to perfect the art of personal privacy. My focus changed from removal of public information to intentional disinformation which caused confusion to anyone trying to stalk someone whom I was protecting. Eventually, I developed complete solutions to starting over with a new life that could not be connected to the previous. Often intense and extreme, my ideas were not always accepted by every potential client.

I eventually left government work as I wanted to commit to a completely private life and continue to help others disappear. I was extremely fortunate to be asked to help write the first season of a new television drama called ***Mr. Robot***. The idea was to make all of the hacking and technology realistic, which I believe we accomplished. The show received high accolades, including a Golden Globe award for best drama, which introduced many new opportunities for me with the press and online media. This led to additional conversations with A-List celebrities, producers, and other Hollywood moguls. When combined with my ten years of public speaking side-gigs to financial companies and other large corporations, I immediately had access to a huge audience of wealthy people with problems. Once my services were known within this circle, word-of-mouth kept me busier than I could have ever imagined. From nude photos being released on the internet to attempted abductions, I became known as the guy who "fixed" things. Today, my primary focus is on extreme privacy and completely disappearing from public records. Every week, someone contacts me with an urgent need to fall off radar. Something bad has usually happened, and there is a concern of physical safety. This is where my extreme antics are welcomed, and I execute a plan to make my clients invisible to anyone searching for them.

I will never share the exact details applied to my own privacy strategies, but I have executed numerous examples throughout this book toward my own life before attempting on others. I always try to fail at a new technique while practicing against my own personal information before attempting with any client. Sometimes, there is not time for this luxury, and I must pull the trigger on the fly and hope for the best. I have definitely made my share of mistakes and I have numerous regrets when it comes to the techniques used to achieve this lifestyle. You will

read about many of them here. There was no textbook for this and I had no one to consult with before trying to disappear. I was on my own.

Many clients do not need to erase their entire lives. Some just need help with a specific situation. Lately, the majority of people who contact me have had something negative posted about them to the internet and they want it removed. This can be very difficult as most search engines ignore these types of removal requests. Some people I cannot help. A recent client was arrested and his mugshot was plastered across numerous websites. I cannot always erase those, but I disclose some methods later in this book. A surprisingly high number of women contact me after a former lover posts pornographic videos to adult websites in attempt to shame them for leaving. These are fairly easy to remove when enough time exists to scour every source. Some clients present tricky situations such as defamatory comments on blogs and personal websites. These require a delicate touch, and most can be removed.

My most difficult clients are those whom I never meet. Occasionally, a very wealthy or extremely famous person will need my services. Most of these individuals meet directly with me and we start their privacy journey. However, some are too big to meet with me face-to-face. Instead, I meet with teams of lawyers which are skeptical of my methods. They then communicate with an assistant to the actual client who then later speaks directly to the client. Much is lost in translation, and I am asked to clarify my strategies. This generates a lot of confusion and misunderstandings. Worse, the execution of my plan is done incorrectly and therefore is not successful. After a few meetings, I am dismissed and I never hear anything from them again.

On one occasion, a famous movie actor reached out about the purchase of a new home and did not want to have his name associated with the paperwork. He wanted it to be a retreat off the radar of the tabloids. I was only allowed to meet with his personal assistant. She seemed very competent at orchestrating his life, but knew nothing about privacy. She unintentionally misspoke to the real estate attorney, which I was not allowed to meet, and the closing paperwork included a single mention of the celebrity's name. Within weeks, an aerial photo of the estate was in a tabloid identifying the new owner.

There are many clients with which I decline my services. After a few years of providing privacy consultation as a "hidden" service, news spread of the successes achieved with a handful of well-known clients. This resulted in a huge increase of strangers contacting me through my website about their own situations. Many were very honest about their true identities and even more candid about the scenarios with which they were seeking help. Others were very vague about everything and became concerned about me knowing too much about their situations.

One of these was an individual that went by the name "Nobody" through a throwaway email address. He asked if I could help him disappear to the point that no one in the United States could find him. He had a large amount of cash that he wanted to use to buy a house anonymously. He refused to provide his real name which is an absolute deal breaker. If I cannot vet a potential client through various internal verification procedures, I am not interested in helping. I had considered immediately declining his request, but I was too curious about him. Was he Tom Hanks? Does he operate a hedge fund? How did he get all the cash and what was he running from? I played along for a while and convinced him that he should install a secure communications application called Signal on his mobile device. Signal allows users to communicate securely with other Signal users by providing full end-to-end encryption for all voice, video, and text communications. This prevents anyone from intercepting the connection and even Signal employees cannot identify the content of the communication.

I was not interested in talking to him through Signal, but I was counting on him making a common mistake when he installed the application. Signal connects to your cellular telephone number by default when you install the service. You then give the number to other Signal contacts and begin talking securely. I did not ask him for his Signal number, because he would likely feel exposed by disclosing his actual cellular number, even if only used through Signal. Instead, I gave him my Signal number and told him to send me a verification text within the Signal application. My Signal number was a Google Voice number that I dedicated solely for use on Signal.

This way, no one could connect my Signal account with my real cellular account. The potential client sent the text, which arrived in my Signal application. It immediately revealed his true cellular number.

I provided this number to various telephone search services and collected the results. Within less than a minute, I possessed a true name, home address, email address, and Facebook page associated with his cellular number. It belonged to the girlfriend of a fugitive wanted by the U.S. Marshals for many serious crimes including molestation of children. This is the reason I vet everyone. If I were to assist a federal fugitive, I could be prosecuted myself. My gut said to simply stop communicating and walk away. I couldn't. I knew from the beginning that this was suspicious. The need to pay in cash and the desire to only disappear from anyone looking for him in the U.S. were red flags. After some brief conversation, I was positive he was the wanted pedophile fugitive. I told him that I could meet him in Los Angeles in a week. He should bring $5,000 cash for my retainer and have it in a Taco Bell paper sack. His girlfriend's previous home address was only an hour outside the city, so this seemed plausible for him to agree to the meeting. I picked a quiet location that would not have too many people around early in the morning on a Sunday. I told him I would be wearing a blue shirt and black jeans. I would have glasses and a trimmed beard. He volunteered that he would be in a rented BMW and wearing a red collared shirt with tan shorts. I then did something that may offend some readers. I immediately called a U.S. Marshal contact that I had made during a recent internet intelligence training that I had conducted in the Los Angeles area and let him take over.

To this day, I have no idea what happened on that Sunday morning. My guess is that an arrest was made, as that subject is no longer on the public fugitive list. Why the Taco Bell paper sack? It is a great way to identify the suspect in the case that multiple people fit the general description. Please know it is rare that I need to utilize this type of ruse in response to a solicitation by a potential client, but I refuse to have my services exploited by child predators. If it were a misdemeanor warrant for shoplifting food, I would have taken no action and you would not be reading this. However, with certain serious crimes there is a clear moral obligation to intercede. Also, it should be noted that when someone hires me to make them disappear, I need to learn most of their private details if I am going to effectively obfuscate them.

Other declined clients include those that I simply cannot help. Some have mental issues that have created unnecessary paranoia and a constant concern that they are being monitored. They often send me twenty-page emails that contain random thoughts that seem incoherent. I try to convince those people that they are likely not in any danger and should seek counseling to eliminate some of these stresses. Occasionally I follow-up, but rarely receive a response. Others are simply not ready to go the distance. They want to continue to use Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram while having an expectation of privacy during their new life. I do not believe that any of my clients can truly become invisible and still use social networks. Some of those who stay off the main social networks are still not ready to eliminate their online lives.

On one occasion, I helped a young woman remove revenge pornography from the internet. She had sent very intimate videos taken of herself with her telephone camera to a current lover with whom she would later end the relationship. He posted them online and I used various tactics to force removal. A month later, she sent similar videos to a new lover who posted them online during their relationship, and attempted to extort her after she left him. I removed everything, including cached copies on search engines. I encouraged her to stop sharing this sensitive content. I believe we should trust no one with nude photos under any scenario. Even if the person never intentionally shares the images, we must still rely on the integrity of the devices; privacy policies of the services; security of the software; and good intentions of any employees with access to the data. If any of these avenues fail to protect us, the internet will ensure the images are conveniently published and stay online forever.

My favorite clients are the people who are ready to start over. Relocation is mandatory and alias names will be used daily throughout the rest of their lives. They will never associate their true name with any purchase or location ever again. They are prepared to embrace the additional effort it will take to properly respond to daily requests for their personal details. A trip to a dentist, chiropractor, barber, hotel, restaurant, or Starbucks will never be the same. They will immediately realize the number of personal details which are collected about them every day, and the impact of divulging accurate information on their personal privacy. This requires a strong

desire to disappear and the discipline to maintain the lifestyle. They will be impossible to find if done right. This book is written for that type of person.

My previous books about privacy were mostly REACTIVE. I focused on ways to hide information, clean up an online presence, and sanitize public records to avoid unwanted exposure. This book is PROACTIVE. It is about starting over. It is the guide that I would give to any new client in an extreme situation. It leaves nothing out, and provides explicit details of every step I take to make someone completely disappear. Many readers are likely questioning the reasons someone would need to execute the exhaustive plans that I have created. Almost all of my clients fall into one of four categories.

The Wealthy Executive: This represents the majority of my work. After living a traditional life with their family's name attached to everything they do, something bad happens. Layoffs at the company launch death threats to the CEO or a scandal breaks out indicating that corruption rises all the way to the top. Whatever the situation, my client wants to disappear. They want a safe place for their family to stay while things get sorted. This is surprisingly difficult. Hotels want valid ID, and social engineering attempts by journalists and enemies quickly identify the location of the client. I will explain many ways that I secretly hide people temporarily and permanently.

The Celebrity: My famous clients usually have one of two problems. They either made a mistake and now need something cleaned up (such as nude photos, inappropriate tweets, or inaccurate articles), or they want to buy a new home that will not surface on tourist maps. I will present many pages within multiple chapters discussing the options for completely anonymous home purchases. It will not be easy, but it is possible.

The Government Employee: At least once a week, I am contacted by a police officer or other government employee that is in immediate danger. They are involved in a high-profile shooting, court case, or cartel investigation, and the spotlight is on. People are looking to cause problems and the client finds their home address on hundreds of public websites. It is too late to clean-up. It is time to move, and it is very important to be strategic about the names associated with any lodging.

The Victim: This is usually my most cooperative and eager client. It is also usually a woman. She finds the courage to leave a physically abusive relationship and she knows that her safety depends on her disappearing. I have had clients who were victims of attempted murder who know they must now live an anonymous life. This requires a long-term game plan, and each step of the execution must be perfect. Their life is relying on anonymity.

I am fortunate that I can now pick and choose the clients that truly need the help and will successfully execute the plans that I create. While I rarely meet new clients due to a series of fortunate events, and most come to me to "fix" something, the final result after I finish my work is usually positive. Some of my clients have had devastating events impact their lives, but they have moved on and are now happily invisible. It has not been all roses. I have made many mistakes and learned expensive lessons about my privacy strategies. Some of my less than optimal ideas have landed me in hot water, and even in physical police custody during one unfortunate event (which is not discussed here). I hope these lessons assist others with properly executing their own strategies and not replicating my mistakes.

Some will think that this book will hide them from the U.S. Marshals or prevent them from serving a pending prison sentence. It will not. I know the groups that will be in charge of hunting you. They are good. They will find you. Even fugitives who escape to the woods without any possessions get caught. This is not that type of book. This is for the increasing number of individuals that no longer want their home address on Google; data mining companies to build detailed profiles of them; or health insurance companies to snoop on their private purchases. They are tired of companies "listening" to their devices through metadata and questionable permissions. They simply want out of the system which allows data within their digital lives to determine how they are treated by large corporations and governments.

When I was a child, there was a single choice you could make which either made you private or public. You could specify that your telephone number be unlisted. This action removed you from the telephone book, for a small fee, and made you practically invisible. This is laughable today. The moment you deed your home in your name, it is public information on the internet. Did you start electricity services at your new rental home in your real name? Within days, data mining companies replicate these details; append your social networks and family members; neatly package your profile into a sellable product; and offer it to any new startup looking to target you with advertisements. It is a mess, and I believe we should take steps to stop this behavior.

The advice within this book is NOT to move to the woods and cease contact with everyone. It is quite the opposite. I believe that you can lead a normal life, including healthy relationships, without making personal details public. There will be a balance of enjoyable living and refusal to submit to the standard abuses of data collection. As you navigate through the book, there will be many times which you can choose the level of adoption. While I will always present the suggested extreme methods, there will be opportunities to slowly slide into privacy. **Please read the entire book before executing any strategies of your own.**

It is highly unlikely that you will need to completely disappear. Hopefully, you get through life without the requirement to hide. However, I ask you to consider all of the strategies presented here. While they may not all apply to you, there are many steps you can take to better protect your personal privacy and security. The book is written in chronological order of every step that I take with a new client requiring the full treatment. It is presented as if you are in immediate danger of losing your life, and people are trying to find you. It attempts to put you back into a normal life without the need to constantly look over your shoulder. Many of these tactics are extreme. You may laugh out loud a few times. Your family and friends may think you are crazy. However, if you ever need to disappear, you will be prepared.

The information shared in this book is based on real experiences with my actual clients. The stories are all true, with the exception of changed names, locations, and minor details in order to protect the privacy of those described. Every subject referenced in this book has given both verbal and written consent to appear in the content, and possesses an interest in helping others in similar situations. I have refused to share their true identities with anyone, including my publisher, legal advisors, and other clients. I take my clients' privacy very seriously.

I realize this is a thick book with an overwhelming amount of content. Please do not let that deter you from taking small steps toward achieving the level of privacy appropriate for you. **Privacy is a marathon, not a sprint.** Any actions taken help, and you should never expect to apply every principle within this book all at once. It has taken me over a decade to create a private and secure life appropriate for my own needs, and I am still learning every day. I still make mistakes and identify ways I can improve. Our individual privacy playbook is never complete.

Before we jump into actionable items, I present four very important warnings. First, things will change. The first four chapters of this book focus on technology. The exact steps taken during the writing of this book may need to be modified in order to match updated software and services. Use the overall methods as a guide and not the exact steps. You may need to research any application changes which have occurred since publication. I encourage you to confirm all of my suggestions online before execution. There may be better ways of doing things today. Some services may disappear. When that happens, consider subscribing to my free weekly podcast for updates.

Next, there is no perfect privacy playbook for everyone. You do not need to replicate every step I take on behalf of myself and clients. Please read through this entire book before establishing your own privacy protocols. You may identify a better privacy plan for yourself than the specific examples presented here. I only wish to present scenarios which have helped my clients and various opinions on how to best protect yourself. I encourage you to generate your own opinions as you read along. You may disagree with me at times, which is ideal. That means you are really thinking about how all of this applies to you. If everyone unconditionally agrees with every word I say, then I am probably not saying anything interesting. If we agree on everything, only one of us is needed.

Some readers may not be ready to tackle all of the overwhelming digital tasks which make our computers, mobile devices, and online accounts private and secure. You may want to focus on anonymous assets, trusts, aliases, and other tactics associated with the real world. It is absolutely fine to skip ahead in the book. I would rather a reader go to a chapter of interest right away instead of abandoning the book during the initial chapters about technology. We all have different needs. Make this book work best for you.

Finally, you will see the following statement a few times throughout this book. It was required by my legal team, but I agree with every word. **I am not an attorney. I am not YOUR attorney. You should not replicate anything I discuss in this book without first consulting an attorney. The following is not legal advice. It is not any type of advice. It is merely explicit examples of the actions I have taken to make myself and my clients more private. Your scenarios will be unique from mine and your privacy plan will require modification from mine. Seek professional legal advice.**

CHAPTER ONE
COMPUTERS

This chapter represents my first major deviation from the first two editions. In the past, I began with methods for establishing a ghost address because it was an easy step with an immediate feeling of gratification and success. I purposely procrastinated discussing computers in effort to appeal to those less technical than others. I now believe that establishing a secure and private computer is a priority before tackling any other topics. Since you will need a computer to complete most of the techniques mentioned throughout the book, let's all make sure we are safe and secure. I also begin here because of the abnormally high number of clients possessing compromised machines. Every week, someone contacts me because they suspect a former lover, coworker, employer, or other individual has infected their machine with malicious software configured to spy on their online activity. While some of these complaints are eventually unfounded, I have seen my share of computers sending intimate details to an unauthorized person. It can be impossible to achieve personal privacy if someone is capturing your screen every time you make a change. Therefore, we need a clean and secure computer untouched by anyone from our lives which may have bad intentions. It is not just the former romantic partner which could be a concern. It is the companies which make the devices we trust.

My first computer possessed DOS 6.22 as the operating system. There was no internet available to the masses and there was no concern of data collection by Microsoft. Today, Windows 11 pushes users to create an online account in order to access the operating system for which they have licensed. Once you load the system, Microsoft collects heaps of data about your usage and stores it indefinitely. This "telemetry" is advertised as a way to enhance your overall experience, but I find it creepy. I do not want Microsoft to collect a report about my computer habits.

Apple is no better. Some could argue that they collect even more intimate details from you as you conduct activities on your machine. They also demand an online account if you want to download their applications, and they use this as a unique data collection identifier. Did you download a podcast but only listen to the first five minutes? Apple knows this and stores it within your profile on their servers in California. Did you leave a review of an application or other Apple product? This is stored forever, associated with your account, and analyzed for potential future advertisement recommendations. You may think I am paranoid, and maybe I am. I will let you decide if this is a concern. Consider the following types of information Apple and Microsoft collect and store on their servers about you and your devices.

- Approximate location
- IP Address history
- Search history
- Typed text
- Programs downloaded
- Programs opened

This only represents the basics. If you have a microphone active on your device and did not disable the appropriate privacy settings, you could be sharing audio throughout the day. Previous editions of this book immediately focused on ways to harden Mac and Windows operating systems due to the large audiences relying on these platforms. This time, let's all become better internet citizens together. We will focus on Linux first, and only revisit best practices with Apple and Microsoft after I have exhausted all Linux considerations.

In 2018, I switched to Linux full-time, and now only use an Apple machine for production tasks (generating press-ready PDF files, recording training videos, and other tasks which are more difficult on Linux). My daily driver is a pure Debian Linux machine. However, that is not my recommendation for those new to Linux due to occasional driver and software difficulties. If you have a strong opinion of one flavor of Linux over another, I respect your choice and you likely do not need the following tutorial. If you believe Qubes OS is the most private operating system (it just may be) and you are willing to suffer through the initial learning curve, go for it! However, if you are new to Linux and desire a version which may provide an easy transition, I recommend Ubuntu.

I hear sighs from tech-savvy readers who disagree with my Ubuntu endorsement, but consider the following.

- Ubuntu allows easy access to software packages in a graphical interface.
- Ubuntu has some of the highest compatibility with existing computers.
- Ubuntu provides easy software update options.
- Ubuntu reflects a large portion of Linux users, and online support is abundant.
- Ubuntu has fewer driver issues than other systems when adding new hardware.
- Ubuntu has removed the controversial Amazon affiliate links in previous builds.
- Ubuntu's large user base makes us all a smaller needle in the Linux haystack.

Overall, I see a higher rate of long-term Linux adoption from my clients through Ubuntu than other options. Therefore, I believe it is a great place to start. **All of the Terminal commands within this chapter, along with any updates since publication, can be found on my website at inteltechniques.com/EP for easy copy and paste.** If you are using ANY version of Linux instead of Microsoft or Apple, you are probably achieving better privacy and security in regard to your digital life. Unlike Apple, Linux does not require an online user account in order to use core services and upgrade applications. Unlike Microsoft, Linux does not demand personal usage data. Unlike both commercial options, Linux is open-source, and the code is vetted by many professionals before each release. If you are interested in achieving extreme privacy, I hope you will consider Linux as your primary computer. The following tutorial will create a new Linux machine with slight modifications for privacy and security.

- Navigate to https://www.ubuntu.com/download/desktop and download the latest Long-Term Support (LTS) Desktop version. At the time of this writing, it was 20.04. By the time you read this, it should be 22.04 (April 2022) or 24.04 (April 2024). This will download a very large file with an extension of ISO.
- If desired, visit https://tutorials.ubuntu.com/tutorial/tutorial-how-to-verify-ubuntu and verify the download based on your current operating system. This is optional, but could be important. This will confirm that the version you downloaded has not been intercepted, potentially possessing undesired software. If this sounds paranoid to you, research the rare Linux Mint hack of 2016 when this exact scenario happened.
- Create a bootable USB device from the ISO file by installing **Balena Etcher** (www.balena.io/etcher). Launch the program, select the ISO, select your USB drive, and execute the "Flash" option.

You should now possess a USB device which is ready to install Ubuntu Linux onto a computer of your choice. If you have an old unused computer collecting dust, that is a great opportunity to try Ubuntu without committing heavily. If you only have your primary machine, you may be able to "dual-boot" both your current operating system and Ubuntu. There are numerous online guides for this. For our purposes, I will assume you are installing Ubuntu as a primary (and only) operating system directly to a machine.

I have successfully installed Ubuntu on practically every Windows and Mac machine I have possessed. If you are considering purchasing a new machine specifically for Linux, I highly recommend **System76** (system76.com). All of their laptops have the Intel Management Engine disabled. This tiny operating system within the firmware of the processor could potentially allow unrestricted, and unknown, remote access to your machine. There is much debate about the likelihood of this happening, but I welcome the paranoia. I use a System76 machine as my daily driver. This is not a paid endorsement, and I purchased the machine myself (through anonymous payment of course). The following will install Ubuntu Linux to your machine and harden the settings.

- Insert the Ubuntu USB device and power on the computer. If the Ubuntu install screen is not present, research the appropriate option to select a boot device for your computer. This is typically the F1, F2,

F10, delete, or escape key. Pressing these immediately after powering on should present an option to boot to USB or BIOS.

- On the Welcome screen, choose "Install Ubuntu" and select your language.
- Choose "Normal Installation" and check both download options under "Other".
- If you no longer need any data on the drive inside your computer, choose "Erase disk and install Ubuntu". This will destroy any data present, so please be careful.
- Click "Advanced features", select "Use LVM with the..." and choose the "Encrypt the new..." option. Click OK to proceed, then click "Install Now".
- Enter a secure password which you can remember and is not in use elsewhere.
- If you are overwriting a used computer, consider the "Overwrite empty disk space" option. This will delete all data on the drive, and could take a long time.
- Click "Install Now", "Continue", choose a location, and click "Continue".
- Provide a generic name such as "Laptop", and enter a secure password. This could be the same as the encryption password for convenience, or you could select a unique password for additional security. You will need both of these passwords every time you boot the computer. Most people use the same password.
- Confirm your selections, allow the installation to complete, and reboot.
- Provide your password(s), then click "Skip" on the welcome screen.
- Select "No, don't send system info", "Next", "Next", and "Done".
- If you receive a notice about updates, click "Install Now" and allow to reboot.

Note that these steps may appear slightly different on your version of the installation software. You should now possess an Ubuntu Linux installation with full disk encryption. This prevents someone from accessing your data even if they remove your hard drive. Right away, you are very private and secure, but I always make a few modifications before introducing Ubuntu to a client. The first three Terminal commands disable Ubuntu's crash reporting and usage statistics while the remaining steps harden your overall privacy and security. Click the nine dots (lower left) to open the "Applications" menu, scroll to "Terminal", open it and execute the following commands. You may be prompted for your password.

- sudo apt purge -y apport
- sudo apt remove -y popularity-contest
- sudo apt autoremove -y
- Launch "Settings" from the Applications Menu.
- Click "Notifications" and disable both options.
- Click "Privacy", then "File History & Trash", and disable any options.
- Click "Diagnostics", then change to "Never".
- Close all "Settings" windows.

Antivirus: This is optional, but an occasional scan for viruses is not a bad thing. Linux viruses are rare, but they do exist. You are more likely to identify viruses which target Windows machines. These could be attachments within email messages which are not a threat to your Linux installation, but should still be removed. The following commands within Terminal installs an open-source antivirus program called ClamAV.

- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install -y clamav clamav-daemon

You are now ready to update your antivirus database and conduct a scan. Type the following commands into Terminal to stop the service, update the database, and restart the service.

- sudo systemctl stop clamav-freshclam

- sudo freshclam
- sudo systemctl start clamav-freshclam

These commands download all virus definition updates and should be executed before each scan. We now have two options for a scan of our entire drive. The first scans your data and notifies you of potential viruses. However, it does not remove any files. I always execute this option first. The second command repeats the scan while deleting any infected files.

- clamscan -r -i /
- clamscan -r -i --remove=yes /

ClamAV may occasionally present a false-positive report of a virus. Do not panic. Research the file on the internet and identify the issues. If you receive reports of malicious files within email, simply delete those messages.

System Cleaner: I recommend BleachBit as my daily system cleaner. Type the following into Terminal to install the application.

- sudo apt install bleachbit

Clicking the nine dots in the lower left will present two BleachBit applications. The second icon executes the software with administrative privileges and is the option I choose. Upon first launch, click "Close" to accept default configuration. Select every option except the "Free disk space" feature. Click "Preview" to see a report of recommended cleaning. Click "Clean" to execute the process. I run this program at least once a week to remove unwanted files. **If you later install ProtonMail Bridge, be sure to deselect this option within BleachBit.** Otherwise, your email cache will need to be rebuilt every time.

You can customize the Ubuntu interface any way desired. I like to remove unnecessary icons from the favorites bar (left) by right-clicking each and selecting "Remove from Favorites". I then add more appropriate options as I install various programs. I also change the wallpaper and screen saver to a solid dark color. Ubuntu does not provide an easy way to do this, but the following two commands within terminal remove the background image and change the wallpaper to a neutral color.

- gsettings set org.gnome.desktop.background picture-uri ''
- gsettings set org.gnome.desktop.background primary-color 'rgb(66, 81, 100)'

Updates: It is vital to routinely update all installed applications. There are two ways to do this. You can launch the "Software Updater" program from the applications menu and accept the updates installation, or enter the following commands within Terminal. I confess I do both.

- sudo apt update
- sudo apt upgrade

Backups: Linux is private, secure, and stable, but bad things happen. Hard drives die and operating systems become corrupt. I create a backup of my home folder once per week. In the case of disaster, I can recreate my custom settings in a few minutes after installing a fresh copy of Ubuntu. Conduct the following within Ubuntu.

- Insert a USB drive into your computer.
- Open the applications menu and type "backups". Open the Backups application.
- Click "Storage Location" and choose "Local Folder".
- Click the "Choose Folder" button, select your USB drive, and click "OK".

You can now launch the Backups application at any time and click the "Back Up Now" button under the "Overview" tab to create a full backup of your home folder to your USB drive. As you continue to make modifications to Ubuntu, having this backup becomes more important.

Be aware that this backup is not encrypted by default. If you possess sensitive details within your home directory, you may want to consider your encryption options. Personally, I only use encrypted containers via VeraCrypt for anything sensitive (Chapter Three). Therefore, I create a large encrypted container on the external drive, mount the container before the backup, and backup the home folder to that container within the drive. This will all be explained soon.

You should now have a very stable, and very secure Linux operating system. The entire internal disk is encrypted, and you possess basic settings which will prevent most online attacks. Using Linux instead of Windows will dramatically decrease the likelihood of a virus impacting your usage. Many clients believe they cannot work in Linux because it does not offer some premium software applications. Some are surprised to discover that the vast majority of their usage is within a web browser, which they find faster in Linux than other options. Firefox is already installed and waiting. However, there is much more work to be done. Chapter Three outlines numerous services, applications, and overall habits which will help you stay private and secure while online. The basics are in place, which will ease the tutorials in later chapters.

While I hope you will consider replacing your primary computer with a Linux system, I am a realistic person. Linux is not for everyone, and I do not want to exclude any readers who want to stick with Apple or Microsoft products. While the protections can never be extreme, we can still harden our Mac and Windows computers in order to afford more privacy and security. The remaining pages of this chapter are devoted to those who are not yet ready to transition to Linux. Most of my clients are familiar with Mac products, and I believe they possess much better overall security than a Microsoft Windows system. Some clients are stuck in the Microsoft environment and insist on a Windows machine. In the next several pages, I will offer my recommendations for each of these options, and explain each step I take before handing a computer to a client. The only system I refuse to incorporate into a client's new personal digital life is a Google Chromebook. There is simply no way to achieve any real privacy within that operating system.

A recurring theme is that a new device is optimal instead of trying to sanitize an existing computer. The moment you connect any Apple or Microsoft computer, tablet, or smartphone to the internet, these companies collect information associated with the Apple ID or Microsoft account (name, address, email, credit card, etc.). These companies then append this record with the unique serial number of your device, all hardware details, and the IP address of your internet connection. They now have a nice dossier on you and your hardware. This information can be seen by employees, anyone with a court order requesting these details, or potentially through a data breach.

As you continue use of these products, companies store much more of your activity such as your email contacts, wireless networks, and dozens of additional metrics. The amount of data sent to Apple and Microsoft is staggering and they can absolutely connect your recycled devices to any new alias names created during registration. If you were to format your computer and start over with a brand new name, email, and home address, Apple and Microsoft could still see the unique hardware identifiers and have the ability to connect the user accounts together.

Aside from corporate invasions into our data, I consistently meet clients which have various keyloggers, malicious software, and monitoring applications intentionally installed on their devices by stalkers, former lovers, and other adversaries. **Because of this, I always demand that high-targeted clients receive all new computer equipment**. I will begin with the most common option I see lately, which is Apple computers.

New Apple Computer Configuration

Apple macOS devices are targeted by malicious online attacks much less often than Microsoft Windows, and are considerably more secure than Windows, especially with default settings. Most clients are already familiar with the Mac environment and comfortable with the operating system. The following is my mandatory list of configurations and modifications when issuing a new Apple computer to a client.

Apple ID: When first booting a new or reformatted macOS device, you will be prompted to provide an Apple ID, or create a new Apple ID account providing your name, physical address, and email address. You have the option to bypass this requirement, but you will be prohibited from using the App Store. This eliminates many software options and disables the ability to update and patch your App Store applications. However, an Apple ID is NOT required to download and install system updates. **I never attach an Apple ID to Apple computers**, and I encourage my clients to do the same. If you never associate an Apple ID to your device, Apple has no easy way to store any of the activity to a profile. It also prevents accidental iCloud activation. An Apple ID is required for iOS devices, but not macOS computers. We will install all of our applications later using a package manager called Brew.

FileVault: The next step I take is to apply full-disk encryption to any new Apple device. This process is extremely easy by opening the "System Preferences" application and selecting "Security & Privacy". Choose the "FileVault" option to see the current state of encryption on your device. By default, this is disabled. FileVault is a built-in full-disk encryption utility that uses AES-256 encryption. Enabling FileVault requires you to create a recovery key and gives you two options through which to do so. The recovery key is an emergency, 24-digit string of letters and numbers that can be used as a recovery option should you forget your password. The first option is to store the recovery key in your iCloud account, which is not advised. The second recovery option is the most secure. Your device will display the 24-digit series of letters and numbers. This code is not stored by Apple or in your iCloud account. I copy this key and paste it into my password manager, which is explained later. Alternatively, you could temporarily store it in a text file until your password manager is installed.

Once you have enabled FileVault's full-disk encryption, your system possesses an extremely important level of security. The entire contents of your computer's storage can only be read once your password has been entered upon initial login or after standby login. If I steal your device and attempt to extract your content via forensic process, I will only see unreadable data. By default, every computer's hard drive is ready to give up all of the secrets until you apply full-disk encryption.

While we are in the System Preferences, let's make a few more changes. Back in the "Privacy & Security" option under "General", change "Require password" to "Immediately". This will ensure that your laptop requires a password any time you shut and open the lid. Next, choose the "Firewall" option and enable it. Note that you may need to click the padlock in the lower left in order to make changes. The firewall blocks incoming connections to the computer. This is especially important if you use public networks.

You should now have an Apple device which offers full functionality with enhanced security. Apple does not know your identity and you have not provided any personal data through the Apple stock applications. I do not recommend use of the Apple Mail, Contacts, Calendar, iCloud, Reminders, Messages, Facetime, iTunes, News, Time Machine, or Siri applications. We will use more private and secure options later. We only need the core operating system from Apple for now.

Brew: The first application I install on any new macOS operating system is a package manager called Brew. This application is very beneficial when there is a need to install programs which would usually already be present on a Linux computer. It also simplifies installation of applications which would otherwise require manual download. Brew is easily my favorite software for Mac computers. The easiest way to install Brew is to visit the website brew.sh and copy and paste the following command into the Terminal application (Applications > Utilities > Terminal). After completion, you are ready to use Brew to install and update applications.

/bin/bash -c "$(curl -fsSL https://raw.githubusercontent.com/Homebrew/install/HEAD/install.sh)"

Antivirus: There is likely no need for anti-virus applications on an Apple device, especially if you practice safe browsing habits. I never recommend commercial anti-virus products for Mac. If you insist on antivirus being present, consider ClamAV, an open-source free solution which was explained previously for Linux. Many readers scoff at my recommendation for antivirus for Mac users. Consider the following.

- The use of ClamAV on Mac and Linux computers is more about preventing the spread of bad files to Windows users instead of protecting your own machine, but viruses do exist for non-Windows systems.
- Some readers work for government or private organizations which require possession of anti-virus software on computers per internal policy.
- Some readers conduct online investigations and must defend their work in court. I was once asked under oath whether I possessed and utilized antivirus software on my work computer. I was glad my answer was not "No". While you and I might understand the rarity of Mac and Linux viruses, the jury may not.

Brew happens to have a pre-configured version of ClamAV ready to go. After Brew is installed, type the following commands, hitting "Return" after each line, into the same Terminal application previously used. The first command disables Brew's analytics program, which relies on Google's services.

- brew analytics off
- brew install clamav
- sudo mkdir /usr/local/sbin
- sudo chown -R `whoami`:admin /usr/local/sbin
- brew link clamav
- cd /usr/local/etc/clamav/
- cp freshclam.conf.sample freshclam.conf
- sed -ie 's/^Example/#Example/g' freshclam.conf

These steps will install ClamAV; switch to the installation directory; make a copy of the configuration file; and then modify the configuration file to allow ClamAV to function. You are now ready to update your antivirus database and conduct a scan. Type the following commands into Terminal.

- freshclam -v
- clamscan -r -i /

The first option will download all virus definition updates, and should be executed before each scan. The second option conducts a scan of the entire computer, and will only prompt you with details of found viruses. While it may appear to be dormant, it is working, and will notify you upon completion. All of these commands must be exact. In order to assist with properly copying and pasting these commands, please use the digital versions on my website at **inteltechniques.com/EP**. ClamAV may occasionally present a false-positive report of a virus. Do not panic. Research the file on the internet and identify the issues. If you receive reports of malicious files within email, simply delete those messages. Note that the above scans only SEARCH for viruses, they do not REMOVE threats. If you would like to conduct a scan and automatically remove suspicious files, you must conduct a different command. Please note this could be dangerous, and could permanently remove necessary files. I always run a scan, research the threats found, and execute the following scan ONLY if I am confident the files should be removed.

- clamscan -i -r --remove=yes /

Antimalware: Windows users are likely familiar with the need for malware-scanning applications. This is not as necessary with macOS, but there are two malware detection applications which I highly recommend.

OverSight: This product presents a small umbrella icon in the upper right menu of your Mac. By default, it monitors for any application which attempts to receive input from sound or video devices. In other words, if a program surreptitiously enabled your microphone in order to capture a conversation, OverSight would display a notification. If an application enabled your webcam, OverSight would let you know. While OverSight is free, a paid alternative made by the same company as Little Snitch is called Micro Snitch. Both offer the same features. If you possess the latest version of macOS (Big Sur or newer), then you already have a similar option embedded into the operating system. A small red dot should appear in the upper-right portion of your screen when the microphone is active. This is a great feature, but I do not trust Apple to always apply this to their own products. OverSight can be installed with the following command within Terminal.

- brew install oversight

Onyx: If your Apple operating system is behaving strangely, Onyx may be able to correct the issue. This maintenance program should not be executed on a schedule, and should be reserved for situations of undesired behavior. On occasion, my fonts become corrupted and my menus become unreadable. Onyx fixes this. The following within Terminal installs Onyx.

- brew install onyx

VirtualBox: If a client will ever need to launch a Windows machine, VirtualBox is a free virtual machine software application. It is also valuable for testing other operating systems before committing within a designated computer. I explain my usage of virtual machines within Chapter Three. If you want to install it now, the following applies. At the time of this writing, VirtualBox does not support newer M1 Apple devices.

- brew install virtualbox

Updates: Similar to Linux, you should keep your Mac computer updated. The "Software Update" options within "System Preferences" will patch your operating system, but it does not update individual applications. Since we used Brew to install our optional software, the following commands will update Brew itself; update each application; cleanup any unnecessary cached files; and remove software no longer needed by your computer. I keep these commands digitally ready within my local notes application for easy copying and pasting, which is explained in Chapter Three.

- brew update
- brew upgrade
- brew cleanup -s
- brew autoremove

You should now possess a macOS computer which is stable and secure. There is still much more to be done, but you have the staples completed. In Chapter Three, we will tackle daily usage while maintaining privacy.

System Cleaner: While BleachBit is a great Linux and Windows system cleaner, it does not offer a native Mac option. CCleaner is available for Mac, but I do not trust the parent company. This leaves us without a reliable system cleaner for Mac computers. Fortunately, **Privacy.sexy** (privacy.sexy) has a solution. This site aids in the creation of a custom script which will clean your system based on your desired actions. Click the "MacOS" option and then navigate through the privacy and security categories, selecting the options you want to apply toward your system. The area to the right will populate the commands which clean the chosen areas. When finished, click the "Download" button at the bottom and the final script will be generated. Follow the directions to execute your script whenever desired. This script replicates the options present within system cleaners such as CCleaner, but without the application overhead and potential for undesired activity. I execute my generated script weekly.

macOS Telemetry

While Little Snitch allows us to block network connection within specific applications, it can also block a lot of unnecessary traffic generated by Apple. First, modify Little Snitch's default system setting within the "Rules" menu. You cannot delete the rules which allow basic macOS and iCloud functionality, but you can disable them by unchecking the options as seen in Figure 1.02. This will prevent iCloud and Apple services from functioning properly, but I don't mind. Since I do not have an Apple ID associated with my machine, I am not using iCloud.

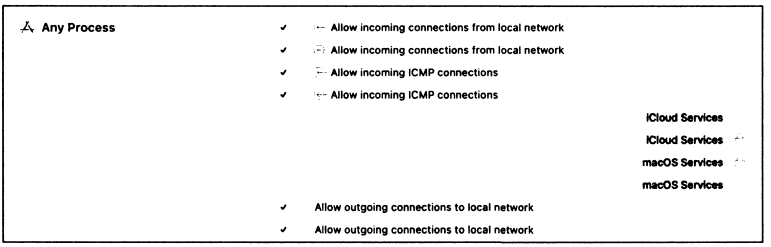


Figure 1.02: Little Snitch Apple configuration.

You will likely now begin receiving popup messages from Little Snitch asking if you want to allow specific connections, such as "itunescloudd" attempting to connect to icloud.com. Even if you never use iTunes, iCloud, or Apple Music, your Mac computer is constantly sending data to Apple servers about your online activities. I believe this should be blocked. While I could have blocked "All" outgoing connections for these apps, I usually choose to only block the domain which is trying to be accessed. This way, I can be alerted if a new domain is trying to be reached. I block data being transmitted from the App Store, Find My App, Music, News, Notes, Podcasts, and Stocks. Obviously, you would not want to do this if you use any of these apps. I do not. Furthermore, I am blocking data from being transmitted by services such as calendar, cloud, games, and parsce-fbf (Siri).

There were a few settings which I did not disable, such as trustd (confirms security certificates for apps), timed (synchronizes time), softwareupdated (updates operating system), and a few others. I also had a lot of connection problems when I completely blocked mDNSResponder. Therefore, I allowed my DNS but blocked everything else. This prevents Apple servers from receiving data sent from software but allows those applications to connect to the internet. This does not prevent 100% of Apple telemetry, but it eliminates much of it. I do not claim that these settings are optimal or appropriate for everyone. I only share the Apple telemetry which I blocked without limiting daily functionality. My post at https://inteltechniques.com/blog/2021/08/18/macos-telemetry-update includes images of my full telemetry configuration.

New Microsoft Windows Computer Configuration

Many readers may be more comfortable within the Windows environment, and choose it over Apple devices. Most businesses require Windows in order to use specific software or manage a more controlled network. Some may want a more affordable computer and never consider the overpriced Mac line of products. Regardless of your reason, Windows might be the more appropriate option for you. In my previous books, I presented privacy and security options for Windows 7, which is a much less invasive operating system than Windows 10 or 11. Windows 7 no longer receives support or scheduled security updates. Therefore, I no longer recommend Windows users continue to possess Windows 7 as an operating system. Unfortunately, we must embrace Windows 10 or 11.

By default, Windows 10 and 11 require a Microsoft online account in order to install the operating system. The good news is that you can bypass account creation altogether by being offline. Do not choose a Wi-Fi option during setup. Even better, do not enable Wi-Fi at all for now. While offline, you will receive a prompt to "Create account later" and will be allowed to make a local account. An active Microsoft account is not required in order to receive important software updates. This eliminates the need to provide Microsoft with your name, home address, and email account. However, there is much worse news. Microsoft's Telemetry service continuously collects the following data, plus numerous additional details, sending it to their corporate servers in Seattle.

- Typed text on keyboard
- Microphone transmissions
- Index of all media files on your computer
- Webcam data
- Browsing history
- Search history
- Location activity
- Heath activity collected by HealthVault, Microsoft Band, other trackers
- Privacy settings across Microsoft application ecosystem

This data would make it very easy to identify you, your location, and all online activity. Microsoft claims this collection of data is only to enhance your experience. I find this invasive, and I will present options to disable much of the data collection. First, we must complete the installation process. If you have a new computer or are reinstalling the operating system, you will be prompted to choose "Express Settings" or "Customize Settings". Choose the custom option which will present many choices for your new system. Disable each option presented on the screen. This will disable some of the most intrusive privacy violations such as the ability to collect keystrokes as you type and sending usage data to Microsoft.

You must now submit a username. Much like the Linux and Apple instructions, I suggest a generic account such as "Office Laptop". Choose a strong password which you can remember. If required to provide a "Hint", simply type the word NONE. Your computer should finish the initial boot process. After booting, enter the "Control Panel" and apply all system updates.

Similar to the Apple configuration, I want to possess full-disk data encryption. My preference for Windows 10/11 Pro machines is to use Microsoft's Bitlocker. This is a proprietary encryption program for Windows which can encrypt your entire drive as well as help protect against unauthorized changes to your system such as firmware-level malware. If you have the Pro version of Windows 10/11, you only need to activate Bitlocker in the Control Panel by following the directions, which are similar to the Apple option. Unfortunately, if you have a Windows 10/11 Home version of the operating system, Bitlocker is not available to you. In this common scenario, or if you do not trust Microsoft to provide your encryption, I suggest using VeraCrypt for full-disk encryption. The following explains the entire process.

- Download VeraCrypt from www.veracrypt.fr. Execute the installer and select the "Install" option. You can accept all the default settings in the installer.
- Once VeraCrypt is installed, launch the program.
- Click System > Encrypt System Partition/Drive in the VeraCrypt window.
- You will be asked whether you want to use "Normal" or "Hidden" system encryption. The Normal option encrypts the system partition or drive normally. When you boot your computer, you'll have to provide your encryption password to access it. No one will be able to access your files without your password. The Hidden option creates an operating system in a hidden VeraCrypt volume. You will possess both a "real" operating system, which is hidden, and a "decoy" operating system. When you boot your device, you can enter the real password to boot your hidden operating system or the password to the decoy operating system to boot it. If someone is forcing you to provide access to your encrypted drive, such as a border crossing mandate, you can provide the password to the decoy operating system.

In terms of encryption, using "Normal" encryption keeps your files just as secure. A "Hidden" volume only helps if you are forced to disclose your password to someone and want to maintain plausible deniability about the existence of any other files. If you are not sure which you want, select "Normal" and continue.

- Select "Encrypt the whole drive" and choose "Single-boot".
- Choose the encryption standard of the default setting.
- Enter a password. It is very important to choose a strong password which is unique and can be remembered. I will discuss more on this later. VeraCrypt will ask you to move your mouse randomly around inside the window. It uses these random mouse movements to increase the strength of your encryption keys. When you have finished, click "Next".
- The VeraCrypt wizard will force you to create a VeraCrypt Rescue Disk image before continuing. If your bootloader or other data ever gets damaged, you must boot from the rescue disk if you want to decrypt and access your files. The disk will also contain a backup image of the contents of the beginning of the drive, which will allow you to restore it if necessary. Note that you will still need to provide your password when using the rescue disk. VeraCrypt will create a rescue disk ISO image located locally at C:\Users\NAME\Documents\VeraCrypt Rescue Disk.iso by default. You can either create a CD using this image, or simply save the ISO in case of emergency. Note that the file should be saved somewhere other than the drive which is being encrypted.
- When prompted for "wipe mode", choose none, especially if this is a new computer.
- VeraCrypt will now verify everything is working correctly before it encrypts your drive. Click "Test" and VeraCrypt will install the VeraCrypt bootloader on your computer and restart. If Windows does not start properly, you should restart your PC and press "Esc" on your keyboard at the VeraCrypt bootloader screen. Windows should start and ask if you want to uninstall the VeraCrypt bootloader (Y).
- Enter your VeraCrypt encryption password when your computer boots. Sign in to your device when the normal welcome screen appears. You should see a "Pretest Completed" window. Click the "Encrypt" button to actually encrypt your device's system drive. When the process is complete, your drive will be encrypted and you will have to enter your password each time you boot your computer. If you decide you want to remove the system encryption in the future, launch the VeraCrypt interface and click System > Permanently Decrypt System Partition/Drive.

After successfully encrypting your drive, you now possess a huge layer of security. If I steal your device, I cannot access your content without the password. If I remove the hard drive and connect it to a secondary forensic machine, I have no way of reading the data. This process may seem like a hassle, but the benefits are well worth the effort.

Windows absolutely requires some type of anti-virus solution. I prefer the default Microsoft Defender over any commercial options. Some will say this is reckless as Microsoft Defender collects user data and submits it back to servers in Seattle. This is true, but no more invasive than the other data collection which is default with Windows 10/11. Basically, Microsoft already knows what you are doing. Microsoft Defender has less overhead than most commercial solutions; it is completely free; it is included with Windows 10/11; it automatically applies updates from Windows; and it is designed specifically for threats toward Windows 10/11. Therefore, I prefer it over anything else for Windows 10/11 users. The default settings are acceptable.

In previous books, I recommended a cleaning application called CCleaner. I no longer use this product because of some unethical practices of its owner Piriform. Some versions of CCleaner contain Ad-ware which has been accused of collecting user metrics. My preference today is to use **BleachBit** (bleachbit.org). BleachBit is very similar to CCleaner, but can be a bit more aggressive. I select all available options with the exception of "Wipe Free Space". Choosing this would overwrite all free space on the hard drive which is time consuming. BleachBit removes leftover internet history content, temporary files, and many other types of unwanted data. I execute this program weekly.

Next, I strongly advise users to attempt to minimize the amount of data Microsoft collects about your computer usage. I already explained a few options during the installation process, but there is much more content which needs blocked. There are many free utilities which assist with this, but I have found **O&O Shut Up 10** to be the most effective and current.

Download the latest version at https://www.oo-software.com/en/shutup10 then install and launch the software. You will see many individual options which can be enabled or disabled. A red icon indicates that feature is disabled while green indicates enabled. The wording can be murky. In general, anything red indicates that data about that topic is being sent to Microsoft while green indicates the service is blocked.

As an example, the first option states "Sharing of handwriting data disabled". The default option is disabled (red). Switching to green tells us that this threat is disabled, and we are protected. Some may want to play with each individual setting. Most choose a pre-determined level of privacy. In the "Actions" option at the top, you will see three categories of "Recommended", "Recommended and somewhat recommended", and "Apply all settings". The first option is very safe and applies normal blocking such as disabling advertisement IDs. The second option is a bit stricter and blocks everything except automatic Windows updates, Windows Defender, and OneDrive. The last option blocks everything possible.

My preference is to select the "Recommended and somewhat recommended" option, and then enable the "Microsoft OneDrive Disabled" option. This leaves updates and Defender running. After you have made your selections, close the program and allow Windows to reboot. Open the application again to make sure your desired settings were maintained. Every time you update the Windows operating system, take a look to see if you need to re-enable your choices here. If you ever have troubles because of your level of protection, you can reverse these changes any time from within the application.

If you want to replicate the abilities of Little Snitch on Windows, consider **Glass Wire** (glasswire.com) or **Portmaster** (safing.io). Since I encourage clients to avoid Windows if possible, I do not provide a tutorial for these applications here. Neither are as robust as Little Snitch, but both offer basic protections. Apply the same methodology previously explained if you choose to test these applications.

Most versions of Windows include numerous stock applications, such as "News", "Weather", and "Xbox games". By default, you are not allowed to remove or uninstall these applications. They are always available to drain resources and collect data about your usage. In order to complete any tasks on these two pages, you must first set the PowerShell Execution Policy from "Restricted" to "RemoteSigned" to allow local PowerShell scripts to run. Conduct the following.

- Right-click the Windows menu icon in the bottom-left corner of your desktop.
- Select "Windows PowerShell (Admin)" and confirm execution.
- Enter "set-executionpolicy remotesigned" without quotes and press Enter.

The following command within this same PowerShell terminal window displays the default Microsoft applications which are included with your build.

- Get-AppxProvisionedPackage -Online | Format-Table DisplayName, PackageName

You can now submit a lengthy command within this elevated PowerShell window which will remove any stock Microsoft applications desired. The text on the following page removed the worst offenders from my Windows build. You may decide to submit a more or less aggressive command based on your own needs. For convenience, you can digitally copy these commands from my site online at **inteltechniques.com/EP**. Once you have PowerShell launched, copy and paste the entire text on the following page from my website and submit as a single command. If you notice any applications which you do not want removed, simply eliminate those from the command before execution. You can use Notepad within Windows to modify this text as desired.

```
$ProvisionedAppPackageNames = @(
"Microsoft.3DBuilder"
"Microsoft.BingFinance"
"Microsoft.BingNews"
"Microsoft.BingSports"
"Microsoft.BingWeather"
"Microsoft.ConnectivityStore"
"Microsoft.Getstarted"
"Microsoft.Messaging"
"Microsoft.Microsoft3DViewer"
"Microsoft.MicrosoftOfficeHub"
"Microsoft.MicrosoftSolitaireCollection"
"Microsoft.MicrosoftStickyNotes"
"Microsoft.MSPaint"
"Microsoft.Office.OneNote"
"Microsoft.People"
"Microsoft.Print3D"
"Microsoft.SkypeApp"
"Microsoft.StorePurchaseApp"
"microsoft.windowscommunicationsapps" # Mail,Calendar
"Microsoft.WindowsFeedbackHub"
"Microsoft.WindowsPhone"
"Microsoft.WindowsStore"
"Microsoft.Xbox.TCUI"
"Microsoft.XboxApp"
"Microsoft.XboxGameOverlay"
"Microsoft.XboxIdentityProvider"
"Microsoft.XboxSpeechToTextOverlay"
"Microsoft.ZuneMusic"
"Microsoft.ZuneVideo"
"Microsoft.YourPhone")
foreach ($ProvisionedAppName in $ProvisionedAppPackageNames) {
Get-AppxPackage -Name $ProvisionedAppName -AllUsers | Remove-AppxPackage
Get-AppXProvisionedPackage -Online | Where-Object DisplayName -EQ $ProvisionedAppName |
Remove-AppxProvisionedPackage -Online}
exit
```

Note that booting into a different user account will likely present all removed applications for that profile. Also note that any major Windows updates could replenish these applications. However, repeating the commands should remove them again. Removing these applications for one user may not impact other profiles within Windows. This method is more about removing unwanted and unnecessary applications from your instance, and does not impact much data sharing from your computer to Microsoft servers.

Whenever required, I install Windows 10/11 Enterprise LTSC versions of Windows for clients. This version is minimal, and does not include the Edge browser, the Microsoft Store, or the voice-activate assistant Cortana. I see these as great omissions. License keys can be purchased online as cheap as $30, but you will need to sort through many shady vendors. The operating system can be downloaded directly from Microsoft after purchase.

Typical Client Configuration

In late 2020, I began strongly encouraging all high-risk clients to switch to Linux Ubuntu as their primary operating system. I provide most clients with a System76 Lemur Pro 14" laptop which contains all Linux modifications presented within this chapter. It possesses a hardened version of Firefox, which is explained in Chapter Three. Most clients rarely conduct any activity outside of the web browser, but all communications are also configured as desktop applications, as explained later.

This chapter emphasized the use of Linux in order to be most private and secure. However, I never want to be a Linux snob who believes computer selection is all or nothing. I was a Windows user for many years followed by five years of explicit Mac usage. Switching to Linux full-time was not easy for me. I missed the simplicity and overall visual pleasantness of macOS. There is no shame in hardening Windows or Mac to fit your current needs. However, as I write this, three of my customers running Windows have been hit with ransomware and no longer have access to their data. This probably would not have happened on a Linux or Mac computer. I avoid Windows due to privacy AND security concerns.

My bottom line is that Linux is more private and secure than Windows or macOS, and macOS is more private and secure than Windows. Some may say that Mac computers are more secure than Linux due to their "walled garden" which prevents many malicious apps from executing within the operating system. There is merit there, but the constant data collection by Mac has forced me to full-time use of Linux.

Linux is not appropriate for everyone. However, that does not excuse any reader from trying it out. Whether through installation on an old computer or within virtual machine software (explained later), I strongly encourage everyone to play around with Linux for at least a week. You may be surprised at how quickly you adapt. Linux offers a level of privacy protection which simply cannot be replicated by Windows or Mac.

Hopefully, you now possess a computer with full-disk encryption, an anti-virus solution, and an overall hardened configuration for your daily needs. These basic tutorials will likely apply to over 95% of this audience. Regardless of your choice of Mac, Windows, or Linux, you are only as secure as your online habits. Chapter Three picks up there and we have a lot to do to make ourselves secure. Overall, this is not a digital security book; it is a privacy guide. However, I want to acknowledge that you cannot have privacy without digital security and vice versa. There are unlimited ways to configure countless mobile devices, laptops, desktops, operating systems, applications, and anything else with a digital display screen. These first four chapters present only the mandatory changes I implement during a full privacy reboot. You will likely possess numerous additional devices that are not mentioned here. Please use the underlying messages within these chapters to make the best decisions about your own digital life configurations.

During the editorial review process for this edition, I asked technical and non-technical readers to provide input. Those without a technical background found these first four chapters overwhelming. Instead, they began with Chapter Five and read through the remainder of the book. Afterward, they concentrated on the principles within Chapters Two through Four. I believe this may be an appropriate strategy for some readers who are not tech-savvy. Please do not let the technology presented within the next three chapters steer you away from the privacy tactics within the rest of this book. The next chapter is one of my favorites.

CHAPTER TWO
MOBILE DEVICES

An important step toward completely disappearing is replacing all mobile devices and accounts. Some privacy enthusiasts will tell you that you cannot possess a cellular telephone and still expect any privacy. They have a point, but that is unrealistic. If I informed my clients during an initial meeting that they could never use a mobile app again or send a text message while on the run, I would have no more business. My goal is to allow you to enjoy the benefits of technology, but while providing minimal legitimate data to the companies that benefit most from your usage.

Throughout this entire book, please remember that it is designed for the reader in an extreme situation. I will assume that your physical safety is in jeopardy, and that making any mistake is life or death for you. I will treat you like a client who is running from a homicidal former lover that is determined to kill you. I will never consider costs of products, as your safety is more valuable. I should present the bad news now. If you want extreme privacy, you need all new mobile devices. Clients often ask me if they can simply factory reset their iPhone, and my answer is always no. Consider the following argument.

Assume that you are a hardcore Apple user. You have a MacBook laptop and an iPhone device. Every Apple product possesses an embedded serial number. This number is associated with your Apple account. Both mobile and laptop devices constantly communicate with Apple servers, supplying the identifiers associated with your devices. Hard resetting (wiping) an iPhone does not reset the serial number. Apple still knows who you are. Creating a new Apple ID for use on these devices does not help. Apple maintains a log of all Apple accounts connected to any device. A court order to Apple, or a rogue employee, can immediately associate your new account to your old, and all of your accounts to all of your hardware. This includes location data and IP addresses. There is simply no way around this. This also applies to most Microsoft and Google products.

Therefore, we obtain new equipment. It is time to replace your mobile device. For my clients, I arrive with the new equipment in order to ensure it is not associated to them at the time of purchase. Whenever possible, I pay with cash at an electronics store, provide no personal details, and walk out with clean equipment. My image (barely visible under my cowboy hat) is stored on their surveillance system for years, but is not the client's presence. If you plan to buy new hardware with cash, you may want to find a nominee that does not care about privacy to go in the store and make the purchase on your behalf. This is a bit extreme, but justified by some. During a phone call to an Apple store on my podcast, a manager admitted that every store's surveillance footage is routed to a central collecting location, and stored for an undetermined time. I assume forever. I also assume facial recognition is applied or will be implemented in the future.

Some advocate for buying used devices in order to further confuse the systems that collect user data. I do not always endorse this. You never know what you are buying. What if the previous owner was a drug kingpin being monitored by the DEA? A court order to Apple shows the DEA agent that the device is now being used by a new account. They would have the legal authority to monitor you. While that would be a very rare occurrence, the possibility of purchasing stolen equipment is much more feasible. If the police show up at your door because your cellular carrier provided the current location of a stolen phone, you will be required to identify yourself. Your name and home address will be included in a report, which is public information with a simple FOIA request. You will be able to explain the purchase, but the damage will be done. All of your hard work at anonymity will be ruined. We can prevent these situations by purchasing new equipment from retail stores. The minimal extra cost now provides peace of mind while continuing your privacy journey later.

Let's begin with the most important device to replace: your cellular telephone. If you apply only one piece of this book toward your life, I believe it should be a new anonymous mobile device with anonymous service. It is the single tracking device that we all purchase and voluntarily carry with us everywhere. We should make it as private as possible. In the next chapter, we will modify our online habits to strengthen our anonymity.

Android vs. iOS

We should probably have the Apple vs. Google discussion. There are likely hardcore Android users reading this that refuse to use an Apple product. They refuse to pay the "Apple Tax" by switching over to another ecosystem. I get it. I am not an Apple fanboy, but I believe the operating system and hardware on the Apple platform is more secure and private than any official STOCK release by Google. I do not like the constant data transmissions that Apple collects and stores about your device and usage, but it is not as bad as the data collection and usage from stock Google products. Fortunately, we can avoid all data collection by both Apple and Google with a custom phone which is explained in a moment.

This is the next major deviation I take in this edition. Previously, I pushed Apple iPhone devices since they were the best easily available option. This time, let's step up our game and go the extreme route. I no longer carry any iPhone or other iOS device and I encourage my clients to do the same. I would also never consider a stock Android device. The amount of location data forced to be shared with Apple and Google is too much, even with an "anonymous" user account. Instead, I combine reliable Android hardware with un-Googled Android software to create our best option for privacy and security. After I present these new mobile device strategies, I offer my previous methods of using Apple devices as privately and securely as possible. At the end of this chapter, I present a final basic summary of my mobile device strategy for new clients.

For now, you must choose the most appropriate route for your needs. The list below is displayed in order of most private and secure to least. I explain each option throughout this chapter. I encourage you to read and understand all of the technology, but I respect readers who skip directly to the section which applies to them. Consider the summary of each.

GrapheneOS Device: I believe this is the ultimate option. GrapheneOS is custom open-source software which converts any traditional Google Pixel device into a pure Android environment without any Google services or connections. It provides all of the basics and allows you to customize the software you need. It has a locked bootloader and does not require root access. I carry a GrapheneOS Pixel 4a device with me every day for all communications. It is my only travel device.

Custom Un-Googled Device: If you do not have (or want) a Pixel device, you cannot use GrapheneOS. You may have a phone you prefer which is supported by LineageOS. This is also a custom ROM without any Google applications or services, but the bootloader must remain unlocked which provides a layer of vulnerability. I explain this soon. However, it is much better than any stock Android or iOS device.

Custom AOSP Device: Readers who are tech-savvy may want to create their own custom Android device without any Google services. I will explain how I have used the Android Open Source Project (AOSP) to build my own versions of Android within devices not supported by GrapheneOS or LineageOS.

Manual Un-Googled Device: Some readers may not want to unlock their bootloader and upload custom ROMs. You may be happy with your current Google device but desire removal of forced applications from Google, Facebook, or LinkedIn. This section explains how to remove any application or service from your mobile device through Terminal on a computer in order to create a much more private and secure environment.

Apple iOS Device: Finally, you may desire an iPhone. This is not an awful situation, and you can make your iPhone much more private and secure with several tweaks. This section identifies all of the configurations I make to every iPhone which is delivered to my clients.

Overall, there is no elitism here. Make the best decisions for your own situation. You may start at the bottom of this list and gradually experiment until you arrive at the top. Take your time, understand the techniques, and make educated decisions about your own mobile device usage.

Option 1: GrapheneOS Device

My clients each receive a new telephone with new anonymous activated service. Unless my clients absolutely insist on an iPhone, I issue new devices containing custom Android builds by default. This is going to get very technical, but the final product we create will possess more privacy, security, and anonymity than anything you can buy off a shelf. If you are not ready for this level of privacy, upcoming sections tackle other ways to possess an anonymous iPhone or Android device.

I believe **GrapheneOS** (grapheneos.org) is the optimal operating system for a mobile device. It eliminates all data collection by Google, and introduces "full verified boot" within a minimalistic custom operating system. Typically, uploading a custom ROM to an Android device requires you to unlock the bootloader. After the operating system is installed, the bootloader must remain unlocked in order to use this unofficial build. The unlocked bootloader could present a vulnerability. If I physically took your device; uploaded my own malicious version of your operating system to it; and then put the phone back, you may not be able to tell. Your data and apps would all look the same, but I could monitor your usage if I modified the OS to do so.

This is where GrapheneOS has an advantage. It detects modifications to any of the operating system partitions and prevents reading of any changed or corrupted data. If changes are detected, such as a malicious physical attempt to compromise the device, error correction is used to obtain the original data. This protects the device from many attacks. The authenticity and integrity of the operating system is verified upon each boot. Because of this, a Google Pixel device is required to install GrapheneOS.

Some may be surprised at that sentence. Yes, I recommend a Google Pixel device. This is because we will completely remove all software included with the device and replace it with better versions. Pixel devices offer superior hardware security capabilities than most Android devices. I purchased a Google Pixel 4a for $349, paid in cash at a local BestBuy store. Used devices can be found for under $300 on Swappa, but PayPal is required for payment. Fortunately, these devices are plentiful at many local retail establishments, and it is always best to pay cash for any mobile device. If you want to ensure longer support, you might consider purchasing a Pixel 5a. The instructions presented here are identical for the 4a, 4a (5G), 5, 5a, and 6, with the exception of the specific version of GrapheneOS required for each model. This should also work for Pixels released after publication. Always purchase the latest model supported. If I were starting over today, I would seek a Pixel 5a.

There are two options for installation of GrapheneOS onto your Pixel device. The web installer is the easiest for non tech-savvy users, while the Linux method is most stable. I will explain both. If you have a Linux computer as explained previously, I recommend using it for this purpose. If you do not have a Linux machine, the web installer should work fine for your needs.

Regardless of the installation path you choose, you must first prepare the phone itself. Turn on the Pixel device and dismiss any attempts to enter a Google account. Swipe the menu up to launch "Settings", and conduct the following.

- Tap "About phone".
- Tap "Build number" at the bottom several times until "Developer mode" is enabled.
- Tap the back arrow.
- Tap "System".
- Tap "Advanced".
- Tap "Developer Options".
- Enable "OEM Unlocking" and "USB debugging".

Your device may require internet access via Wi-Fi or cellular data to complete this process. We can now install GrapheneOS. I will begin with the easiest option.

GrapheneOS Installation Via Web Installer

From your Windows or Mac computer, navigate to https://grapheneos.org/install/web and read through the entire page. Once you understand the overall installation process, run through the steps, which are outlined here.

- Turn the device off.
- Hold the power and volume down buttons simultaneously.
- When you see the "Bootloader" menu, connect the device to computer via USB cable.
- Click the "Unlock Bootloader" button.
- Select your device from the popup menu.
- Click "Connect".
- Press the volume down button on the device to select "Unlock Bootloader".
- Press the power button to confirm the choice.
- Click the "Download Release" button on the GrapheneOS page.
- Allow the appropriate version of GrapheneOS to completely download.
- Click the "Flash Release" button.
- Allow the process to complete.
- Click "Lock Bootloader" on the GrapheneOS page.
- Press the volume button on the device to select "Lock Bootloader".
- Press the power button to confirm the choice.
- Make sure "Start" appears next to the power button and press it.
- Allow the phone to boot.

This sounds simple, but a lot can go wrong. In my experience, only Google Chrome and Microsoft Edge browsers will complete the process. Attempts with Safari and Firefox failed for me. A poor quality USB cable can ruin the entire process, so use the cable included with the device when possible. Some Windows machines may not have the appropriate drivers for your device. If the phone is not recognized, plug it in and attempt a software update at "Windows Update" > "Check for updates" > "View Optional Updates". You should now have GrapheneOS installed. Skip past the next section about installation through Linux to continue.

GrapheneOS Installation Via Linux

The following steps were slightly modified from the GrapheneOS website at grapheneos.org/install. Always check that site before proceeding as things may have changed since this writing. I have included each step on my site at **inteltechniques.com/EP** for easy copy and paste. The following tutorial requires an Ubuntu Linux computer, and I used a laptop with Ubuntu 22.04 as the host. This is the cleanest and easiest option. While you can install from a Windows or Mac host, software requirements can vary and driver issues can be complicated. The Linux steps are more universal. Never use a virtual machine for this installation due to detection issues.

We must now configure software within our Linux computer. As stated previously, this can be completed within your new Linux machine or a live boot environment with a USB boot device. Full details can be found at https://ubuntu.com/tutorials/create-a-usb-stick-on-ubuntu. I will assume you already have a Linux laptop built from the previous chapter, but Windows and Mac options are explained at grapheneos.org/install. Conduct the following within an Ubuntu Terminal session. Note that the exact version presented here may have been updated. The tutorial steps offered at **inteltechniques.com/EP** will be updated as needed. Always rely on that version over any printed text here. **These steps also install ADB, which is required within other tutorials.**

- sudo apt install libarchive-tools
- curl -O https://dl.google.com/android/repository/platform-tools_r32.0.0-linux.zip
- bsdtar xvf platform-tools_r32.0.0-linux.zip
- export PATH="$PWD/platform-tools:$PATH"

- sudo apt install android-sdk-platform-tools-common
- sudo apt install signify-openbsd
- fastboot --version

The final command verifies that Fastboot is installed which should display the version number. We now need to boot our device into the bootloader interface. To do this, hold the power and volume down buttons simultaneously while the device is off. This should present a "Fastboot mode" menu. Connect the device to your Ubuntu computer via USB cable. Execute the following command within Terminal and verify it displays "OKAY".

- fastboot flashing unlock

Press the volume down button on the mobile device until "Unlock the bootloader" is displayed, then press the power button. We are now ready to download the new operating system files. First, you must navigate to grapheneos.org/releases and select your device within the "Stable Channels" section. Note that the 4a is code-named "sunfish", while other models are code-named "bramble" (4a 5G), "redfin" (5), and "barbet" (5a). **It is vital to choose the correct version for your device**. Next, identify the latest version number, such as "2021081411". You will need to replace each version within the following examples (2021081411) with the latest version displayed on the website during your installation. Execute the following within Terminal ONLY for the Pixel 4a.

- curl -O https://releases.grapheneos.org/factory.pub
- curl -O https://releases.grapheneos.org/sunfish-factory-2022030219.zip
- curl -O https://releases.grapheneos.org/sunfish-factory-2022030219.zip.sig
- signify-openbsd -Cqp factory.pub -x sunfish-factory-2022030219.zip.sig && echo verified

The last command should display a confirmation that the software is correct. This confirms that we have downloaded a secure file which has not been intercepted or maliciously replaced. The following Terminal steps extract the download and install it to the device.

- bsdtar xvf sunfish-factory-2022030219.zip
- cd sunfish-factory-2022030219
- ./flash-all.sh
- fastboot flashing lock

You should now see the option "Do not lock the bootloader" on the device. Press the volume down button until "Lock the bootloader" is displayed and press the power button. You can now reboot the device by pressing the power button labeled "Start" or holding down the power button to turn off, and then turning on as normal. You may see an error about booting into a different operating system, but this is normal. Allow the phone to boot without making any selection.

Upon first boot of GrapheneOS, press "Next" until the Wi-Fi connection screen is present. Connect to Wi-Fi and complete the following tasks, with considerations for each.

- Disable location services for now, this can be set up later if needed.
- Assign a secure PIN for the screen lock.
- If desired, add your fingerprint to the screen lock function.
- Skip any restore options.

Your installation is now complete. The device itself is completely encrypted and sends no data to Google. Next, let's harden a few settings.

Once you are within the new operating system, confirm that OEM unlocking and developer options are disabled with the following steps. This may be redundant, but we want to make sure we are protected.

- Swipe the menu up to launch "Settings" and click "About phone".
- Tap "Build number" at the bottom several times until "Developer mode" is enabled.
- Click the "Back" arrow and click "System", "Advanced", then "Developer options".
- Disable "OEM Unlocking" and confirm the choice.
- Disable "Developer options" and reboot the device.

Your new GrapheneOS device is very private and secure, but there is always room for improvement. There are no Google services, and Google is not receiving any data about your usage. This presents a new problem. Without Google services, there is no Google Play store which is used to obtain apps. Since we will not compromise our integrity by adding the required Google software to activate the store, we will use better options instead.

- Launch the Vanadium browser within the apps menu and navigate to f-droid.org.
- Click the "Download F-Droid" button.
- Confirm the download and click "Open" at the bottom of the screen.
- If prompted, click "Settings" and enable "Allow from source".
- Click the back button and confirm the installation of F-Droid.
- Open the F-Droid application.
- Swipe down from the top and install any F-Droid updates available.
- If prompted, repeat enabling of "Allow from source" settings.
- Reopen the F-Droid application.

You now have a substitute app store which is not powered by Google. Many of the open-source applications we will use will come from this repository. This device is more private and secure than any stock unit which could be purchased from a retailer. Unlike a traditional iOS or Android phone, a user account is not required in order to use the device. If ever prompted to add a Google account, avoid or "skip" the option. This way, there is no single Google or Apple account which can be tracked, archived, and abused. Again, by default, GrapheneOS transmits no data to Google. Eliminating these privacy threats provides great benefits.

The installation effort can seem overwhelming, but is usually only a one-time event. Fortunately, updates are automatic by default and pushed to your device often. You will notice them within the notification menu, and you may be prompted to reboot to finish installation. Along with F-Droid, I recommend the application Aurora Store. Aurora Store is an unofficial client to Google's Play Store. You can search, download, and update apps. You can also spoof your device information, language, and region to gain access to the apps which are restricted in your country. Aurora Store does not require Google's proprietary framework. With Aurora Store, you can install all of the mobile apps mentioned throughout this book. Aurora Store can be installed through F-Droid. During installation, be sure to choose "Anonymous" mode, which prevents Google account requirements, and accept all other default options.

Always attempt any app installations through F-Droid before Aurora. If an app is missing from F-Droid, rely on Aurora Store. You can use the "Updates" menu of each app to make sure all of your installed applications stay updated. Make sure to keep Aurora updated through F-Droid in order to maintain functionality. I launch both F-Droid and Aurora weekly to fetch any pending application updates.

Let's pause and digest what we have accomplished. Our phone possesses the basic communications technology we need for daily use. It does not share any data to Google or Apple. An account is not required to download applications; therefore, an account does not exist to collect and analyze data about our usage. There are no

embedded cloud storage options which can accidentally be enabled. This is a huge feature for most clients. This minimal device encourages us to return to the original intention of a mobile phone: communications. In a moment, we will customize our device with communications options.

While your desired apps should install without issues, everyday function may be a problem. Since GrapheneOS does not contain any Google apps, you are likely missing some core Google software which provides services such as push notifications, location tracking, and mapping. This may sound like a huge benefit, but it also presents some limitations. You can typically still open apps and "fetch" data such as pending email or text messages at any time, but you might be missing instant notifications. With some apps, synching of content might simply be delayed. Some secure messaging apps, such as Signal, can deliver messages instantly through their own platform without the need for Google's push service. Traditional email applications, such as ProtonMail, may only fetch the data when the app is opened. This may be a desired feature to some. A true Google-free experience without constant incoming notifications is a nice change.

Personally, I prefer to intentionally fetch desired content when needed in order to keep Google or Apple out of my business. My phone never lights up during meetings and never dings audible tones throughout the day. There is never a looming notification reminding me that my inbox is growing with unread messages. I check for any communications on my own time. I am never tempted while driving to check the latest email which just arrived. When appropriate throughout my daily schedule, I check my email and other communications apps by opening each. The content is fetched from the various servers and I can tackle anything which needs a response. Emergencies through Signal messages and calls continue to present a notification as designed. It took a while to lose the anxiety of potential missed messages. Today, it reminds me of the way email was checked when I first started using it. Back then, you logged into your computer; opened your email client; fetched any incoming messages; responded to those desired; and closed the software after the messages had been sent. You then might even turn off the computer and go about the rest of your day. Today, I check my phone often for email and other communications, but it no longer controls my life.

Many readers may think this is an unattainable luxury. I respect that you may have children in school which need to get in touch with you at all times; an employer who insists you respond to anything within minutes; or a sick family member which needs direct access to you. If you need immediate notification of incoming email and SMS text messages without launching applications, then GrapheneOS may not be for you. Many people discuss installing an open-source version of Google's Push services through software called microG, but that will not work with GrapheneOS. This operating system is hardened very well, and does not allow weakened security through the use of these privacy-leaking options.

Before I scare you away from GrapheneOS, let's discuss some actual experiences. If you use ProtonMail as your secure email provider, as recommended in the next chapter, you will not receive any notifications of incoming messages. You will need to open the app occasionally and check your email. If you use Signal as your secure messenger service, as recommended in the next chapter, you can receive immediate notifications of incoming text messages without the need to open the app. If you use Linphone for telephone calls, as explained later in this chapter, you will receive notifications of incoming calls. Your device will ring as normal. Most other communication applications will not send notifications, and you will need to open those apps in order to see any pending messages. For most people, I believe the ability to receive incoming calls and secure message notifications through Signal is sufficient for daily use without the need for any Google services.

Remember that mobile device privacy is a series of decisions which produce an environment most appropriate for you, and will be unique for everyone. I have a few clients who use GrapheneOS every day and love it. I have others who hated it. It really depends on your personality and need to be notified of everything at all times. For me, switching was therapeutic. It reminded me that I do not need to see everything in real time, and there was life outside of my various networks. I believe GrapheneOS is not only the most private and secure mobile device option we have, but it is the most elegant and minimalistic. It has no bloatware or undesired apps. I must admit that most of my clients do not use GrapheneOS. Only those with extreme situations have successfully made the

switch. Today, the majority of my clients insist on iPhones. Therefore, I make them as private and secure as possible, as explained in a moment. First, we should discuss some GrapheneOS limitations.

I am thrilled with using GrapheneOS as my daily mobile device. However, it is not perfect. Since we have eliminated Google and Apple from collecting our data, we have also removed their helpful features. By default, the settings within GrapheneOS are hardened with privacy and security in mind. However, there are several modifications I make for myself and clients. The following outlines multiple considerations for your own GrapheneOS installation.

Missing Applications within Aurora: You may search for an app within Aurora and be unable to find it. At the time of this writing, both MySudo and Privacy.com are not indexed within the native search feature. However, that does not mean we cannot install these applications from Aurora. They are actually present if we know the exact URL, but that is unlikely. There are two options for installing applications which are missing form Aurora's search. The first is to visit the company's website, such as Privacy.com, from the mobile device and long-press the button to install the app via Google Play. Select "Open link in external app" from the popup menu. This should navigate you to the installation option for this app within Aurora. If that does not work, you may be missing an important setting.

- Open "Settings" and select "Apps" > "Default apps" > "Opening links".
- Enable "Instant apps" and tap "Aurora Store".
- Enable "Open supported links" and click "Add links".
- Enable all options and repeat the previous link opening process.

If you encounter a desired application which does not possess a link on their home page, search through the Google Play website. When you find the desired link, long-press and open through Aurora. If this all fails, go to "Settings" > "Networking" within Aurora and enable "Insecure Anonymous Session". Log out of Aurora, close the app, open it, and log back in. If desperate, download the desired application's APK file from apkmirror.com or apkpure.com and install it manually. This should populate the app within Aurora for all future updates.

Battery Drain: If you install GrapheneOS, and a suite of communication applications such as Signal, Wire, and others, expect fast battery drain. Since the device does not possess Google's push services, some apps will try to constantly listen for new incoming communications. This forces those apps to be ready at all times and prevents them from becoming dormant within the background. In my experience, this can change battery length with normal usage from two days to nine hours. Fortunately, there is a fix. Since we do not receive notifications on the device through push services, there is no reason to ask apps to listen for new communications. The following is my process to regain proper battery life.

- Open each third-party app, such as messaging, email, and web browsers, and then close them.
- Navigate to "Settings" > "Apps".
- Open each of these apps under the recent screen; select "Notifications"; and disable all options.
- Navigate back one screen; Select "Battery"; and change to "Restricted".
- Repeat for all desired apps.
- Check these settings on occasion until you have modified each app as desired.

This instructs the operating system to prevent applications from constantly accessing the network when minimized or closed. It prevents apps such as Signal from maintaining a constant connection to various servers. It prevents your email from fetching new messages when you are not using the app. It also prevents unnecessary attempts for notifications on your screen. This all saves precious battery life but also adds privacy. These applications are not constantly connecting to servers and sending your IP address until you take intentional action to check your messages. Manually launching each app synchronizes the account and your messages are populated in the screen.

If you rely heavily on Linphone for voice calls or Signal for secure communications, and you want to be notified of incoming communications, you should leave the default notification and battery settings enabled for those apps. If you child messages or calls you through Signal, you might want to always be notified when a communication arrives. This may impact your battery life, but it may be a priority feature for you in order to stay in immediate contact with others. I explain more about these services later. I have every third-party application on my device in restricted mode without notifications. My phone never prompts me to answer a call or check a message, but I check for messages often. With this minimal usage, my device only needs charged every other day.

Permissions: Navigate to "Settings" > "Privacy" > "Permission Manager" and consider these options. By default, some apps may already have permission to access your camera, microphone, or other hardware features. Communication apps obviously need access to your microphone, but a calendar does not. Consider modifying everything in this menu to your specifications. As an example, I disabled all "Body Sensors" access and severely limited my location, microphone, and camera access. I also disabled all "Nearby Devices" associations, which allows the use of wearable devices, such as a smart watch.

DNS: GrapheneOS does support firewall applications, but they cannot run along with VPNs in the way iOS can. The most appropriate option for most users who want to restrict ads and trackers within applications and browsers is to enable a private DNS option. You can do this by opening "Settings" > "Network & Internet" > "Advanced" > "Private DNS", selecting "Private DNS provider hostname", and entering "dns.adguard.com". This will route all of your internet traffic through AdGuard, and AdGuard will block many trackers, ads, and other unwanted connections. This is not perfect, but it is helpful. It is also applied at the operating system level which should globally block much unwanted data. Later, I present much more details about DNS options.

Update Modifications: On multiple occasions, I have updated the GrapheneOS operating system and reboot to find modifications to my settings. I have witnessed my mobile data connection become disabled, resulting in no internet access. If this happens, open "Settings" > "Network & Internet" > "Mobile Network", and enable "Mobile Data".

Home Menu Shortcuts: The labels for applications within your home menu and the applications menu are often truncated. Instead of displaying "Standard Notes" below the app icon, it may appear as "Standa...". This drives me crazy. I use a program called "Shortcut Creator" to generate custom icons and labels on my home screen. I only recommend this if you are bothered by the truncated names.

Display: I mentioned on my podcast that I restrict my screen to monochrome colors. This helps me focus. I no longer want to use my device to stream video or browse websites. The monochrome display forces me to use the device for communications as it was intended. If you want to test this for your own use, navigate to "Settings" > "Accessibility" > "Text and display" > "Color correction". Enable "Use color correction" and select "Grayscale". I believe this makes my text communication crisper and discourages "playing" on the phone.

Mapping Applications: There are no map applications included with GrapheneOS. You could install Google Maps from Aurora and possess the standard functions. However, you are now sharing data with Google again. I recommend a combination of Magic Earth (Aurora) and OSMAND+ (F-Droid). Magic Earth is better with navigation and identification of businesses, but it does collect some telemetry which may be outside of your comfort zone. OSMAND+ is completely open-source and relies on the OpenStreetMap project. Neither are great with navigation or display traffic congestion from Apple or Google. That is the biggest weakness for most users. However, we can download full maps for offline usage. While both applications allow download of offline maps, I prefer OSMAND+ due to their privacy policy. The F-Droid version allows unlimited download and update of maps of the entire world. These can then be used offline without any cellular or Wi-Fi connection. I download all street maps of the United States to my device (>16GB). When I need to find a location or navigate to a specific address, I do so within OSMAND+. No data is shared about my trip, and I can disable connectivity if the route is extremely sensitive. The application and maps have helped me tremendously when cellular service was unavailable in remote areas.

Individual Profiles: GrapheneOS supports multiple profiles within a single device. This allows you to create unique configurations for multiple users, or your own alias profiles. I played with this for a few weeks, and found it very intriguing, but ultimately decided not to use this feature as part of my communications strategy. Since GrapheneOS is not "calling home" and sending our data out to Google or Apple, I found little reason to isolate my app usage. The one benefit I enjoyed was the ability to possess multiple instances of Signal within a single device, but switching profiles to take advantage of this became tiresome. If you believe you could benefit from isolated instances, please research this option within the GrapheneOS website. It could be quite valuable for segmenting business, alias, and covert usage. In a moment, I explain usage of secondary profiles after sanitizing a stock Android environment.

Sandboxed Google Play Services: GrapheneOS now supports installation of core Google services, which are "sandboxed" and available only on an application level. This additional Google software does not have full access to your operating system as it would with stock Android. Many GrapheneOS enthusiasts believe the installation and execution of this software is acceptable. I do not. While Google will not receive a unique hardware identifier, such as a serial number, it will receive your make, model, and IP address constantly. We simply never know what other tracking metrics are embedded, or will be embedded, into the software. The purpose of an un-Googled device is just that. I do not want Google receiving any data about my usage whatsoever. If you need Google services installed in order to receive push notifications and use Google applications, then I believe GrapheneOS is not appropriate for you. Consider one of the next options. Many will disagree with my harsh resistance to adding Google frameworks into my devices, but I strive for extreme privacy. That means no Google. Period.

Wi-Fi Disabling: GrapheneOS, and other custom ROMS, have the ability to disable Wi-Fi after it has been disconnected from a network. I like this feature. If you leave your home while Wi-Fi is enabled, it will shut itself off to prevent accidental connection to public networks or public beacons from tracking you via Wi-Fi. Navigate to "Settings" > "Network & internet" > "Internet" > "Network preferences" > "Turn off Wi-Fi automatically". I set mine to "1 minute".

Backup: Once you have your GrapheneOS device configured, I encourage you to create a backup. This will preserve all of your settings and customizations. Open "Settings" > "System" > "Backup". Allow the backup to save to the internal location and tap "Recovery code". Document the words presented to you, as these will be required if you want to restore to this version. I recommend that you enable all backup options. However, I tapped "Backup status"; the three dots in the upper right; enabled "Exclude apps"; and de-selected the offline maps. I did not want to take the chance of wasted storage on gigabytes of maps which could be re-downloaded later. On the main "Backup" screen, select the three dots and choose "Backup now". This will create a new folder titled ".SeedVaultAndroidBackup" at the root of your device's storage.

Once complete, I connect my device via USB to my computer; select the option to transfer data within the device's drop-down menu; and copy this new folder onto the computer. I then delete the backup from the device. This allows me to restore a backup to a new device if required. You will likely never need this backup, but it might save you hours of work if you lose your device. If you have the VOIP options presented in a moment configured, this backup may become even more vital. I create a new backup after configuration of everything mentioned in this chapter.

My GrapheneOS experience has been wonderful. I no longer check my phone every minute to respond to incoming messages. I check them on my time. I no longer worry about the data collection about my usage. I do not feel the constant need to request and scrutinize my data from Apple. I am never prompted to enter my long password in order to download a free application. I never need to confirm a code via text or email in order to complete an update or make a change within my settings. I am never forced to log in to an account to verify that I am the proper user of the device. My phone no longer feels "dirty" a few weeks after using it. There is a great sense of freedom when you leave that world behind.

GrapheneOS Reversal

You may have experimented with GrapheneOS and decided it was not ideal for you. You might want to sell your device but need to revert the settings and reinstall a stock Android device. Fortunately, this is quite easy. The following steps erase all personal data and restore the device to the original Android operating system which would be present if purchased as a new device.

- Navigate to https://developers.google.com/android/images.
- Identify the "images" for your specific hardware.
- Download the most recent version by clicking the "Link" option next to it.
- Power the mobile device on.
- Tap "Settings", "About phone", then tap "Build number" seven times to enable Developer Options.
- Go back one screen and tap "System".
- Tap "Developer options" and make sure it is enabled.
- Enable "OEM unlocking" from this screen.
- Enable "USB debugging" from this screen.
- Connect the device via USB cable to the computer you used to install GrapheneOS.
- Install ADB as previously explained, if necessary.
- Open Terminal (or Command Prompt) on the computer.
- In Terminal, execute: adb reboot bootloader.
- In Terminal, execute: fastboot flashing unlock.
- Press the volume button on the device to select "Unlock Bootloader".
- Press the power button on the device to execute the selection.
- Decompress (unzip) the downloaded Android file on your computer.
- Within Terminal, navigate to the folder of the unzipped file (or type cd and drag the folder to Terminal).
- Within Terminal, type ./flash-all.sh and press enter.
- Allow several processes to finish and the device to reboot completely.
- Skip all prompts.
- Enable Developer options as previously explained.
- Enable USB Debugging as previously explained.
- Within Terminal, execute adb reboot bootloader.
- Within Terminal, execute fastboot flashing lock.
- Press the volume button on the device to select "Lock the bootloader".
- Press the power button on the device to execute the selection.
- Unplug the device and reboot.
- Confirm that all Developer Options are disabled.

Your device should now boot to a standard Android operating system and your bootloader should be locked. There will no longer be a warning upon powering the device on about a custom operating system. All personal data and custom settings have been erased and the device is safe to issue to someone else.

Option 2: Custom Un-Googled Device (LineageOS)

The first two editions of this book presented LineageOS as the default custom Android ROM. At the time, GrapheneOS was new and I trusted the stability of LineageOS more. I also appreciated that many hardware devices were supported. While I still prefer GrapheneOS today, LineageOS is a respectable option. There are two main disadvantages of LineageOS. First it does not support verified boot. Your final LineageOS device will visually appear very similar to GrapheneOS, and neither send any data to Google, but your LineageOS device will always present an opportunity to physically connect it to a computer and upload malicious software. Is that a realistic concern for most readers? Probably not. If you do not have people trying to steal your phone and compromise the data, then this is not a huge problem. Always consider your own threat model. Second, LineageOS requires additional steps since most non-Pixel phones require manual unlocking of the bootloader and installation of a custom recovery image. Please do not let this deter you, as the process is not extremely difficult. It simply presents a few more hurdles. Let's walk through it together.

Unlike the streamlined process of installing GrapheneOS onto a Pixel phone, the steps for LineageOS can vary based on the requirements from the phone manufacturer. Always check the LineageOS website (lineageos.org) and confirm two things. First, make sure your exact model is an OFFICIALLY SUPPORTED device. While many phones have unofficial builds, they are often maintained by individuals which do not necessarily abide by the standards of the official options. Next, make sure your exact make and model is supported by the distribution. Once you have confirmed all of this, proceed to the installation page for your device. Always rely on the current installation page over any instructions here. For demonstration purposes only, I will be explaining the process to install LineageOS onto a Sony Xperia 10 test unit. The official installation tutorial is on the LineageOS site at wiki.lineageos.org/devices/kirin/install, but I find those instructions make assumptions that everyone is tech-savvy. I will try to present basic steps here.

If you used a Linux machine to build a GrapheneOS device, you likely already have the required software to complete this process. However, I will assume that anyone considering LineageOS cannot take advantage of GrapheneOS, so let's start over. Conduct the following within your chosen operating system. The Mac and Windows options assume you are using Brew (Mac) or Chocolatey (Windows) as a package manager. More details on this can be found at brew.sh and chocolatey.org.

Linux (Terminal): sudo apt update && sudo apt install android-tools-adb android-tools-fastboot
Mac (Terminal): brew install android-platform-tools
Windows (Command Prompt as Administrator): choco install adb

Next, you must place your device into USB debugging and OEM unlocking modes with the following steps.

- Tap "Settings", then "About phone".
- Tap "Build number" at the bottom several times until "Developer mode" is enabled.
- Tap the back arrow.
- Tap "System".
- Tap "Advanced".
- Tap "Developer Options".
- Enable "OEM unlocking".
- Enable "USB debugging".
- Connect the device to the computer via USB cable and allow any connection prompts.

You must manually unlock the bootloader before proceeding. Note that some devices will not let you re-lock the bootloader, so this might be a permanent change. Please understand the risks before replicating. Make sure you have a backup of any important data, as your device will be completely reformatted and all data will be erased. The unlock process will vary with every device, but searching your model and "unlock bootloader" should present solutions (and risks). On my device, I had to dial *#*#7378423#*#* (*#*#SERVICE#*#*) to

launch the service menu; navigate to "Service Info"; tap "Configuration"; and confirm it displayed "Bootloader unlock allowed: Yes". I then had to enter the IMEI from the device into the Sony Xperia website (developer.sony.com/develop/open-devices/get-started/unlock-bootloader) in order to be issued an unlock code. This will be required in the next phase. Research your device on the manufacturer's website to understand the steps required to unlock your own bootloader. Some will require a code while others will allow you to immediately unlock it.

Next, in my Terminal, I entered "adb reboot bootloader", which rebooted my device into bootloader mode. I could have also turned the device off, held the volume up button while pressing the power button to replicate this action. I then entered "fastboot devices" and confirmed my device was properly connected. Finally, I entered "fastboot oem unlock" followed by my unlock code and struck enter. I then possessed an unlocked bootloader. I can now install LineageOS.

I navigated to the installation files for my device (download.lineageos.org/kirin) and downloaded both the "File" and "Recovery Image". I rebooted my device and repeated the steps to enable USB debugging. I then conducted the following steps within Terminal.

- adb reboot bootloader
- fastboot devices
- fastboot flash boot lineage-18.1-20211214-recovery-kirin

Note that the "img" file displayed in the final command was the exact file previously downloaded. Dragging and dropping the file into Terminal after the command is the easiest way to input the correct path. I then unplugged the device; held the volume down button; and pressed the power button until the device booted into "Recovery" mode. I selected "Apply Update" and "Apply from ADB" on the device. I then reconnected the USB cable and navigated back to the LineageOS instructions page. It connected me to a website where I could download a file titled "copy-partitions-20210323_1922.zip". The following finished the installation.

- In Terminal, enter "adb sideload"; drag and drop your "copy-partitions" file; and strike enter.
- Tap "Yes" on the device to confirm.
- When complete, press the back arrow on the device.
- Tap "Factory Reset"; "Format data/factory reset"; "Format"; and continue with the formatting process.
- When complete, press the back arrow on the device.
- Tap "Apply Update", then "Apply from ADB" on the device.
- In Terminal, execute "adb sideload lineage-18.1-20211214-nightly-kirin-signed.zip".

Again, note that my examples include the files specifically for my device. Your files and paths to them will be unique from mine. Once the installation is complete, remove the USB cable and reboot the device by tapping the back arrow then "Reboot Device". You should now boot to LineageOS. Consider the same issues I presented within GrapheneOS with your own LineageOS build. They are very similar. Updates for your device can be checked via "Settings" > "System" > "Advanced" > "Updater".

Some devices will allow you to re-lock your bootloader, but this is not always the case. In this example, I could have locked the bootloader after installing LineageOS, but this would have likely prevented my phone from booting. This is because LineageOS is not a "Verified Boot" operating system and the Sony hardware would refuse to boot to LineageOS. However, I could have re-installed the stock software through Sony's repair tool; enabled USB and OEM debugging; restarted the device in bootloader mode; then entered "fastboot oem lock" via Terminal to lock the bootloader. This works because the restored official operating system from Sony is trusted as a verified boot option. **When I create LineageOS devices, I leave the bootloader unlocked.** Most LineageOS devices allow backups through "SeedVault", which is the same backup strategy explained previously within the GrapheneOS section.

Option 3: Custom AOSP Device

In late 2021, I was approached by a long-time client who wanted a new mobile device. She did not want a Pixel because they do not offer micro SD storage. She needed the ability to store an internal 1 terabyte micro SD card and have access to the content within the device. There were plenty of options for that within LineageOS devices, but she wanted to use a specific Sony Xperia model which possessed a powerful processor and sleek thin design. There were no LineageOS options for her model, but she insisted on a 100% Google-free operating system and application environment. My purest option was to build my own version of Android, through the Android Open Source Project (AOSP), for her device. The content within this section is extremely technical, and should only be attempted by those whom are tech-savvy and ready to troubleshoot many issues. **You will still need to conduct your own research to replicate this within your own device. I present this only to provide another alternative for those seeking an un-Googled phone.** I doubt many readers have a need for this level of modification, but I felt compelled to include it within this book. It may be nothing more than a mildly interesting read for you before moving on to the next option, which is much more realistic.

AOSP is the foundation operating system for all Android devices. GrapheneOS, LineageOS, and the stock Android included on a device from the cell phone store are all built upon AOSP. GrapheneOS and LineageOS make a few tweaks which add small layers of privacy and security, while stock Android devices add numerous unwanted Google apps, services, and connections. AOSP is basically the raw version of Android which does not include all of the "junk" which invades our privacy. It is a "clean" version of Android which should not include many invasions or applications outside of the bare minimum needed for function.

Before attempting installation of AOSP on my client's $1,000 phone, I wanted to test things on something more affordable. I purchased a Sony Xperia 10 III (2021) for $380 and began my tests. I was fortunate that Sony offers open source builds of their devices which can be researched at developer.sony.com/develop/open-devices. If you wish to replicate these steps for your own device, you will need to confirm that it is possible. **This section is only intended to be a high-level summary of my actions, and not a specific tutorial for any device.** I only recommend this process through a Linux laptop, and I used my Ubuntu machine. I conducted the following within Terminal.

- sudo apt purge openjdk-* icedtea-* icedtea6-*
- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install -y openjdk-11-jdk
- sudo apt install -y adb bison g++-multilib git gperf libxml2-utils make zlib1g-dev:i386 zip liblz4-tool libncurses5 libssl-dev bc flex curl python-is-python3
- mkdir ~/bin
- curl http://commondatastorage.googleapis.com/git-repo-downloads/repo > ~/bin/repo
- chmod a+x ~/bin/repo

These steps installed the required software applications to my computer. Next, I executed "nano ~/.bashrc" to open a file which needed modification. I then scrolled to the bottom of this file, visible within Terminal, and added "export PATH=~/bin:$PATH" to the last empty line. I pressed "ctrl-x", "y", then enter to save and exit. I then continued my installation of AOSP with the following Terminal commands.

- mkdir ~/android
- cd ~/android
- git config --global user.email "test@email.com"
- git config --global user.name "John Smith"
- cd ~/android
- repo init -u https://android.googlesource.com/platform/manifest -b android-12.0.0_r16

These steps created a new folder and configured fake contact details as required by the AOSP distribution. Note that the last command specifically requested Android 12.0.0_r16. This is because it was the most recent stable release at the time and fully supported by Sony's AOSP documentation, visible on their website located at developer.sony.com/develop/open-devices/guides/aosp-build-instructions. Always refer to any online AOSP documentation for your own device instead of this summary. I continued with the following steps.

- cd .repo
- git clone https://github.com/sonyxperiadev/local_manifests
- cd local_manifests
- git pull https://github.com/sonyxperiadev/local_manifests
- git checkout android-12.0.0_r16
- cd ../..
- repo sync

The final command synchronizes the AOSP source code which we requested to our computer. This is a substantial amount of data (over 40GB) and required over four hours to complete. You MUST have at least 300 GB (preferably 400 GB) of free space to complete this task. Once the data was synchronized, I continued with the following.

- ./repo_update.sh
- source build/envsetup.sh && lunch
- make -j$(nproc)

The first command confirmed I had the most recent source code while the second command displayed a list of device models. I entered the number associated with my own device, the Xperia 10 III (XQ-BT52). The final command compiled all of the code and generated the files required to create a custom AOSP device. This process churned for over three hours. My first attempt displayed several errors, but the second execution of "make -j$(nproc)" resulted in a successful build. The second attempt only required 20 minutes.

Next, I unlocked the bootloader using the same instructions previously presented within "Option 2". I then pressed the volume up button and connected the USB cable from my device to the computer. This entered the device into bootloader mode and I confirmed my device was connected with "fastboot devices". Next, I downloaded the "Binaries" created by Sony specifically for my device. Many manufacturers provide this data, but some do not. Searching "AOSP binaries" and your device model should assist. I found the file I needed on the Sony site at https://developer.sony.com/file/download/software-binaries-for-aosp-android-11-0-kernel-4-14-ganges. I unzipped the file which resulted in the following file within my Downloads folder.

SW_binaries_for_Xperia_Android_11_4.14_v8a_ganges.img

Now that I had the binaries (vendor) file for my device downloaded and the AOSP build compiled, I was ready to upload the content to the phone. While powered off, I held down the volume up button and connected the USB cable from the device to my Linux computer. The phone entered bootloader mode. I conducted the following within Terminal.

- cd ~Downloads
- fastboot reboot fastboot (This reboots into BootloaderD)
- fastboot flash oem SW_binaries_for_Xperia_Android_11_4.19_v8a_lena.img
- cd ~/android/out/target/product/pdx213/
- fastboot flash boot boot.img
- fastboot flash vbmeta vbmeta.img
- fastboot flash dtbo dtbo.img

- fastboot flash recovery recovery.img
- fastboot flash system system.img
- fastboot flash system_ext system_ext.img
- fastboot flash product product.img
- fastboot flash vendor vendor.img
- fastboot flash vbmeta_system vbmeta_system.img
- fastboot flash userdata userdata.img
- fastboot erase metadata

Note the specific paths within these commands. In the beginning, I switched to my Downloads directory which allowed me to flash the img file present within that folder. However, the img files created during the AOSP process are stored in a different location. You must navigate to that path, which is typically within your Home folder > android > out > target > product. In this folder, you will see a directory titled the code name of your device (mine was pdx213). Inside that folder will be several files, but we only need those listed here.

Rebooting the device launched me into Android 12 without any excess applications or services. It appeared very similar to the custom ROMs previously explained. Figure 2.01 (left) displays the minimal apps included on my device, while Figure 2.01 (right) displays the firewall Blokada confirming a lack of attempted connections. This is a much different story than the hundreds of requests we would have seen within a traditional Android device. Blokada is a mobile device firewall which I use to test application connections, **but I do not use it as part of my daily routine**. I explain how I rely on DNS to filter unwanted connections in the next chapter. I was finally ready to assist my client with customization of her new device using the techniques discussed later in this chapter.

Many things can go wrong here. The AOSP build process could fail on one or more required images. This happened to me once. All img files were created with the exception of system.img. A Terminal command of "make systemimage" while in the "Android" folder finished the process in a few minutes. This was better than starting over. However, I have had AOSP builds fail which could only be resolved by repeating every step. I want to stress that this summary is not intended to walk you through your own AOSP build within a different device. You will need to do your own research into your device's capabilities. Hopefully, the steps here have provided some insight into the process. If you now have the urge to create your own AOSP build, information is plentiful online. If you possess your own AOSP build, the same methods previously mentioned within the GrapheneOS section apply. You will need to manually set up an applications store and other details. The final result will be the same, with the exception of a locked bootloader. When you want to install security patches, you must repeat the "repo sync", "./repo_update.sh", "source build/envsetup.sh && lunch", and "make -j$(nproc)" steps. Then upload the new img files created during the process. However, do not upload userdata.img if you want to keep all of your apps and settings. Did I mention that I prefer GrapheneOS or Lineages OS, both of which auto-update, over this option? The next option is also much easier, and will provide 95% of the desired privacy and security benefits of these first three options.

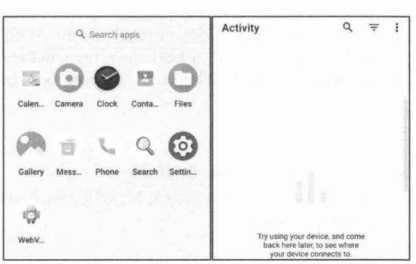


Figure 2.01: An AOSP build and Blokada firewall screen.

Option 4: Manual Un-Googled Device

You may be reading this section thinking that the methods here are out of scope for your own needs. You may not feel comfortable modifying your own operating system. You might already possess the perfect Android device for your needs and dread the idea of starting over. This option will allow you to remove unwanted "bloat" from your current device without modifying the personal details stored within it. It is a safe option, as we can reverse anything we do if the results are not ideal. If you used a Linux machine to build a GrapheneOS or LineageOS device, you likely already have the required software to complete this process. However, I will assume that anyone considering this manual option did not take advantage of custom ROMs, so let's start over. Conduct the following within your chosen operating system. The Mac and Windows options assume you are using Brew (brew.sh - Mac) or Chocolatey (chocolatey.org - Windows) as a package manager.

Linux (Terminal): sudo apt update && sudo apt install android-tools-adb android-tools-fastboot
Mac (Terminal): brew install android-platform-tools
Windows (Command Prompt as Administrator): choco install adb

Next, you must place your device into USB debugging mode with the following steps.

- Tap "Settings", then "About phone".
- Tap "Build number" at the bottom several times until "Developer mode" is enabled.
- Tap the back arrow, "System", then "Advanced".
- Tap "Developer Options" and enable "USB debugging".
- Connect the device to the computer via USB cable and allow any connection prompts.

You can now open Terminal or Command Prompt from your computer and begin searching for (and removing) unwanted applications. After executing "adb devices" to confirm your connection, consider the following.

- adb shell pm list packages: This command displays every application on your device, including hidden system processes. This is a good way to start digesting the enormous amount of applications which you may find invasive.
- adb shell pm list packages > ~/Desktop/packages.txt: This creates a text file on your desktop (Mac and Linux) which contains the data from the previous step. This is vital in case you remove something which breaks your device. It will be easy to replace the culprit since we have a list of all applications. If necessary, you could also use this list to revert all of your customizations within this chapter. You should keep this for future reference.
- adb shell pm list package | grep 'google': This displays only applications which include "Google" within the title. This is beneficial in order to target specific terms. Replacing "Google" with "Facebook", "Netflix", or other apps may identify your next task.
- adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.youtube: This is the command to remove an application. In this example, I removed the YouTube app. As soon as I executed it, I was presented with "Success" within Terminal. As I watched my device's screen, I saw the app disappear in real-time.

Now that you know the basic commands, consider what apps you would like to remove. The following presents some common invasive apps.

Gmail: com.google.android.gm
YouTube: com.google.android.youtube
Maps: com.google.android.apps.maps
Chrome: com.android.chrome
Facebook: com.facebook.system
Netflix: com.netflix.mediaclient

Adventurous readers may want to remove the entire Google framework which is constantly monitoring your activity and reporting metrics back to their servers. The following represents the main applications which force this data collection. Note that removing these will remove Google push services, which is required if you want

notifications of incoming communications. These could also prevent your device from rebooting, but you can always reset to a factory installation if needed. **Always assume there is a risk of losing all personal data when making configuration changes. Make sure you have a good backup.**

Google Service Framework: com.google.android.gsf
Google Play Services: com.google.android.gms
Google Carrier Services: com.google.android.ims
Google Speech Services: com.google.android.tts

By now, you may be experimenting on your own device and you may have regret about your actions. Fortunately, we can easily reverse each action with the following command, which reinstalls any removed application.

- adb shell pm install-existing com.google.android.youtube

Let's pause and digest this activity. Removing each app seems easy and immediate, but it is a bit misleading. We are not completely removing the application from the device. Instead, we are telling the operating system to remove the app for the current user. Think of this as "hiding" the app. This is adequate for most needs. Once the app is removed from your user profile, it will not load upon reboot. It will not run in the background or collect data about your usage. It is virtually deleted from your device as you know it. Since the app still resides within the operating system, we can revert our actions easily. Please note that removing an application does not remove any personal data associated with it. If you downloaded an image attachment from Gmail, and then deleted the Gmail app, the attachment would still be within your storage.

I find this method ideal for removing common bloatware such as social network apps (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), branded support apps (Sony, Samsung, etc.), and forced third-party apps (keyboards, contact mangers, etc.). If you choose not to apply a custom or AOSP ROM to your Android device, please consider creating a device un-Googled as best as possible. Removing unused apps will always lead to better overall privacy and security. Consider Figure 2.02. It displays a screen capture of a stock Android drawer (left), the same view after removing applications (middle), and a view of Blokada (right) displaying only two non-intrusive connections made since the last reboot after removal of invasive apps.

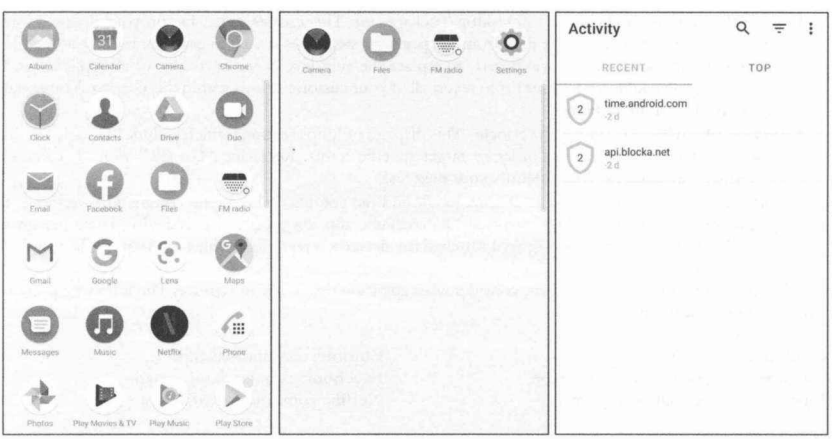


Figure 2.02: Results from removing invasive Android apps manually.

The list below includes the exact commands I executed on my test Sony Xperia device. I include this only for review of the types of apps I uninstalled. You should create your own list of installed packages to determine what you should remove. Searching any of the packages should present details of the services.

Google Services:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.gsf
Google Play:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.gms
Google Store:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.android.vending
Google Carriers:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.ims
Google Speech:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.tts
Google Telemetry:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.mainline.telemetry
Gmail:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.gm
YouTube:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.youtube
Google Photos:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.photos
Google Maps:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.maps
Google Calendar:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.calendar
Google Contacts:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.contacts
Google Messages:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.messaging
Google Music:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.music
Google Duo:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.tachyon
Google Lens:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.ar.lens
Google Docs:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.docs
Google Videos:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.videos
Google Chrome:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.android.chrome
Google Partners:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.partnersetup
Google Assistant:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.googleassistant
Google Dialer:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.dialer
Google Dialer Overlay:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 android.platform.res.overlay.google_dialer
Android Call Logs:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.android.calllogbackup
Google Keyboard:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.inputmethod.latin
Google Files:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.nbu.files
Google Clock:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.deskclock
Google AR:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.ar.core
Google Search Box:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.googlequicksearchbox
Google Talkback:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.marvin.talkback
Google Battery Monitor:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.turbo
Google Apps Restore:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.restore
Google Analytics:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.feedback
Google Setup Wizard:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.setupwizard
Google Location:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.gms.location.history
Google Wellbeing:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.apps.wellbeing
Google Wellbeing:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.overlay.gmswellbeingconfig
Facebook:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.facebook.katana
Facebook:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.facebook.system
Facebook:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.facebook.appmanager
LinkedIn:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.linkedin.android
Netflix:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.netflix.mediaclient
Netflix:	adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.netflix.partner.activation

You could go much further by removing the bloatware included by the manufacturer, such as many useless apps provided by Samsung, Sony, Xiaomi, etc. However, be careful not to remove desired options such as an enhanced camera or update software. Again, do your own research. I removed "com.sonymobile.support", "com.sonymobile.retaildemo", and "com.sonymobile.apppprediction" to eliminate these embedded Sony apps within the Android Settings menu.

You may have noticed some essential apps within this list. Replicating these steps will remove your keyboard, file browser, photo gallery, contact manager, calendar, phone dialer, SMS messenger, ability to download apps, and many other Google-branded features. I always download non-Google versions of these essentials from **Simple Mobile Tools** (simplemobiletools.com) and **OpenBoard** (github.com/dslul/openboard) before I remove the stock options. I also install F-Droid as previously explained. The following URLs navigate directly to open-source replacement options within the F-Droid environment. They can all be downloaded through the F-Droid app after you have researched and approved each option.

OpenBoard Keyboard: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/org.dslul.openboard.inputmethod.latin/
Simple File Manager: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.filemanager.pro/
Simple Gallery: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.gallery.pro/
Simple Contacts: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.contacts.pro/
Simple Calendar: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.calendar.pro/
Simple Dialer: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.dialer/
Simple Messenger: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.smsmessenger/
Simple Clock: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.clock/
Simple Notes: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.notes.pro/
Simple Voice Recorder: https://f-droid.org/en/packages/com.simplemobiletools.voicerecorder/

If you download the APK files from these links directly onto your computer, you can also install them to your device via USB. Assuming you saved the file "org.dslul.openboard.inputmethod.latin_18.apk" (OpenBoard Keyboard) from the "Download APK" link on the F-Droid website, the following Terminal commands would streamline the installation directly to your device. This can be much faster than navigating the app on a mobile platform. Note that you must have USB debugging enabled and the device must be connected via USB to the computer.

- cd ~/Downloads
- adb install org.dslul.openboard.inputmethod.latin_18.apk

I keep all of these apps on my machine ready to go. I can send them all to a device with a handful of commands, which I keep saved in my notes. Once installed, they will appear within F-Droid for easy future updating. If you ever need to factory reset your device, having all of these commands ready will save you a lot of time. During my testing, I copied and pasted the commands from the previous page and this section within Terminal all at once. The entire removal and installation process took less than 30 seconds, and I possessed a much more private and secure device with almost no effort.

On occasion, I find that an app within a custom ROM performs better than anything within F-Droid or Aurora. While sanitizing a stock Android device for a client, I wanted to remove the Google Gallery application due to its invasive network traffic. Once removed, the camera had no way to display a captured image, and the user had no way to browse through photos. Installing Simple Gallery resolved the issue, but it was very slow and was missing required features such as the ability to trim a video. I wanted the Gallery app included within LineageOS. It was simple, fast, and functional. It cannot be downloaded from within any app store, as it is a custom build for LineageOS. The solution was to extract it from a functioning device and then import it into my client's phone. I conducted the following within Terminal while a LineageOS device was connected via USB cable. Copying this app does not include any personal content or configurations.

- adb shell pm list package --user 0 | grep 'gallery': This command identified "com.android.gallery3d" as the Gallery application within the device.
- adb shell pm path com.android.gallery3d: This displayed the full path to the APK file (/product/app/Gallery2/Gallery2.apk).
- adb pull /product/app/Gallery2/Gallery2.apk: This extracted the APK file from the path previously displayed. I then disconnected the LineageOS device and attached the client's phone.
- adb install --user 0 Gallery2.apk: This installed the extracted app to the client's device.

Android Supplement: Profiles

Every modern Android device, including GrapheneOS, LineageOS, AOSP, and stock Android, possesses the ability to create multiple user profiles within a single device. This allows you to create numerous environments which isolate apps and services from the primary profile. These are not virtual machines or completely restricted containers, but they do offer some privacy and security benefits. I believe they are best explained with a recent example of my own usage.

The client which asked me to convert a stock Android device into a more private option by removing Google's apps and services returned with a new problem. Her banking app, which she needed to access weekly, would not run without Google's framework and security checks. I did not want to re-enable the invasive apps and services which I had removed, so I created a second profile for this purpose. I conducted the following.

- Navigate to "System" > "Advanced" > "Multiple Users".
- Enable the "Multiple Users" toggle.
- Click the "+" to create a new profile and title it "Financial".
- Allow the device to reboot into the new profile.

This booted me into a new copy of stock Android. All of the Google apps and services which were included with the device upon first boot were present exactly as they appeared on the first day. The Google framework and other removed apps had returned in this profile. This is because I had only uninstalled software for the current user, and not from the factory install images. I could swipe down from the top menu and switch back to the primary profile and effortlessly return to a mostly un-Googled experience. I installed Aurora Store and my client's banking application while in this new profile. I had to use the previously explained technique to open the banking app installation through Aurora. The app installed and loaded fine, and she was able to log into her account when needed. However, there are always caveats to this.

Exiting a secondary profile does not shut down all of the active services within it. You may notice an unnecessary burden to your device's RAM and battery if you leave this profile running in the background. The solution is to completely reboot after using the secondary profile. My recommendation is to enter the new profile from your primary profile; conduct the required business; switch back to the primary profile; and then reboot the device. If you do not enter the secondary profile after a reboot, those resources should not be loaded.

This secondary profile is not anonymous or completely disconnected from the primary user. They both share the same stored Wi-Fi connections, cellular device, GPS, Bluetooth, and hardware identifiers. Our purpose of a secondary profile is to provide an invasive Google environment when needed without compromising your primary profile. Since she only needs to access her banking app on rare occasion, there is no need for it to impact her daily phone usage. She also uses her secondary profile for access to Google Maps in the event she should need it. While her offline maps usually provide the information she needs, she may find herself in a situation where active traffic details and alternative routing could be vital. A Google account is not required.

Secondary profile creation relies on com.google.android.setupwizard being stored within the main profile. We removed this with the previous commands. If you receive errors, you made need to reload this service into the primary profile; complete the setup of the secondary profile; then remove it again from the primary profile.

I never recommend more than one secondary profile. Possessing multiple profiles requires additional storage and maintenance. Forgetting to reboot after access of each profile could quickly drain your resources and drag down your speed.

I mentioned that I do not recommend secondary profiles if using a private custom ROM such as GrapheneOS. This is because these options do not have easily embedded Google services available to the secondary profile by default. If I am going to the extent of a completely un-Googled custom ROM, I will not re-introduce Google services for the sake of convenience. Always make your own decisions best for your scenario.

When you find a need to restore an application, repeat the "install-existing" command for any desired app or service. I once needed to restore the Google Setup Wizard (com.google.android.setupwizard) option because it is required to generate a new secondary profile. The following commands re-added the option before attempting profile creation, then removed it from both profiles after the profile generation.

- adb shell cmd package install-existing com.google.android.setupwizard
- adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.setupwizard
- adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 10 com.google.android.setupwizard

On rare occasion, I find an app which stalls because of these un-Googled configurations. Signal Messenger once refused to install because it believed that Google Mobile Services (GMS) was installed but "locked". GMS had been removed for the current user, but it still existed, in a dormant but "enabled" state, confusing Signal. The following Terminal command "disabled" GMS.

- adb shell pm disable-user --user 0 com.google.android.gms

This pacified the app. After installation, I then reversed this setting with the following command.

- adb shell pm enable com.google.android.gms

The service was still "hidden" and uninstalled from my profile, and the device never made any connections to Google. This alternative setting disables the service completely instead of uninstalling. Overall, I prefer the option of uninstalling each app from the profile. It tends to maintain the setting after major updates while disabling the apps often reverses the setting after updates. I reserve the disable tactic only for scenarios of an upset app. However, for full coverage you could do both without any harm. The following would uninstall and disable YouTube for the primary user profile of the device.

- adb shell pm uninstall -k --user 0 com.google.android.youtube
- adb shell pm disable-user --user 0 com.google.android.youtube

Now that you have made several modifications, you may want to quickly display details about the current state of the device. The previous command of "adb shell pm list packages --user 0" will display all of the remaining packages for the primary user, but not the packages which have been uninstalled. The following command displays all packages, including those which you have removed, for the primary user.

- adb shell pm list packages -u --user 0

If you want to only display the packages which you uninstalled for any user, execute the following command.

- diff <(adb shell pm list packages) <(adb shell pm list packages -u)

Finally, the following command displays all disabled packages for the primary user.

- adb shell pm list packages -d --user 0

This may all seem easy, but things do go wrong. I have witnessed a device refuse to boot after the main Google services were removed. Booting into recovery mode; restoring the device to factory settings; then repeating the exact same process then worked without issue. I cannot explain why this happens, but it does. Remember that you can usually restore a device back to the original factory condition if things break. To do this, enter the "Recovery Mode" while the device is turned off. For many units, holding the volume down and power buttons

at the same time presents this option. Online research of your device and "factory reset" should identify the key requirements appropriate for you. The volume keys can then select the restore option and the power button executes the task. However, you will lose all of your custom settings when you do this. This is why I always recommend practicing these options on an old phone or a recently restored device. Expect data loss and the need to restore all of your settings. It is always best to start over with a clean device.

I encourage you to document all of the commands applied to your devices. I keep mine in a separate text file for each unit. If a major Android update reverses my settings, I can re-apply all commands in less than a minute. If I lose my phone, I can purchase the same model and replicate the setup immediately. If I ever need to conduct a factory restore, I do not need to research all of the settings again. There is no harm executing a command which has already been applied. If I uninstalled an app or service, and I am not sure if it has been re-enabled, I can simply execute that command again. If it was needed, Terminal will display "success". If the change was already in place, it will display a generic error stating the service was already uninstalled. I often execute all of my commands at once after every Android update. While most fail, I see an occasional success for a service which had been reinstalled.

Your sanitized stock Android device may or may not present an internal backup solution. My preference for any Android, including GrapheneOS and LineageOS, is to use ADB's internal backup option. I previously presented alternative options because ADB has been threatening to remove this feature. If it is still available by the time you read this, consider the following commands. The first copies all possible system and app data to a file called "backup.ab" while the second restores the data to the device.

- adb backup -all -system -apk -keyvalue -obb -shared -f backup.ab
- adb restore mybackupfile.adb

During the steps presented within this chapter, you have likely enabled Developer Options and USB Debugging while experimenting with your device. This presents many benefits, including the ability to issue commands from a computer via USB cable. It also presents many vulnerabilities. If someone has physical access to your device, there is a greater chance they could access or modify its contents due to these settings. When you are finished with the features provided within these settings, please disable both USB Debugging and Developer Options (in that order).

- Open the "Settings" app then tap "System", "Advanced", then "Developer Options".
- Disable "USB debugging"; disable the top "Developer Options" toggle; and reboot the device.

If you have unlocked your bootloader; installed a custom ROM such as GrapheneOS or LineageOS; and then reinstalled the device's stock firmware (operating system) through a restore program; you should consider re-locking your bootloader. This should only be done once an official operating system designed for your specific device has been installed. This action might erase all of your content and restore to the factory image. For many devices, the following would re-lock the bootloader, and protect the device from some physical attacks. Always research the proper bootloader unlocking and re-locking process before attempting your own procedure.

- While the device is off, press the volume down and power buttons.
- Connect a USB cable from the device to your computer.
- While the device is in bootloader mode, execute "fastboot oem lock" from Terminal.

You should also consider Android security versus privacy. A GrapheneOS device may be more secure than a LineageOS unit due to the locked bootloader, but both have the same overall privacy benefits. Removing Google software from your stock Android device may be more secure (locked bootloader) than a custom ROM maintained by only one internet stranger (unlocked bootloader), but both will remove you from the Google ecosystem. However, none of these options provide Google services such as SafetyNet which help secure your device from malicious applications. A stock Android device with Google services installed might be more secure

than a custom un-Googled ROM, but there is a huge privacy risk. These security benefits come with the requirement to constantly send Google metrics about your usage. There is no perfect solution for everyone. For me and my clients, the privacy benefits of un-Googled devices far outweigh the potential security benefits of their security-based services. If you are only using trusted applications without experimenting with random games and online services, I believe the threat is quite minimal. If your mobile device is the only computer you own, and you browse the web all day on it, you may be better off with something more similar to a stock Android device. I believe GrapheneOS installed on a Pixel with a locked bootloader is the ideal balance for most people in the privacy community.

I close this section about Android issues with a few thoughts. There are a lot of opinions within the Android custom ROM community about the perfect Android setup. Now that Apple is collecting more user data than ever before, people are flocking to so-called "private phones" which send no data to Apple or Google whatsoever. There is a lot of elitism within this culture. The GrapheneOS forums will shun anyone who dares to ask for clarification of build decisions while Reddit is full of users quick to shame anyone who does not unlock their bootloader. During all of my testing, I found that it is not difficult to achieve privacy within Android with minimal effort.

Neither my GrapheneOS, LineageOS, AOSP, or manually un-Googled devices sent any data from the operating system to Google once my setup was complete. You may want to start with option "4" before committing to rebuilding (and potentially damaging) your device. Do not allow internet strangers to force you into using a technology with which you are not comfortable. I have several clients happily using stock Android devices with all bloatware and Google services uninstalled. Small steps toward your own privacy path can be greatly effective. You may find the lack of push services and the Google framework prevent you from enjoying your device. It is always better to learn of this the easy reversible way than to feel stuck with a limited operating system which you do not understand. While I truly enjoy my daily GrapheneOS device, it took a while to realize I do not need constant notifications disrupting my life. I tend to always go the extreme route when I would probably receive similar benefits from the other strategies presented within this chapter.

Android Supplement: Android 12 Privacy Guide

Android 12 emerged in late 2021 and introduced many valuable privacy and security settings which I find superior to iOS. The following are the most vital modifications I have found to apply to any Android 12 device, regardless of it being a stock unit or built from a custom ROM. Some of these settings may already be enabled within various devices, and others may be missing from custom ROMs, but all should be checked after any major update.

We should start with the cellular network connectivity. The following two options will not be available within every OS. The first option disables 2G connections if supported by your device. This can eliminate some cellular interception threats. The second option may only be available within custom ROMs, such as GrapheneOS, and it eliminates both 2G and 3G connections, which provides more security.

Settings > Network & internet > SIMs > Allow 2G > Disable
Settings > Network & internet > SIMs > Preferred network > LTE Only

The following options should be available in most Android 12 configurations. Devices with Android 11 may also benefit from some modifications. Use the search option within the Settings menu to identify potential settings. If Android 13 (or 14) is available by the time you read this, you will likely see even more options. **All mobile device configuration is a personal choice and you may not agree with my custom settings. Research any changes if you feel they may be inappropriate for your needs.**

Settings > Network & internet > Internet > Network preferences > Disable "Turn on Wi-Fi automatically"
Settings > Network & internet > Internet > Network preferences > Disable "Notify for public networks"
Settings > Network & internet > Private DNS > Select "Private" and provide your DNS server (Chapter Three)
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > Bluetooth > Disable
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > NFC > Disable
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > Printing > Default Print Service > Disable
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > Driving mode > Disable
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > Nearby Share > Disable
Settings > Connected devices > Connection preferences > Nearby Share > Show Notification > Disable
Settings > Apps > Assistant > Disable All
Settings > Notifications > Notification history > Disable
Settings > Notifications > Bubbles > Disable
Settings > Notifications > Wireless emergency alerts > Disable all if desired
Settings > Notifications > Enhanced notifications > Disable
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Privacy > "Don't show notifications at all"
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Add text > (Enter a VOIP number for contact if found if desired)
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Show wallet > Disable
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Show device controls > Disable
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Now Playing > Disable
Settings > Display > Lock screen > Wake screen for notifications > Disable
Settings > Accessibility > Talkback > Disable
Settings > Accessibility > Select to Speak > Disable
Settings > Accessibility > Live Transcribe > Disable
Settings > Security > Find My Device > Disable
Settings > Security > Screen Lock > PIN
Settings > Security > Encryption & credentials > Encrypt phone > Encrypted
Settings > Privacy > Permission Manager > (Each option) > Disable invasive app access
Settings > Privacy > Show passwords > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Notifications on lock screen > "Don't show notifications at all"
Settings > Privacy > Private Compute Core > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Personalize using app data > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Autofill service from Google > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Google location history > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Ads > Opt out of Ads > Enable
Settings > Privacy > Ads Enable debug logging > Disable
Settings > Privacy > Usage & diagnostics > Disable
Settings > Location > Disable (until needed)

Some custom Android operating systems focused on privacy and security may present additional options within the settings menu. Consider the following modifications on these types of devices.

Settings > Network & internet > Wi-Fi > Network preferences > Turn off Wi-Fi automatically > 1 Minute
Settings > Security > Auto reboot > 8 Hours
Settings > Security > USB accessories > Deny new USB peripherals
Settings > Security > Enable native code debugging > Disable

Option 5: Apple iOS Device

I believe the privacy and security of a custom un-Googled Android device is far superior to any stock Apple or Android phone available from retail stores. Unfortunately, my clients are usually most familiar with the iOS environment and simply demand these devices. Therefore, I am always ready to meet these expectations. I typically purchase the phones with cash at an Apple store and leave without accepting Apple's activation and setup services. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I had to identify alternative solutions. When some Apple stores were closed, I was able to pay with cash at a local BestBuy. Now that we commonly see openings of retail establishments, this may no longer be an issue. If you purchase a device online, there will always be a digital trail to your true identity. Therefore, cash in-person is always preferred.

Once you have your new device, you are ready to configure all settings and create an Apple ID account. There is a lot to consider. If you purchased a new device, this is a great opportunity to establish a new Apple ID and prepaid cellular account in order to stop the tracking of your old accounts and restart the data collection process with anonymous details. Conduct the following on your new device, which is based on iOS 15.

- Turn on device.
- Select language and region, then click "Set Up Manually".
- Select and join available Wi-Fi.
- Click "Continue".
- Set up Touch ID if desired.
- Click "Passcode Options" and choose "Custom Numeric Code".
- Create a strong passcode and click "Next".
- Confirm passcode and click "Next".
- Choose "Don't transfer data and apps".
- Click "Forgot password or don't have an Apple ID".
- Choose "Set Up later" in Settings.
- Choose "Don't Use".
- Agree to the terms of service.
- Click "Continue" or "Customize Settings".
- Choose "Not Now" for "iMessage and Facetime".
- Choose "Disable Location Services".
- Choose "Setup Later in Settings" (Siri).
- Choose "Setup Later in Settings" (Screen Time).
- Click "Don't Share" iPhone Analytics.
- Select desired appearance and zoom.
- Click "Get Started" to exit the menu.

Once you have booted to the main menu, the following configurations should be considered through the Settings menu. Note that some of these settings may disable features which you find desirable, and some options here might not be present within your device. Research any modifications and apply settings which are most appropriate for your usage.

- Settings > Wi-Fi: Off (If not used-preferred)
- Settings > Bluetooth: Off (If not used-preferred)
- Settings > Cellular: Disable access to undesired apps, such as Find My, Contacts, etc.
  If using ONLY cellular data, and not Wi-Fi, you can use this menu as a firewall.
- Settings > Notifications > Show previews: Never
- Settings > Notifications > Scheduled Summary: Off
- Settings > Notifications > Siri Suggestions: Disable all

- Settings > Notifications: Disable notifications on desired apps, especially sensitive apps
- Settings > Notifications: If desired, disable all Government Alerts
- Settings > General > AirPlay & Handoff: Disable all
- Settings > General > Picture in Picture: Disable
- Settings > Siri & Search: Disable all
- Settings > Siri & Search > (each app): Disable all
- Settings > Privacy > Location services: Disable all
- Settings > Privacy > Tracking: Disable all
- Settings > Privacy > Motion & Fitness: Disable all
- Settings > Privacy > Analytics & Improvements: Disable all
- Settings > Privacy > Apple Advertising>Personalized Ads: Disable
- Settings > App Store > Video Autoplay: Off
- Settings > App Store > In-App Ratings & Reviews: Disable
- Settings > Passwords > Security Recommendations>Detect Compromised...: Disable
- Settings > Messages > iMessage: Disable
- Settings > Facetime > Facetime: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Search Engine: DuckDuckGo
- Settings > Safari > Search Engine Suggestions: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Safari Suggestions: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Quick Website Search: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Preload Top Hit: Disable
- Settings > Safari > AutoFill: Disable All
- Settings > Safari > Prevent Cross-Site Tracking: Enabled
- Settings > Safari > Fraudulent Website Warning: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Privacy Preserving Ad Measurement: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Check for Apple Pay: Disable
- Settings > Safari > Camera: Deny
- Settings > Safari > Microphone: Deny
- Settings > Safari > Location: Deny
- Settings > Maps > Share ETA: Disable
- Settings > Maps > Air Quality Index: Disable
- Settings > Maps > Weather Conditions: Disable
- Settings > Maps > Ratings and Photos: Disable
- Settings > Maps > Show Ratings and Photos Suggestion: Disable
- Settings > Maps > Follow Up by Email: Disable
- Settings > Shortcuts > iCloud Sync: Disable
- Settings > Music > Show Apple Music: Disable
- Settings > Camera > Scan QR Codes: Disable
- Section V: Personalization

Remove any unwanted optional stock apps, such as Home, Translate, Books, iTunes Store, Watch, Tips, Facetime, Calendar, Mail, Notes, Reminders, News, TV, Stocks, etc. Change the wallpaper if desired and remove unwanted Widgets from screens. Remove any unwanted apps from home screen and create new app shortcuts if desired.

You should now have an iPhone with several custom configurations. However, you have not connected an Apple ID to your device yet. You cannot download any apps. I like to establish a new Apple ID at least once a year in order to slightly confuse Apple's data collection systems. I insist on a new Apple ID and prepaid cellular

- ProtonMail > Settings > Account >Mobile Signature > Disable
- ProtonMail > Settings > Default Browser: Firefox Focus

ProtonVPN: If you plan to use both ProtonVPN (or any other VPN) and Lockdown Privacy simultaneously, you must change the protocol of your VPN. Go to your settings and disable Smart Protocol. This allows you to change your protocol to IKEv2 which eliminates the conflict with Lockdown Privacy. VPNs are explained soon.

Signal: Signal needs some settings activated and deactivated. I take the following actions:

- Signal > Settings > Privacy > Default Timer: Set as desired
- Signal > Settings > Privacy > Hide Screen in App Switcher: Enable
- Signal > Settings > Privacy > Show Calls in Recents: Disable

Strongbox: This application opens KeePassXC databases. I prefer to keep my mobile version of passwords "Read Only" and only make changes from my laptop when necessary. The biometric option to open databases is available with the paid version. I rely on this app daily.

VoIPSuite: If you use the self-hosted VoIPSuite application explained in a moment, you may want to create a shortcut with the following steps. Note that a default browser of Firefox Focus may present many undesired login screens and may block notifications. If you rely heavily on this app and do very little web browsing from your device, you may want to leave Safari as your default browser and store your VoIPSuite credentials within Keychain for ease of use. Consider this option carefully.

- Navigate to Shortcuts > + > Add Action > Web > Open URLs.
- Add your SMS app URL and click "Next".
- Provide a name for your shortcut.
- Click the icon to choose a custom option.
- Click the three dots in the upper right.
- Click "Add to Home Screen" and "Add".
- Click "Done".

Backup and Restoration: Backing up your iPhone is much easier than Android. It only requires you to open Finder on your new Apple computer with Catalina, Big Sur, or later operating system, connect the mobile device via USB, and conduct the following.

- Click the phone option in the left menu.
- Scroll down and click the "Back Up Now" button.

This will create a backup of the operating system configuration and all Apple data such as your contacts, notes, and calendars. It does not backup all apps and their settings or any media such as music. If you do not possess an Apple computer, you could use iTunes installed to a Windows machine. If you want extreme privacy, you could set up a Windows virtual machine on a Linux host; disable all internet access to the Windows VM; install iTunes within the Windows VM; and connect your mobile device to the iTunes installation. Regardless of the way you do this, having a backup of your mobile device settings will be a huge benefit if you ever need to replicate your configuration onto a second device. This is vital for my clients, as I will not be with them when a disaster happens.

In 2020, I purchased a new replacement iPod Touch as my secondary home device (which I no longer use). Usually, I would make a fresh start with a new Apple ID, but I wanted to test my backup strategy. I turned the new device on; chose the computer connection option; connected it to my MacBook Pro; launched Finder; selected the device; and chose the option to "Restore Backup". Within a few minutes, I possessed a new iOS device which contained the same configuration as the previous device. I then launched iMazing and transferred

the data from the previous device to the new replacement to create a true clone. To be fair, I could have downloaded all of my desired apps within the same amount of time. Today I insist that all of my clients possess a valid backup of their Apple devices.

For extreme privacy, this device should never be configured from your home. Most phones have location services, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, and cellular connectivity enabled by default. This could expose your account and associate it with your residence. I will explain in a moment how I isolate my phone from my home.

If you plan to purchase apps, obtain a prepaid iTunes gift card with cash from a grocery store. Never provide Apple with a credit or debit card number. Hopefully, this will not be necessary because you should possess minimal applications and only those absolutely required.

For most clients who demand an iPhone, I encourage them to obtain the second generation iPhone SE. This device has plenty of power and is affordable at $399. The main feature I like is the fingerprint sensor. While I do not use it, I know my clients do. I would rather them apply a fingerprint to unlock the device instead of the default facial recognition included with flagship iPhone models. I present more thoughts on this on the next page. In previous editions, I recommended the first generation iPhone SE. While I still have a few, including one that sees occasional usage on international travel, these are difficult to find today. Furthermore, this outdated device will soon stop receiving security updates and patches. I no longer recommend people seek this model.

Regardless of the model, I immediately disable all iCloud services within the device. This will prevent accidental exposure such as emails, contacts, calendars, and notes from being stored within Apple's cloud storage. While I do not recommend using Apple's stock iOS applications for any of these services, it is easy to upload data unintentionally. You can access these settings from the iOS "Settings" app > "Apple Account" > "iCloud". This should display "Off" within this menu. Hopefully, you were never signed in.

Some may question my distrust of iCloud. A more appropriate claim would be that I do not trust any cloud storage services for my clients. We have all heard about various breaches which exposed celebrities' personal photos and email messages. These occurred due to the convenience of free cloud storage. The only way to truly prevent this is to block any data from leaving the device. I will discuss solutions in a moment. Most of my clients are highly targeted due to their fame, so I insist on completely disabling iCloud or any other storage solution.

Many people ask about the security of the Touch ID option. I do believe it is secure, and Apple does not receive an image of your fingerprint. Your device creates a mathematical value based on the print, and only looks for a match when it is used. It is only as secure as your passcode, since either can unlock the device. Your decision to activate Touch ID is personal, and most of my clients demand it. I only ask you to consider the following threats.

- Forced Print: If you are placed under physical duress, you could be forced to use your finger to unlock a device. This is extremely rare, but I have had clients who were victims of kidnapping and abduction. These unfortunate incidents weigh heavily on this decision.
- Legal Demands: Some courts have ruled that providing a passcode is not always required as part of a search warrant to search a device, but a fingerprint is. You can refuse to tell your code, but may be physically forced to give up your fingerprint.
- Apple Face ID: I would never consider using this. Although Apple does not store your image, it has been proven vulnerable using photographs of faces to unlock the device.

As I stated previously, I never use cloud storage for sensitive information such as personal photos and videos. However, I respect the need to possess a backup of this data, especially when our mobile devices likely create and store every image we capture. Since many clients possess a new iPhone and Apple computer, I encourage them to manually backup all content via USB cable. The default Apple application for photo backups is Photos, but I prefer not to use it. Instead, I use the stock application titled Image Capture. This minimal software does not attempt to connect to Apple servers and has limited functionality. Upon connecting an iPhone to an Apple computer, I conduct the following.

- Launch Image Capture and select the iPhone in the upper right.
- In the "Import To" option, select the computer folder which will store all images.
- Select "Import All" to copy all images and videos to the computer.
- If desired, select all images, right-click, and permanently delete from the device.

If you are frustrated at the requirement to use Apple's iTunes or Music app to transfer music to your device, I have eliminated many of the headaches by using a premium application called iMazing. It allows me to transfer music, photos, contacts, documents, and backups to or from any iOS device without complications from Apple. The ability to transfer new music files without the possibility of deleting all stored songs is worth the $45 price to me. If you have this software, you do not need any stock apps from Apple in order to import or export any type of data associated with your mobile device.

Once you have your photos and videos on your computer, I hope you are conducting backups of your data to an external device (a tutorial is in the next chapter). By maintaining all of your personal data locally on machines in your possession, you completely eliminate the ability to "hack" into your iCloud and steal your content. You are not bulletproof, but an attack would be extremely targeted and difficult. Note that connecting your new iPhone to your new Apple computer creates a known connection of these two devices with Apple. The risks are minimal since both devices hopefully have no association to your true identity.

I want to state again that I do not use iOS devices and never recommend them to people able to transition to a GrapheneOS, LineageOS, AOSP, or sanitized Android device. As I was updating this chapter, I fetched an iPhone SE from my collection of retired products to test all of these settings. Halfway through the steps, while simply trying to download a free app, I was blocked by Apple. They wanted my password again, which I provided. They then demanded that I verify my VOIP number on file, which I did. They then required a code be sent to that number, but then refused to send the code. They also refused to allow me to receive a code at the email address on file. Everything I tried to get access to my own account failed. Apple suspended me from access to anything in their app store, all because I wanted a free app. This summarizes my dislike of Apple and relief to have found a more reliable operating system (GrapheneOS).

If you were blocked from accessing any new apps or the content within iCloud, would you be impacted? I have countless stories of being on the road and having limited functionality within my mobile iOS device. This is why I always prefer to use devices which do not mandate an active online account in order to receive full access to the device. Apple has the power to lock you out at any time. Customer support will not help you when this happens unless you can pass all scrutiny. If you adopt various privacy practices, Apple will not like this and refuse to assist.

My final thought within this section comes directly from my experience with numerous celebrity clients and the online attacks which forced them to retain my services. They all had iPhones with active iCloud accounts. Their data was automatically synchronized in the background. When online criminals gained access to those accounts due to password recycling or other behaviors, they had everything needed to steal, extort, and harass my clients. The best defense against this activity is to never synchronize the data online. If your photos never leave your devices, there is no easy way to access the data. This is a vital step to extreme privacy if you choose to use Apple devices.

I have bashed Apple a lot in this chapter. However, I do believe their operating system is secure. I believe their intention is to make the iOS experience easy and convenient for their users while offering a decent sense of privacy on the surface. However, Apple wants to know everything about you through default settings. If you modify your settings, disable iCloud, create an anonymous Apple ID, and use a prepaid account, I believe your privacy risk from iOS is minimal.

Cellular Service

Now that your device is configured, your privacy settings are tweaked, and your operating system is more secure, you will need cellular service. In major U.S. metropolitan areas, I use Mint Mobile as the provider. Mint is a T-Mobile reseller, and only offers prepaid plans. I choose them because they are very affordable, do not require user verification, and allow prepayment up to a year. At the time of this writing, the lowest monthly unlimited plan was $15 including a free SIM card. I only need the data, as my clients will never use their real T-Mobile issued number for calls or texts.

You can obtain SIM cards from Mint directly from their website, Amazon, or BestBuy. The cards are free if you purchase a package directly from Mint and $1 to $5 for two cards if you purchase from Amazon. I purchased dozens of 2-packs from Amazon using an anonymous account and shipped to an Amazon Locker (more on that later), but this may be overkill for your needs. If you only need one or two devices activated, I recommend purchasing the Mint Mobile Starter Pack online from Amazon (amzn.to/3d2qXyG) or in-store from BestBuy. The following are two recommended strategies.

- **BestBuy**: If you are near a BestBuy store, this is the easiest and most private option. Most stores carry the "Mint Mobile $5 Prepaid SIM Card Kit" with a SKU of 6310600. At the time of this writing, the cost was $1.00 and each included $5.00 in credit. I have been able to purchase dozens at a time.
- **Amazon**: Purchase an Amazon gift card with cash from a physical store, such as a grocery store. Create a new account on Amazon using alias information and an address of a hotel near your location. Apply the gift card to the account and purchase the Mint Mobile Starter Pack. Choose a nearby Amazon Locker for the delivery address. Once your cards arrive, obtain them from the locker. I explain many Amazon considerations and frustrations later in the book.

After you possess a Mint Mobile SIM card, install the Mint Mobile app on the device you recently configured. This should be done away from your home. If possible, use public Wi-Fi at the place of purchase, as I previously explained. Insert the SIM card and activate the card through the app. This provides you one week of free service to ensure the coverage is acceptable to your needs. It is using T-Mobile service, and I have found the coverage much better than years past. Once you are convinced that Mint Mobile will work for you, select a package within the app. I use very little data, so the 4GB LTE (unlimited at slower speeds) is plenty for my needs. You can prepay for three, six, or twelve months. The longer you commit, the cheaper the price. The lowest package can be purchased for $15 monthly at the yearly commitment. I later explain anonymous payment options. Some readers report the ability to activate "3 month" Mint Mobile prepaid SIM cards from retail stores through the Mint website without a requirement to download their application. This can be helpful for new iOS devices.

Existing Devices and Service

For extreme privacy, you truly need to eliminate any Apple or Android device which was ever associated with your true identity. Apple and Google hold on to this data forever. They can determine when you log in to a new anonymous account within the same hardware. However, privacy is not all black and white. There are grey areas. Many readers have informed me that they cannot afford new hardware and are stuck within cellular service contracts which cannot be terminated. This page offers some considerations for these scenarios.

iOS: If you want to use your current mobile device but want to reclaim a bit of privacy, conduct a hard reset. This erases everything on the device and allows you to create a new Apple ID. Navigate to "Settings" > "General" > "Reset" > "Erase All Content and Settings". This deletes everything, so make sure you have backed up any important content such as photos, videos, and documents. Apple will be able to associate your serial number with both your old and new accounts, but future data collection will be applied only to the new profile.

Android: The steps to reset Android devices vary by version and manufacturer. Many allow you to reset the device from the "Settings" menu within Android. Tap "System" > "Advanced" > "Reset options" > "Erase all data (factory reset)" > "Reset phone". If required, enter your PIN, pattern, or password. Upon reboot, you

should be requested to provide Google account credentials. Consider skipping this option and applying the privacy principles surrounding F-Droid and the Aurora Store as previously explained.

Service: If you cannot initiate new cellular service, consider sanitizing the account you have. Most cellular providers supply registered user details for use with caller identification services. The name on your account is likely shared with numerous third parties. You can control some of this. Sign in to your account and find your profile. Modify the name if allowed. The name on this profile is typically what is shared with third parties and appears on caller ID screens when placing a call. The following displays the current instructions for the popular U.S. providers. An online search should identify the proper steps for your provider.

AT&T: Profile > Account users > User
Sprint: My Account > Profile & Settings > Limits & Permissions > Change Caller ID name
T-Mobile: (Must call customer service)
Verizon: Account > Add-ons > See All > Share Name ID > Product details > Manage

Recycling devices and service always leaves a trail, but these options are better than doing nothing at all. There is no room for elitism in this game, and any steps you take can provide numerous layers of protection as you navigate the complicated world of privacy and security.

Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) Considerations

Now that you have a new device with a new data plan, you are set. Install only the apps you need, and proceed with private use. Since you should never use the number provided from your cellular company, you will need a way to make and receive standard telephone calls and text messages. If you elected to take the GrapheneOS route, you will rely on an application called **Linphone** (linphone.org) for VOIP telephone service. First, let's understand the reasons we should not use our true cellular number.

- When you make calls and send texts through your standard cellular number, there is a permanent log of this activity stored by the provider of your service. This log identifies all of your communication and can be accessed by employees, governments, and criminals. I have witnessed call and text logs be used as the primary evidence within both criminal and civil trials.
- Your cellular telephone number is often used as a primary identifier for your account. If I know your number, I can use this detail to obtain further information such as location history of the mobile device. Your cellular provider stores your location at all times based on cell towers. I can abuse court orders to obtain these details or hire a criminal to breach your account.
- Cellular telephone numbers are prone to SIM-swapping attacks. If I know your primary number, I can take over your account through various attacks and become the new owner of the number. I can portray you and receive communication meant for you.
- When you give your telephone number to your friends and family, they will likely store it in their contacts and associate your name with the entry. Someone will then download a nefarious app which requests access to the contact list, sending the contacts to online databases which can be queried. We have seen this with several apps in the past, including caller ID services such as TrueCaller and Mr. Number, which shared private contact details with the world. Lately, services such as Twitter and LinkedIn are the bigger concern. Have you ever received an email from LinkedIn asking you to connect with someone you knew? This happens when that person agrees to share their contacts, including email addresses and telephone numbers, with the service. Twitter also wants to obtain these details from any members willing to share them. It only takes one instance to make your cell number publicly attached to your true name. Giving out VOIP numbers eliminates much of the concern of this threat.

The solution to all of this is to never use a true cellular number. Instead, we will only use VOIP numbers for all calls and standard text messages. In the following pages, I explain how to configure a service called Twilio for telephone calls and SMS text. Afterward, I provide a much easier experience through a service called Telnyx. Both have advantages and disadvantages. Twilio is our most robust option, so let's start there.

Linphone/Twilio VOIP Configuration

My goal within the next pages is to create our own VOIP product which allows us to make and receive telephone calls on any device we desire at minimal cost. Furthermore, the numbers will be in our control. We will not need to maintain access to a Google account in order to enjoy the benefits of VOIP calls. This section is technical, but anyone can replicate the steps. As with all online services, any of these steps can change without notice. It is probable that you will encounter slight variations compared to my tutorial during configuration. Focus on the overall methods instead of exact steps. The following explains every step I took in order to create my own VOIP solution with Twilio. After, I present another option which may be more appropriate for some readers. Please read the entire chapter before making any decisions.

The first step is to create a new account at **https://www.twilio.com/referral/9FGpxr**. This is my referral link which gives you $15 of free testing credits and $10 of free full usage credits. I see absolutely nothing about you or your usage. You must provide a name, email address, and phone number to Twilio as part of this process. Twilio possesses strong fraud mechanisms in order to suspend accounts which seem suspicious. During the first tests of this strategy, my accounts were immediately suspended. I had provided a vague name, burner email address, and Google Voice number while connected to a VPN. This triggered the account suspension and I was asked to respond to a support email explaining how I would be using Twilio.

This began communication with two Twilio support personnel. While talking with customer service, I was advised that the VPN IP address was most likely the reason for the suspension. After providing a business name, "better" email address, and explanation that I would be using the product for individual VOIP solutions, my account was reinstated. If you get caught within this dragnet, I discourage you to let them know you are following the protocol in this book to establish VOIP services. We are small customers compared to big businesses. I think you will find your account restrictions lifted within an hour if you tell them you want to test the services before committing your entire company to VOIP.

Twilio may push for a real phone number, but I have never provided anything besides a Google Voice number (explained later). My advice is to provide a unique name, non-burner email address (preferably your own domain), and Google Voice number during registration. If Twilio demands a copy of government ID, push back. I was able to activate two accounts without ID after initial suspension. Overall, they just want paid users who do not abuse their networks.

I will now assume that you have a Twilio account created with a strong password using the previous link. The free credits allow us to test many features of the service, but a $20 deposit will be required before our account is fully usable. Clicking on the upper left "down arrow" should allow you to create a new project. Choose this and provide a name for it. I called mine "VOIP". This will likely require you to confirm a telephone number to "prove you are human". Fortunately, they accept VOIP numbers here, and I provided a Google Voice number. After confirming the number, answer the questions presented about your desired usage. The answers here have no impact on your account.

Once you have your new project created, you should see the new $15 test balance. It is now time to configure our VOIP telephone number. First, determine the locality of the Twilio server closest to you, based on the following configurations. I will be using the "East Coast" U.S. option, so my example server will be [phone number].sip.us1.twilio.com. The most stable option in the U.S is "us1".

- North America Virginia: [phone number].sip.us1.twilio.com
- North America Oregon: [phone number].sip.us2.twilio.com
- Europe Dublin: [phone number].sip.ie1.twilio.com
- Europe Frankfurt: [phone number].sip.de1.twilio.com
- South America Sao Paulo: [phone number].sip.br-1.twilio.com
- Asia Pacific Singapore: [phone number].sip.sg1.twilio.com

- Asia Pacific Tokyo: [phone number].sip.jp1.twilio.com
- Asia Pacific Sydney: [phone number].sip.au1.twilio.com

Please note that I have supplied all of the required Twilio code text on my website at **inteltechniques.com/EP** in order to allow easy copy and paste. If the following menu items have changed, search through their online documentation for the updates. Twilio changes their menu options often without warning or documentation.

- Within the Twilio Dashboard, click "Get a Trial Number". Either accept the generated number or use the search feature to find a number within your desired area code. This will deduct $1 from your trial balance. My demo number is "2025551212". If this option is not present, click the "Develop" link in the upper left menu, then "Phone Numbers", then "Manage", then "Active Numbers", then "Buy a Number". Enter your desired area code and "Search" for a suitable number. Click "Buy" next to the desired number.
- Click the "Voice" link in the left menu.
- Choose the "Manage" menu option.
- Click the "SIP Domains" option and click the "+" to create a new domain.
- Enter the assigned telephone number as the "Friendly Name", such as "2025551212".
- Enter the assigned telephone number as the "SIP URI", such as "2025551212".
- Under "Voice Authentication", click the "+" next to "Credential List".
- Enter a "Friendly" name of your number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "Username" of your number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a secure password and click "Create".
- Under "SIP Registration", click the "Disabled" button to enable it.
- In the "Credentials List" drop-down, choose your telephone number and click "Save".
- Navigate to https://www.twilio.com/console/runtime/twiml-bins.
- In the left menu click the three dots next to "TwiML Bins".
- Click "Pin to Sidebar".
- Click the "+" to create a new TwiML Bin.
- Provide a "Friendly" name of "incomingvoice".
- Place the following text in the TwiML box. Replace "2025551212" with your number.
  <?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
  <Response>
  <Dial answerOnBridge="true">
  <Sip>2025551212@2025551212.sip.us1.twilio.com</Sip></Dial>
  </Response>
- Click "Create" and "Save".
- Click "Phone Numbers" > "Manage" > "Active Numbers" in the left menu.
- Click your telephone number.
- Under "Voice & Fax", then "A Call Comes In", choose "TwiML Bin".
- Select "incomingvoice" in the drop-down menu and click "Save".
- Click "My TwiML Bins" in the left menu.
- Click the plus sign to create a new bin.
- Provide a "Friendly" name of "outgoingvoice".
- Place the following text in the TwiML box, copied from my site.
  <?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
  <Response>
  <Dial answerOnBridge="true" callerId=
  "{{#e164}}{{From}}{{/e164}}">{{#e164}}{{To}}{{/e164}}</Dial> </Response>
- Click "Create" and "Save".

- Click the "Voice" link in the left menu.
- Choose the "Manage" menu option.
- Click the "SIP Domains".
- Select your domain.
- Under "Call Control Configuration" then "A Call Comes In", change "Webhook" to "TwiML Bin" and select "outgoingvoice" in the drop-down menu.
- Click "Save".

You now have a SIP domain and credentials created which allow you to associate your Twilio account with VOIP software called **Linphone** (linphone.org). Navigate to this website and download the desired application for your environment. I downloaded the Linux, macOS, Android, and iOS apps to my laptops and mobile devices. I downloaded it to my GrapheneOS device through F-Droid as previously explained. The following configuration steps should apply to all Linphone applications, but you may see minor variations across platforms. You will need to repeat each step on every device which you want to use for VOIP calling. I will explain the process of configuring Linphone on a laptop in the next chapter.

- If prompted upon launch of Linphone, choose "Account Assistant".
- Click the "Use a SIP Account".
- Enter a "Username" of your number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "Display Name" of your telephone number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "SIP Domain" of your full domain including your username and the closest server location as previously explained. I used 2025551212.sip.us1.twilio.com. Replace "2025551212" with your own number and "us1" with your server.
- Enter the "Password" you previously created for the credential account.
- Change the "Transport" to "TLS".

Click the confirmations until you return to the main application. You can now click the upper left corner in order to select your new account, or choose between multiple accounts if you add more. You should see a green or grey light next to the account if the connection from Linphone to Twilio is successful. We can now make our first call.

- Confirm that your Twilio account is selected within the Linphone application.
- In the search field at the top, input any known telephone number.
- Click the "phone" button to initiate a call.

You should receive an automated message thanking you for using your demo account. This confirms that we can place calls to Twilio's servers, but we are far from unlimited usage to real numbers. We are now ready to attempt a stricter test call. You still cannot call any real number, but you should be able to place a call to any "Verified" number. If you provided a Google Voice number during account creation, that number is automatically verified. If you did not, complete the following within your Twilio dashboard to add a verified number for testing.

- Click "Phone Numbers" > "Manage" > "Verified Caller IDs" in the left menu.
- Add a new number which can be accessed.
- Confirm whether you prefer a call or text and verify the call or text to add the number.

Return to your Linphone application and attempt a call to the number which you have verified with Twilio. For me, it was my Google Voice number. After a brief message about the trial account, the call should go through. If you can complete a test call to your own number, your configuration is complete. You are now restricted to only calling verified numbers. I have seen this fail with some VOIP numbers. If this happens to you, do not be alarmed. As long as you receive a confirmed test call message from Twilio, your configuration is complete. If

you would like to remove all restrictions to make and receive calls to and from any number, you must "Upgrade" the account. The following should be conducted within the Twilio portal.

- Return to the Dashboard in the upper left menu.
- Click the "upgrade" link and provide all requested billing details.
- Provide any credit, debit, or registered prepaid card.
- Apply $20 to the account.

You should now have an unrestricted Twilio account which should be fully functional for voice calls. Please do not upgrade the account until you know your test calls are going through. You should also have a fully functional VOIP application which can facilitate calls. Linphone can be used to place a call at any time from any device. Replicate your Linphone settings on as many mobile and desktop environments as you desire. Furthermore, you can add as many numbers as you wish by repeating this process.

Incoming calls will "ring" your mobile device or desktop as long as the Linphone application is open and your status is "green". Before you create dozens of new numbers, let's discuss the costs. Each Twilio number withdraws $1.00 every month from your balance. If you followed these steps, you are funded for almost three years of usage of the initial phone number. Incoming and outgoing calls cost $0.004 per minute. During all of my testing for this tutorial so far, I spent $1.21. There are several huge benefits with this strategy, as outlined below.

- You can now make and receive telephone calls through practically any device. Windows, Mac, Linux, Android, and iOS are all supported through Linphone apps.
- You have more control over your number(s). You are not at the mercy of Google, and their data collection, in order to process calls.
- You can add as many numbers as desired as long as you have the funds to support them. I have five numbers through Twilio and I can access all of them through every device I own. My annual cost for this, including my usage, is about $70. Twilio does not know my real name and only possesses a custom domain email address and Google Voice number in association to my account.
- You can port a number into Twilio. If you plan to cancel a cell phone or VOIP number, you can port it into Twilio and still have access through Linphone.
- This process works well with custom Android ROMs, such as GrapheneOS, as previously explained.
- You can call international numbers (at increased costs). Most VOIP providers such as Google, Twilio, and others restrict calling to nearby countries. You can enable any country in Twilio by navigating to Programmable Voice > Calls > Geo Permissions.

Please think of this VOIP strategy as being similar to landline service. While configuring Twilio within the Linphone application during testing of this strategy, I encountered several devices which presented authentication errors during usage. These usually claim that the Twilio credentials supplied to Linphone have failed and the user is prompted to enter the correct password. Supplying the appropriate password fails. This appears to be an issue with Twilio temporarily blocking access due to too many invalid attempts, incorrect protocol settings, or launching and closing of Linphone from mobile devices too many times within a sixty minute threshold. Any account restrictions should reset after twenty minutes of inactivity, but the following settings within Linphone should mitigate these issues. These settings can appear within various options in the menu of each operating system's version of the Linphone application, and the exact paths might change.

Linphone-Android:

- Menu > Settings > Network > Use random ports: Disabled
- Menu > Settings > Network > SIP port: 5060

Linphone-iOS:

- Menu > Settings > Network > Random Port: Disabled
- Menu > Settings > Network > Port: 5060
- Menu > Settings > SIP Accounts > (Account) > More Options: Enabled
- Menu > Settings > SIP Accounts > (Account) > Account Enabled: Enabled
- Menu > Settings > SIP Accounts > (Account) > Push Notification: Disabled

Linphone-Desktop (Windows/Mac/Linux)

- Settings > SIP Accounts > Proxy Accounts > Edit > Register: Enabled
- Settings > SIP Accounts > Proxy Accounts > Edit > Publish presence: Enabled
- Settings > SIP Accounts > Proxy Accounts > Edit > NAT and Firewall: All Disabled

ALL Devices:

- Transport: TLS
- ICE/AVPF/STUN/TURN: Disabled
- Outbound Proxy: Disabled

Linphone software accepts multiple numbers for incoming and outgoing calls. However, their menu only allows you to place outgoing calls from the most recently added (default) number. You can select the default number for outgoing calls within the "Settings" menu. In there, select the desired outgoing call account and enable "Use as default". The laptop application, which is explained in the next chapter, does not have this issue. You can select any number and make a call from that account easily.

It is important to note that VOIP telephone calls and messages are not encrypted and we should expect no privacy. However, I have some isolation from my true identity. I use these numbers mostly for outgoing calls, such as calls to businesses. This strategy is an affordable option which allows telephone calls without relying on your cellular carrier-provided number. It can also be used to isolate outgoing "junk" calls which are likely to abuse your number. Twilio has the ability to see our logs, but so would any cellular carrier if we had made the calls via our official number.

The biggest feature of this process is the ability to possess affordable VOIP numbers on an un-Googled operating system, such as GrapheneOS. We have granular control of our numbers without the need for Google's services. Any time you allow a third-party service to facilitate your calls, you are also allowing them to intercept and see your data. All of these services rely on a VOIP provider such as Twilio, so I believe we should consider creating our own solutions and eliminate any additional companies which are unnecessary. Apple devices rely on an Apple ID through the App Store and stock Google Android devices rely on a Google ID through the Play Store. Any apps you download for VOIP services leave a digital trail to your identifiers. Aliases can be used, but this method of VOIP with GrapheneOS gives us more control.

During testing, I attempted to replicate these services with Bandwidth LLC and Voip.ms. I do not recommend either of these companies. Bandwidth refused my numerous requests for service and Voip.ms demanded unredacted copies of my driver's license before an account would be confirmed. When I refused, they closed my account which had a funded balance. While Twilio had their own roadblocks during account creation, they were the first VOIP service which actually provided me service. Anticipate fraud-related hurdles, but know that you can break through the temporary annoyances.

VOIP solutions often have limitations over traditional cellular communications. Twilio, and any services which rely on Twilio, do not always support "short codes". These are abbreviated phone numbers that are usually 5 or 6 digits in length. They are commonly used to send SMS and MMS messages with verification codes for account

access. I think of these numbers as landline replacements which allow me to send and receive voice calls and personal texts. I maintain a single Google Voice account which can receive short codes. I explain more about this later.

My final warning about this strategy is that incoming calls can be an issue with some mobile devices. Outgoing voice calls should work flawlessly from any device, and this is my primary use for this service. I can easily place calls from my mobile devices or laptop (explained in the next chapter) at any time. However, incoming calls to mobile devices can vary, especially with Apple iOS devices. If the iOS Linphone application is not active on the screen, it becomes dormant and stops monitoring incoming calls. You must activate the app in order to be notified of an incoming call.

With GrapheneOS, or any other Android device, Linphone stays open after initial launch and "listens" for incoming calls while inactive. This means you must launch the Linphone application once after each reboot in order to accept incoming calls. This behavior is also present on desktop environments, including Linux, which is desired. My incoming Twilio calls consistently ring to the desktop Linphone application for all operating systems, including Linux, Windows, and Mac, as well as GrapheneOS devices. There are many variables with all of this, including the specific operating system builds and installed services. I often place hour-long calls from my laptop and incoming calls reliably prompt me to answer.

I have witnessed temporary number suspension from Twilio if Linphone on my GrapheneOS device is misconfigured. Since Linphone stays open and connected at all times, it may be synchronizing with Twilio servers too often with unique data. Disabling "Random Port" and confirming "TLS" as previously explained should help avoid this error. If Twilio should ever terminate support for "TLS", changing the protocol to "UDP" or "TCP" within Linphone may resolve the issue.

If you continue to receive warnings about connections, you may need to contact Twilio support in order to identify the exact issue. Alternatively, opening the file menu and choosing "Quit" should eliminate multiple connections. However, this will impact incoming calls. Spend the time to correct the issue once for future usage without disruptions. In a moment, I present another service which is less picky about these connection details.

By default, there is no name associated with the caller ID when you place a call from your Twilio number(s). This may be desired by some, but could be a disinformation campaign for others. On one of my Twilio numbers which I use for personal calls in my true identity, I attached my name to the caller ID. This way, my name appears as the caller on the screen of my bank or credit card company when I call from a Twilio number. It adds an extra layer of assurance. On another number, which I use with my alias name, I prefer that name to display as the caller. This also adds credibility to my call as an alias. Twilio requires you to contact their support in order to request these modifications.

Overall, I view this method as a simple and affordable phone line which provides unlimited numbers at my disposal. I can place calls from my laptop or mobile devices when needed without exposing my true cellular number. I can accept incoming calls on my laptop or GrapheneOS device as if they were traditional landline telephones. The person on the other end does not know I am using VOIP instead of a standard phone line. In my experience, VOIP calls while possessing a stable internet connection can be much more reliable than cellular calls with a weak signal.

While Twilio has served me well over the years, I consider Telnyx to be a worthy competitor. I use both, but you should understand all options. I later summarize important considerations for all services.

Linphone has no embedded voicemail or SMS/MMS text message capabilities and is only for voice calls. If you desire the ability to send and receive SMS/MMS text messages associated with this new Twilio number, you must create an environment which can facilitate this communication. You have a few options for this, but I will begin with the recommended approach (VoIPSuite). Afterward, I will explain the outdated options which may be easier for some users. First, I want to explain my path toward a full VOIP solution within one cross-platform web application.

In 2021, I was searching for a completely free and open-source software solution for VOIP SMS communication which allowed for use of my own Twilio and Telnyx numbers. After failing to find such a solution, I vented my frustration to a member of my online video training. His solution was simple; we would create one. This began several weeks of communication about how the project would function. The first beta version of the application arrived in August of 2021. Today, this all-in-one web application can facilitate two-way SMS/MMS messaging, incoming and outgoing calling, contact management, and more. The entire source code is open source and available at the GitHub link provided in a moment. While I use it occasionally for outgoing calls, I do not believe it eliminates the need for Linphone on our devices, especially for incoming call notification. Redundancy is vital, especially as we try to do things ourselves. The following tutorial was accurate as of this writing. It is replicated on my website at https://inteltechniques.com/voip.suite.html. Please use that site to copy and paste specific configurations. Any changes after this publication will be provided on that page.

The following steps create your own self-hosted SMS web app which allows you to send and receive SMS text messages through unlimited Telnyx and/or Twilio telephone numbers within any platform (Windows, Mac, Linux, iOS, Android, browser, etc.). You will need to obtain access to Twilio and/or Telnyx as previously explained. Once your accounts are created, verified, and configured for voice, conduct the following. The process is lengthy, but only needs completed once. You will need to dedicate an uninterrupted hour for this tutorial. First, you need to create a database which will hold all of the message content. You can use the free version of MongoDB for this. Think of this as the storage for your text messages to which only you have access.

- Open a new tab and navigate to http://www.mongodb.com/.
- Click "Start Free".
- Enter email, name, and password.
- Confirm verification email.
- Begin the onboarding process.
- Leave "Organization" information as-is.
- Enter "VOIP" as the "Project Name".
- Click "Continue".
- Select the "Free Basic" tier and click "Create".
- Accept all default options.
- Click "Create Cluster".
- Allow cluster to be created (1-3 minutes).
- Click "Browse Collections".
- Click "Add My Own Data".
- Enter a unique "Database Name".
- Enter a unique "Collection Name".
- Click "Create".
- Click the leaf in the upper-left to return to your dashboard.
- Click on your project.
- Click "Connect".
- Click "Allow Access From Anywhere".
- Click "Add IP Address".

- Enter a username and password for the database (no special characters).
- Click "Create Database User".
- Click "Choose a Connection Method".
- Click "Connect using MongoDB Compass".
- Click "I have MongoDB Compass".
- Copy the "connection string" into a text document or password manager.
- Click "Close".
- Enable 2FA at https://account.mongodb.com/account/profile/security.

Next, you need a host for your web app. For this, you can use a free version of Heroku. Think of this as the website which will execute the software for your daily use.

- Navigate to https://www.heroku.com/.
- Click "Sign up for free".
- Enter mandatory details.
- Click "Create free account".
- Confirm verification email.
- Click "Accept".
- Click profile icon in upper-right.
- Click "Account Settings".
- Click "Billing".
- Click "Add credit card" (no charge made, just provides additional credits).
- Enter credit card or Privacy.com card.
- Provide any random billing details if using Privacy.com.
- Click "Save Details".
- Pause card if using Privacy.com (prevents any future charges).
- Click the upper-left icon to return to the "Dashboard".
- Click "Create New App".
- Provide any "App name", which must be unique.
- Click "Create App".
- If you do not see your app details, click the logo in the upper-left and select your app.
- Click the "Settings" tab.
- Click "Reveal Config Vars".
- Enter "BASE_URL" in the "KEY" field.
- Scroll down the page and copy the URL in the "Domains" section, similar to https://xxx.herokuapp.com/. Be sure to include the "https" and trailing "/".
- Paste the URL in the "VALUE" field under the "Config Vars" section.
- Click "Add".
- Enter "DB" in the "KEY" field.
- Paste the MongoDB "connection string" copied previously into the "VALUE" field.
- Replace "password" with the password created for the database in the previous MongoDB steps.
- Be sure to remove the brackets (< >) around the password.
- Click "Add".
- Enter "COOKIE_KEY" in the empty "KEY" field.
- Enter 20 random characters in the "VALUE" field.
- Click "Add".
- Enable 2FA at https://dashboard.heroku.com/account.

Next, you need a free Github account which you can copy or "fork" the app itself into. This will synchronize with the app host.

- Open a new tab and navigate to https://github.com/.
- Click "Sign up for Github" (or log into your account).
- Follow any prompts to enter email, password, and username.
- Confirm verification email.
- Navigate to https://github.com/0perationPrivacy/VoIP.
- Click "Fork" in the upper right.
- If prompted, create a new repository called "VoIP" Click "Fetch upstream".
- If available, click "Fetch and merge" (this is a redundant step).
- Enable 2FA at https://github.com/settings/security.

Return to the Heroku browser tab and complete the following steps.

- Click the "Deploy" tab.
- Click the Github option (middle).
- Make sure you are logged into your Github account.
- Click "Connect to Github".
- Click "Authorize Heroku".
- Click the "Deploy" tab.
- In the Github section enter "VoIP" (case-sensitive) and click "Search".
- Click "Connect" next to the result.
- Click "Enable Automatic Deploys".
- Click "Deploy Branch".
- Click the "Settings" tab.
- Scroll to "Domains".
- Copy the URL, such as https://xxx.herokuapp.com.
- Navigate to that URL, which is the link you will access for this app.
- Optional: Bookmark it on the desktop for future use.
- Optional: Create a mobile "home screen" shortcut.

You can now launch your new web app within any browser by navigating to the URL mentioned above (https://xxx.herokuapp.com). If necessary, refresh the browser until you see the login page. Next, you must configure each Telnyx or Twilio number you wish to use within this app.

- Click "Sign Up" to create a new account.
- Enter a unique username.
- Enter a secure password.
- Click "Sign Up".
- Log into your new account.
- Click the dropdown menu and select "Add New Profile".
- Enter a "Profile" name as desired (ex: phone number) and click "Save".
- Make sure this profile is selected and displayed.
- Click the "Settings" icon in the upper-left.
- Click "Profile Settings".

For Telnyx numbers:

- Select the Telnyx option.
- Enter your Telnyx API key available within the Telnyx Dashboard.
- Click "Get Number".
- Choose the desired number within the dropdown menu.
- Click "Save" then "OK".

For Twilio numbers:

- Select the Twilio option.
- Enter your Twilio SID and Token available within the Twilio Dashboard.
- Click "Get Number".
- Choose the desired number within the dropdown menu.
- Click "Save" then "OK".

Note that you may be prompted about incoming calls. If you enabled incoming calls through Twilio or Telnyx, VoIPSuite should prompt you for a choice about the embedded call application. It will ask if you want your incoming calls routed through VoIPSuite or the third-party option currently configured (such as Linphone). I always recommend using a traditional VOIP application for incoming calls, and do not recommend VoIPSuite for this purpose. Dedicated applications are simply more stable than this program, which relies on web-based calls. If you ever want to revert any incoming call configurations made by VoIPSuite, simply repeat the incoming call steps previously presented.

If desired, repeat this process of creating a new profile for each number you own. You can delete a profile by selecting the profile, clicking the settings icon, and clicking the trash can icon for that profile. Once you have your account created, you should consider disabling new accounts. This prevents someone from creating an account within your app and using your online resources. This is optional, but encouraged.

- Return to https://dashboard.heroku.com/apps.
- Select your app.
- Click "Settings".
- Click "Reveal Config Vars".
- In the "KEY" field enter "SIGNUPS".
- In the "VALUE" field enter "off".
- Click "Add".

Next, you need to make sure your new web app does not "sleep" after inactivity. You can use a free version of Uptime Robot to ping your new web app every 20 minutes with the following steps.

- Navigate to https://uptimerobot.com/.
- Click "Register for Free".
- Provide any name, email, and password.
- Confirm verification email.
- Optional: Navigate to https://uptimerobot.com/dashboard.php#mySettings.
- Optional: Select the 2FA checkbox and enable 2FA.
- Return to the dashboard.
- Click "Add New Monitor".
- Change "Monitor Type" to "HTTP(S)".
- Apply "Friendly Name" of "VOIP".

- Provide URL of your Heroku App used previously.
- Change "Monitoring Interval" to "20 minutes".
- Click "Create Monitor".
- Click the "Create..." button again.

Finally, you should apply updates every week with the following steps.

- Navigate to https://github.com/ and sign into your account.
- Select your app (fork of the original).
- Click "Fetch upstream" in upper-right.
- If available, click "Fetch and merge".

VoIPSuite Usage

You can launch your VoIPSuite application from within any web browser, including desktop and mobile environments. In GrapheneOS, I make it my home page within the default Vanadium browser and create a shortcut to it directly on my home screen. Once launched, you can select from multiple profiles within the drop down menu. Swiping down refreshes the screen, but incoming messages should automatically populate. This application receives constant updates and modifications. Below are a few features and considerations.

- Any messages sent will come from, and be stored within, the selected profile. Switching the profile displays only the messages intended for that number.
- MMS messages are supported and a file selector is available.
- A contacts list is available, including import, export, and deletion options.
- The "Call" icon launches a dialer for outgoing calls within the browser. While incoming calls are also supported, the page must be active to answer a call. Therefore, I prefer traditional applications such as Linphone for these calls as I find it more reliable.
- Numerous people initially reported non-functioning configurations of VoIPSuite, but every instance was resolved by starting over and confirming each step. I know that is not what you want to hear.
- If you encounter issues, report them at https://github.com/OperationPrivacy/VoIP/issues.
- All changes and updates are documented within the official VoIPSuite GitHub page. Navigate directly to https://github.com/OperationPrivacy/VoIP/blob/main/CHANGELOG.md often.
- Two-factor authentication is available to secure your VoIPSuite account. However, note that this will require 2FA every time your mobile cache is cleared.
- The "Update" image in the upper-right informs you of an available update, which can be fetched on your own GitHub page. An application called Pull (github.com/apps/pull) can be installed to automatically apply updates if desired.

SMS/MMS Forwarding and Email Options

While I prefer the previous solution for text messaging, I respect that some readers may want something more simplistic. The following content was included with the previous print edition of this book, and is still applicable. It allows you to forward incoming text messages from your Twilio number to another number or email address. This suited me quite well for a few years and could still have value to you. Do NOT conduct any of these steps if you are using the previous VOIP app. If you want to manually configure your own SMS forwarding, conduct the following steps, or consider the email forwarding strategy explained in a moment.

- Click the "TwiML Bins" option in the left menu then "My TwiML Bins".
- Click the plus to add a new bin and provide a name of "incomingsms".
- Insert "<Response></Response>" within the TwiML field and click "Save".
- Click "Phone Numbers", "Manage", "Active Numbers", then select your number.

- Under "Messaging", and "A Message Comes In", choose "TwiML Bin".
- Choose "incomingsms" in the field to the right and click "Save".

Any incoming text messages to this number can now be read in the "Programmable Messaging" menu option in your Twilio account. SMS text messages cannot be pushed to, or sent from, your Linphone application using this VOIP strategy. While it is possible to implement this feature, it requires creation of a dedicated app and hosting your own web server, which exceeds the scope of this book. If you want to forward any incoming SMS text messages to another number, such as Google Voice or MySudo, replace "<Response> </Response>" from this tutorial with the text below. Replace 2125551212 with any number which you want to receive the text messages intended for your new Twilio number.

```
<Response><Message to='+12125551212'>{{From}}: {{Body}}</Message></Response>
```

Advanced users may want to instantly forward any incoming SMS text messages to an email address. This requires an online web server. A shared host and any custom domain, as explained later, will suffice. Create a text file called twilio.php with the following content. Change "your@email.com" to the address where you want to receive notifications. Change "@yourdomain.com" to your actual domain name. Upload this file to your web host. This text is also available on my site for easy copy and paste.

```
<?php
$to = " your@email.com ";
$subject = "Text Message from {$_REQUEST['From']} to {$_REQUEST['To']}";
$message = "{$_REQUEST['Body']}";
$headers = "From: twilio@yourdomain.com";
mail($to, $subject, $message, $headers);
```

Navigate to your Twilio dashboard and conduct the following.

- Click "Phone Numbers", "Manage", "Active Numbers", and select your number.
- Under "Messaging" and "A Message Comes In", change each entry to "Webhook".
- Provide the full address of the PHP file you previously created within both fields. This may be similar to https://yourdomain.com/twilio.php.

Test your new SMS option from another number. Any incoming SMS messages to your Twilio number should now be forwarded to your email. The subject will appear as "Text Message from 2125551212 to 6185551212" and the body will contain the message sent. I prefer this option because it does not require another telephone number, such as Google Voice, in order to receive messages. When I give my car dealer this Twilio number during a maintenance visit, I receive an email when they send a text notifying me my vehicle is ready. If you want to send SMS text messages from your Twilio number, you have two options. There is a "Try it out" feature within your Twilio dashboard, but I find this process cumbersome and it relies on you to be constantly logged into Twilio. Instead, consider a Twilio "Quick Deploy" option. First, navigate to https://www.twilio.com/code-exchange/browser-based-sms-notifications. Next, confirm that the "Account name" is the VOIP project which you created for this process. If you have more than one number, select the appropriate option. Finally, create a passcode which prevents random people from finding your project and sending messages. This should be a fairly secure passcode, but should also be rememberable. When finished, click "Deploy my application". You will be presented a static URL similar to https://sms-notifications-6431-bf4jg3.twil.io/index.html.

Visiting this page presents a form which allows unlimited outgoing SMS text messages from your new Twilio number. Enter one or more target numbers; apply your application passcode; and write your message. Be sure to bookmark this page within your desktop and mobile browsers in order to access it easily. If you want to send a response to a received message, you can open your new Twilio page and send it from there. To be transparent, I do not do this. It is simply too much effort. However, I know that many readers want a complete SMS option directly within Twilio. I explain my own usage of secure text messages later.

Twilio Voicemail Configuration

Next, consider voicemail. Some may prefer to have no option to leave a voice message. The instructions up to this point will either ring your Linphone application for 30 seconds and then hang up, or simply terminate the call right away if Linphone is not open and connected. I prefer this for some numbers, as I do not want the caller to be able to record a message. However, we can enable voicemail, tell Twilio to record the message, save it to their servers, and email us a link of the recording. Conduct the following within the Twilio Dashboard.

- Navigate to https://www.twilio.com/labs/twimlets/my/ to access your Twimlets.
- Choose "Voicemail" then "Create New Twimlet".
- Provide your desired email address to receive voicemail notification.
- Provide your desired outgoing greeting.
- Choose "True" to have the messages transcribed to text or "False" to avoid transcription. Note that transcriptions add an extra cost and do not impact the ability to hear the voice messages. I do not transcribe them for privacy reasons.
- Click "Save URL" then provide a nickname of "voicemail".
- Copy the provided URL, similar to "http://twimlets.com/AC5b84e8/voicemail".
- Click "TwiML Bins" in the left menu and select "incomingvoice".
- Replace the current text with the following.

```
<?xml version="1.0" encoding="UTF-8"?>
<Response>
<Dial answerOnBridge="true" timeout="30" action="http://twimlets.com/AC5b84e8/voicemail">
<Sip>2125551212@2125551212.sip.us1.twilio.com</Sip>
</Dial>
</Response>
```

- Replace "http://twimlets.com/AC5b84e8/voicemail" with your provided URL.
- Replace "2125551212" with your own SIP Domain name.
- Replace "us1" with your own server location if necessary.
- Click "Save" and test the service.

If your Linphone application is open and connected, an incoming call should ring for 30 seconds. If you do not pick up the call in that time, the voicemail system presents a generic greeting and allows the caller to record a message. If Linphone is closed or not connected to Twilio, the greeting is presented right away. If a caller leaves a voicemail, you will receive an email at the address provided which includes a link to hear the recorded MP3 file. This recording can also be accessed by navigating to "Voice" > "Overview" in your Twilio Dashboard. Similar to Google Voice, you can delete the recorded file from this menu. This file is not secure or private. It is very similar to the way a traditional cellular provider or Google Voice would store voicemails available to your device. If you have no devices connected to your Twilio account which are ready to receive a call when a call comes in, expect to see error messages within the Twilio "Monitor" menu. These are to notify you that your phone system could not receive the call and can be ignored.

Before you commit to voicemail transcription, consider my thoughts on Twilio account sanitization, which are presented in the next section. If desired, disable the "Daily Calls Log Archives" logging feature within Twilio at "Voice" > "Settings" > "Log Archives". This does not stop Twilio from storing VOIP call metadata, but it does eliminate a small layer of internal logging. As a reminder, all of the Twilio code presented during this section can be copied and pasted online from **inteltechniques.com/EP**. If everything is working well, you might consider adding more numbers to your strategy in order to have a selection for voice and text. We can add unlimited numbers which can be accessed through Linphone.

Keep in mind that additional numbers will extract funds faster. I only recommend additional numbers if you understand the reasons which you need them. Repeat the previous steps for each number needed. While writing this update, 1 configured a toll-free number. The monthly fee for this number is $2.00 (twice the price of a standard number), but it presents a more professional appearance. I have also witnessed toll-free numbers behave differently when used as number verification. One of my banks absolutely refused any VOIP number as my required 2FA authorization number. However, providing a VOIP toll-free number passed the scrutiny. When I attempted this on PayPal, a toll-free number was absolutely refused. There seems to be no standards with this. Testing different options might lead you to your own best option.

You can now choose between multiple different numbers within your Linphone application. Whichever is chosen as default allows outgoing calls to be completed from that number. Incoming calls to any numbers will ring the app and allow connection regardless of the default account. Incoming text messages will be stored at the Twilio Dashboard (unless you use the VoIPSuite app) and voicemail will be transcribed and sent to your email address. You can replicate this for unlimited numbers, as long as you have funding to support them.

Twilio Account Sanitization

If you use the SMS web app previously presented, it removes your incoming and outgoing SMS/MMS messages from Twilio's servers automatically. It sends a command informing Twilio to remove the data from its servers once the data has been received or sent. If you use any other manual SMS/MMS messaging option, message metadata and content remain on Twilio's servers, and could be accessed by employees. Every voicemail you receive also stays present on their servers as an MP3 file, which can be accessed via direct URL without any credentials. Let's identify ways to remove this data, beginning with stored text messages.

- Navigate to https://console.twilio.com.
- Make note of the "Account SID" and "Account Token".
- Click on "Messaging" then "Overview" in the left menu.
- Open any "Recent Message" by clicking the date and make note of the "Message SID".

You can now open Terminal within any Linux or Apple system and issue a command to delete each message. If your "Account SID" was 11, "Account Token" was 22, and "Message SID" was 33, the command would be as follows.

```
curl -X DELETE https://api.twilio.com/2010-04-01/Accounts/11/Messages/33.json \
  -d "Body=" \
  -u 11:22
```

This can be quite annoying if you need to purge hundreds of messages, but would only need to be completed once if you are using the recommended SMS app previously presented. Voicemail and call log deletion is more straightforward within the website. The following steps allow you to remove this data from your console.

- Navigate to https://www.twilio.com/console/voice/dashboard.
- Open any log entry which has an arrow icon under "Recording".
- Click "Delete this call log" and confirm.
- If desired, delete individual call logs from this location.

Twilio stores 13 months of call log history by default. If you possess numerous recordings which need removed, you can use the bulk deletion tool with the following directions.

- Navigate to https://www.twilio.com/console/voice/recordings/recording-logs.
- Click "Select" and then "Select All".
- Click "Actions", "Delete Recordings", then confirm.

If you have enabled the call transcription service, you may wish to remove all voicemail text transcriptions stored within your account.

- Click "Monitor", "Logs", then "Call Transcriptions" in the left menu.
- Open each transcription and click "Delete this transcription".

While writing this section, I realized that my data had not been sanitized for a long time. My Twilio dashboard possessed voicemails and text transcriptions about my health, family, friends, and work. I spent an hour cleaning all of it, then disabled transcriptions using the previous tutorials. It saves me $0.05 per call and eliminates one more place where sensitive information could be stored.

We can also disable some logging by Twilio with the following modification.

- Click "Voice", "Settings", and "General" in the left menu.
- Disable "Request Inspector" and click "Save".

All of this logging may seem invasive. It is, but it is not unique to Twilio. Twilio is doing nothing more than every other telephony provider including cellular and landline telephone companies. Fortunately, we have some control of how the data is stored. However, I do not want to present false expectations here. While Twilio may appear to have deleted your call logs, voicemails, messages, and transcriptions, they are all likely still stored somewhere within their system. Our only goal is to remove the data from within our dashboard. Never expect any level of privacy when it comes to traditional phone calls and messages. VOIP services should never be used for sensitive communication. Assume there is a permanent log of everything which will be stored forever.

Linphone/Telnyx VOIP Configuration

I have been using Twilio for many years because it was the only reliable VOIP option when I began this pursuit. Since then, I have discovered easier alternatives. If the Twilio tutorial did not generate the usage you desire, possibly due to a change in their menus or a suspended account, you might consider an alternative service called **Telnyx** (https://refer.telnyx.com/refer/zrfmo). This VOIP provider replicates the service provided by Twilio, but their setup process is much easier. Now that you have an understanding of our Twilio strategy, I will abbreviate the steps here for Telnyx.

- Create a free account at **https://refer.telnyx.com/refer/zrfmo** with $20 in credits.
- Provide a custom domain email address, which is explained in the next chapter.
- If prompted for purpose, choose "SIP Trunking".
- If prompted, leave the telephone number field empty.
- Click "SIP Connections" from the side menu.
- Click the "+ Add SIP Connection" button.
- Enter the name you wish to have for your connection (I chose "VOIP").
- Enable "Credentials" as the "Connection Type".
- Copy the username and password automatically generated.
- Click "Save and finish editing".
- Click "Numbers" in the left menu.
- Enter a location, click "Search for numbers" then "Add to cart" for your number.
- Click the "Cart" in the upper right.
- Under "Connection or Application", select your connection (mine was VOIP).
- Purchase the number using your free credits.
- Click "Outbound Voice Profiles" then "Add new profile".
- Provide the name of "outgoingvoice" and click "Create".
- Click "Outbound Voice Profiles" then the "Edit" icon next to "outgoingvoice".

- Select your connection (VOIP) and click "Add Connection/Apps to Profile".
- Click "SIP Connections" then "Outbound Options" to the right of the connection.
- Enter your new phone number in "Caller ID Override", then click "Save".

We are now ready to modify Linphone as we did previously. The following applies to any mobile or desktop platform using Telnyx as a VOIP service.

- Open the Linphone application and select the "Assistant" then "Use a SIP Account".
- Enter the username previously provided by Telnyx; the new VOIP telephone number as the display name; "sip.telnyx.com" (US) as the SIP address; the password previously provided by Telnyx, and "TLS" as the protocol. Save everything and test.

Your Linphone application within your desktop or mobile environment (or both) can now make and receive calls without adding any funds. This is unique to Telnyx. **If you want to commit to Telnyx as your VOIP provider, be sure to add $20 in new funds to your account in order to prevent termination of the trial.** This provides enough credits ($40) to provide VOIP service for over three years, including a single number and usage.

Telnyx does not offer native SMS forwarding to their web portal or another number. The only option is self-hosting a forwarder to an email address as we did with Twilio. If you have your own domain and a shared web host, create a text file titled telnyx.php with the following content. Change "your@email.com" to the address where you want to receive notifications. Change "@yourdomain.com" to your actual domain name.

```
<?php
$to = "your@email.com ";
$subject = "Text Message from {$_REQUEST['From']} to {$_REQUEST['To']}";
$message = "{$_REQUEST['Body']}";
$headers = "From: telnyx@yourdomain.com ";
mail($to, $subject, $message, $headers);
```

Upload the file to your host. The URL may be similar to https://yourdomain.com/telnyx.php. Within the Telnyx portal, conduct the following.

- Click "Messaging" then "Create your first profile".
- Provide a name of "sms" and select "Twexit API".
- In both "webhook" fields, enter the URL of the PHP file previously created.
- Click "Save" then click "Numbers" within the left menu.
- Within your number entry, select "sms" in the "Messaging profile" field.
- Confirm the rate notice if prompted.

Incoming text messages should now be forwarded to your email address. The subject will identify the sender and recipient while the message body will display the text message. This method prevents Telnyx from storing your incoming messages on their own server in the way that Twilio does. They would still have the ability to intercept and see the contents, but that is unlikely. Once the message is routed to your email, you should be the only host of the content. If you want to send a text from your new Telnyx number, click on "Messaging" in the Telnyx dashboard and click "Learn & Build" > "Send & Receive a Message". You can use the online form to send a SMS text message to any number. You can also use the commands provided on that page to send messages from within Terminal. Similar to Twilio, I do not use this feature. I never use a VOIP number for back-and-forth conversations. I only need to receive the occasional confirmation text message, which forwards to my email from both providers.

You can customize the caller ID name displayed during your outgoing calls within the Telnyx portal. Click "Numbers" from the menu and then "Caller ID/CNAM Listing" under the services area of your chosen number. Enable the "CNAM Listing" and "Caller ID Name" options, then enter any name desired. It may take a week to take effect. Be sure to enable two-factor authentication (2FA) through "My Account" in the "Security" section. 2FA options are presented in the next chapter.

While this configuration is simpler than Twilio, it has less features. However, there are also benefits which are not available with Twilio. Consider the following.

- With Twilio, unanswered calls went directly to voicemail, and messages were transcribed and emailed to me. With Telnyx, unanswered calls disconnect after about one minute. There is a voicemail option, but it requires a third-party service or server. If you want voicemail and transcription, Twilio is best.
- Twilio allows incoming text messages to be natively delivered directly to your dashboard or forwarded to any other number. Telnyx requires you to host your own message forwarding server for this to work. If you need the number to support incoming SMS text without third-party services, then Twilio is the appropriate option. If you have your own website, replicating this is fairly easy.
- Twilio possesses numerous fraud triggers which can impact our usage. Many readers report difficulties simply creating an account and being allowed access. Telnyx provides immediate access upon registration of a "business" email address. However, I have witnessed Telnyx suspend accounts created using free email domains behind a VPN. Always provide an email address associated with a custom domain (explained later) while connected to public Wi-Fi in order to present the highest chance of obtaining a new account. Since you will be using this service to make and receive telephone calls associated with your real name, I see very little reason to attempt registration with an alias.
- Twilio sometimes considers each opening of the Linphone app from iOS devices a new connection into their system. Ten open simultaneous connections within an hour will result in a suspension of services until less than ten connections are present. If you only open the mobile or desktop app to make the occasional call throughout the day, this is no concern. If you minimize and open the iOS app every minute to make calls or check for service, you may experience problems. If your mobile iOS Twilio account keeps temporarily disconnecting, Telnyx might be a better fit. However, if properly configured, we should be able to avoid this. Using the transport protocol of "TLS" within Linphone should eliminate this problem.
- The pricing and overall call quality for Telnyx and Twilio is almost identical.

I currently maintain numbers through both services and configure each into all instances of Linphone. Both Twilio and Telnyx work great with mobile and desktop versions of Linphone. If I were forced to rely on only one service, it would be Twilio due to the voicemail options. If I needed access only to voice calls, I would choose Telnyx due to easy configuration and overall stability.

Twilio often changes their settings without notice and support is practically non-existent. I experience more issues and outages with Twilio than Telnyx. Incoming SMS text messages from both services are forwarded to my email account via my website. In a moment, I provide further summary of detailed usage of all services for myself and clients.

Sipnetic Configuration

If you have a GrapheneOS device with Linphone configured for outgoing VOIP telephone calls, you may be all set. However, please be prepared for disruptions. I have experienced errors with Linphone when connected to specific cellular networks which prevented me from making calls. I now always possess a secondary VOIP call application in the event my primary option fails. Hopefully, you will never need it, but having this configured now could save you many headaches later. I have tested dozens of paid and free SIP phone applications over the past year. For Android, I have found Sipnetic to be the most reliable without restricting the number of accounts. The following steps will install and configure the application on your GrapheneOS device.

- Search and install Sipnetic via Aurora Store and launch the application.
- Navigate to the "Manage Accounts" option within the menu.
- Click the plus to configure a new account.
- Choose "Enter Manually" and provide a "Server Name" of either:

  Twilio: Your full Twilio server (2025551212.sip.us1.twilio.com)
  Telnyx: sip.telnyx.com

- Click "Next" and ignore any errors about the server.
- Enter your credentials from the previous tutorials.
- Click on the newly created account.
- Change the display name as desired.
- Change the default transport to TLS.
- Select the option to "Use only default transport".
- Disable the "Enable ICE" option.
- Return to the "Settings" menu and select the "Network" option.
- Disable "Random port".
- When finished, click "Quit" within the main menu.

Your Sipnetic application is now prepared for incoming and outgoing calls. I never launch the program unless I am having issues with Linphone. It sits quietly on my device without impacting my system resources.

MySudo Configuration

Many of my clients currently use the VOIP service **MySudo** (mysudo.com) for most non-secure communications, such as incoming and outgoing telephone calls. This app provides up to nine profiles, and each profile possesses a unique telephone number, email address, and contact list. This service allows me to possess multiple phone numbers on one device, and each can be used for incoming and outgoing calls and text messages, all without the need to configure VOIP numbers and services. It requires a traditional iPhone or Android device, but can also work on our GrapheneOS device through Aurora Store.

MySudo does not need your name, email address, or telephone number. The installation is unique to your hardware. MySudo only knows you by this "fingerprint", which has no association to your true identity. You should be able to obtain a free trial, and purchase any premium plans anonymously using the methods discussed later. This app currently only works on a mobile device. However, it can replicate to a secondary device, such as an iPod Touch. Note that a single number plan provides incoming and outgoing calls and texts for less than the price of a number from Twilio or Telnyx. The following is my strategy for the nine VOIP numbers.

- 1: Personal (Real Name): This is for friends and family who do not use secure communications (telephone only). When they adopt MySudo, I can still use this line for encrypted communications without them knowing the call is secure.
- 2: Google Voice Forwarding (Real Name): My primary Google Voice number forwards all calls to this number (explained later). This is beneficial when friends and colleagues from many years ago try to contact me through an old Google Voice number which I have given them. Google knows that was me.
- 3: Home (Alias Name): This name, number, and email address are unique to anything that involves my home. Utilities, services, maintenance, and all house-purchase paperwork connects to this profile. When that line rings, I know to answer as my home alias. I also share this with neighbors in order to segment this identity from anything unrelated to my home.
- 4: Business (Real Name): When I need to deal with any business-related phone call, I use this profile. This number has been leaked to business lookup websites. The email address is used for any business-related registration I must complete which will ultimately send me spam.
- 5: PMB (Real Name): You will learn how a PMB in another state can help create a great layer of privacy. This number is local to the area of my primary PMB and allows me to really "sell" it. It has the appearance of a local number when I call my vehicle insurance provider or mail receiver.
- 6: Social (Alias Name): As mentioned previously, being anonymous does not mean you cannot live a normal life. This number is used for any social activities near my home. New friends I meet under my new alias have this number for me.
- 7-9: Due to my own privacy concerns, I do not disclose the specifics of these accounts.

The previous examples could also be applied to multiple numbers within your own VOIP solution such as Twilio or Telnyx. The advantage of MySudo is convenience. The work is done for you, and the application can be much more reliable. The disadvantage is that it only works within a mobile environment. When I am on my laptop, I have no way to check for messages or make calls. This is where VoIPSuite has the advantage.

In late 2021, the Android version of MySudo (1.4.0) was released with function and support for GrapheneOS without Google Play services. This was a huge hurdle for many users who rely on MySudo for calls and text messages. There are several caveats to this, but I explain each below.

- If you do not possess Google's framework (which is preferred) on your GrapheneOS device, you will not receive push notifications within MySudo. I find this acceptable and similar to other apps. Opening MySudo and swiping down to refresh loads all pending messages.
- Currently, incoming calls will not ring or present a notification. This is another impact of not installing Google's framework, but the company is working on a solution. I also find this acceptable for my usage. Opening the application should present any missed calls.
- Currently, you cannot purchase a new account through the Android app within GrapheneOS. This is because you have no Google services installed to accept payment. You will need to replicate your active MySudo account from another traditional iPhone or Android device by navigating to Menu > Settings > Backup & Import/Export > Import/Export MySudo Account. This allows your account to work simultaneously on multiple devices. I always recommend cloning this account to a secondary device, even if it is never used, in case you lose a device.

I currently use MySudo within my GrapheneOS device. Outgoing calls are reliable, but incoming calls are missed. I simply launch the MySudo app occasionally throughout the day to identify any missed communications. Combined with my numbers from Twilio and Telnyx, along with the Linphone and Sipnetic applications, I have over a dozen numbers at my disposal. I have never found myself without a working way to make and receive calls and texts. I remind you again that redundancy is key to this lifestyle. In the interest of full disclosure, I served as an advisor to Anonyome Labs (the maker of MySudo) for two years during the early development of this service, and I possess vested shares of the company.

Number Porting

Now that you have a new mobile device with new anonymous service, you likely need to make a decision about your previous device and service. You could cancel the account and lose the number forever; keep the plan and check the old device occasionally for missed calls and messages; or port your old number to a VOIP account. I prefer porting over all other options, but let me explain why before providing instructions. If your old device is out of contract, you have the right to discontinue service. If it possessed a prepaid cellular account, you can suspend the service and simply stop using that plan. Most readers likely possessed a device with a contract through a traditional carrier. If you are still under contract, it may be more affordable to keep the plan until it expires. If it is a newer contract, it may be more affordable to pay an early termination fee. Regardless, at some point the plan will be discontinued. When that happens, you lose all access to that number. Any incoming calls and messages will be lost, and you will not be able to use that number for any sort of verification process, such as calling your bank to make changes to an account.

I do not believe you should ever lose a telephone number that has ever been important to you. When you change your number and start providing a VOIP number, such as a Twilio, Telnyx, MySudo, or Google Voice number, it is unlikely you will remember to contact everyone who has your old number. This can lead to missed calls from old friends or lost text message reminders from services you forgot to notify. Worse, someone will eventually be assigned your old telephone number if you do not maintain it. That stranger will start receiving calls and messages intended for you. Think about any time you obtained a new telephone number. You likely received messages meant for the previous owner. A mischievous person could have some fun with that.

I will assume that you are ready to port over your old number to a new permanent holding place. If you are out of contract, you are in the clear. If a contract exists, you will be held responsible for any early termination fee. I have found that notifying your current carrier and providing a new physical address as your new home which cannot receive their service is sufficient for waiving any fees. I have yet to find a carrier which can provide service to the following address, in case you find this information to be helpful.

10150 32nd Avenue NW, Mohall, ND 58761

The most important first step is to not cancel your service with your old carrier. If you do this, the number is lost and you have no way to port it over. Your account must be active and in good standing in order to port your number to another service. Once you successfully port the number over, that action will terminate the original account. This may make more sense after we walk through the process together. In the following scenario, you have recently purchased a new device, executed new prepaid service, and you still possess your old phone with the original service still active.

As you may recall, I am not a fan of Google products from a privacy perspective. However, Google Voice is our current easiest and most affordable option for porting numbers. Once we have the process in place, there will be no need to log in to the Google account, and you will never do so from your new clean device. Google will receive information about your communications through their service, but I do not see it as any worse than your previous telephone carrier possessing the same data. I present an alternative option in a moment.

The first consideration is to identify which Google account to use for the porting. If you have never had a Google account, you have no choice but to create a new one. Many people may think that a new account should be mandatory for this procedure, but I have a different view. Google can be cautious when it comes to new accounts. If you create an account behind a VPN using a burner email address, Google might find this suspicious and suspend the account until you upload government identification proving your identity. I find this invasive. I respect their need to block usage from spammers, scammers, and other crooks, but I do not want to have my own account suspended. If you already have a Google account established in your true name, and your old phone was also established in your true name, I see no reason why you should not pair these together.

Remember, our goal is to configure a system to receive calls and messages from a number that was already associated with your true identity. Connecting this to a Google account under your true identity does not gain or lose much privacy at this point. I would rather attach your old number to an aged Google account that has very little risk of being suspended due to questionable activity than to connect it to a brand-new account which will be scrutinized by Google.

If you have an old Google account in your name, I suggest using that. If you have no account, I would create an account in your true name. This may sound ridiculous from a privacy perspective, but if it gets suspended, you have a much better chance unlocking it when you are the person with whom it is registered. It will receive extremely minimal use, and Google will collect very little information from it. Let's get started.

- Find your billing account information from your current service provider, such as your account number and PIN. You need this information to complete your port request.
- Within a web browser while protected by your VPN, navigate to voice.google.com.
- Sign in with your Google account credentials if you are not automatically logged in.
- If you have not used Google Voice on your account before, set up a new Google Voice account. You'll be prompted to pick a new number, but your ported number will soon replace it, so it will not matter what that number is. You can use your old cell number as your verification number, as it is still active on the old device.
- At the top right, click "Settings".
- Click "Transfer" under your number.
- Next to your current number, click "Change / Port".
- Select "I want to use my mobile number". Follow the onscreen instructions to set up your new number and pay. Google will charge a $10 fee for the porting. You might be charged a $20 fee to port your mobile number to Google Voice from some mobile service providers, such as Verizon or AT&T. Since your account is already in your true name, I provide a traditional credit card during purchase.
- Continuously check the status of your number porting. Numbers typically take from 48 to 96 hours to port.
- Do not cancel your phone plan until Google notifies you the port is complete. To verify the port, they will call your phone with a code. After the port is finished, your service provider will cancel your phone service.
- If you have multiple numbers on the original account, check with the service provider first to find out about their policies. If you want to keep the plan and get a new mobile number, confirm that with the service provider.

Once you see your old number which was previously attached to your cellular telephone appear as your new number in the Google Voice account, the porting is complete. Test this by completing the following steps.

- While logged in to your Google account, navigate to mail.google.com.
- Navigate to www.callmylostphone.com and enter your telephone number.
- On the Gmail screen, you should see an incoming call.

There is no need to answer this call, you just want to make sure that the number can receive calls through Google Voice. You are finished with this step. If anyone from your past calls your old number, you have a way to receive notification of the call. This applies to text messages as well. You have control of the number. If you need to make a call from that number, such as to prove your identity to a bank, you can make calls from the Gmail or Voice pages while logged in to the Google account in a web browser. Having the ability to occasionally check the Google account may be all you need. Personally, I do not like logging in to Google products, so I take advantage of their forwarding options, as explained soon. It should be noted that Twilio, Telnyx, and MySudo also offer number porting options into their network. I believe Google Voice is still the best option which will not generate monthly fees for access to the number. It also allows us strong security with two-factor authentication. However, hosting your own ported number has some privacy advantages, as explained next.

Porting Into Twilio

In 2021, I needed to port two numbers. One was with T-Mobile and the other with MySudo. The T-Mobile number was provided through the prepaid provider Mint Mobile. I wanted to cancel my current account with them and start over with a new SIM. This is always a great opportunity to port a "real" number into a VOIP provider. Many companies which scrutinize VOIP numbers will often allow a number which was originally assigned to a traditional carrier, even if the number has since been ported to a VOIP provider. The following documents the entire process.

On September 10th, 2021, I navigated to https://www.mintmobile.com/chat and began a text support session. I requested the "account number" and "PIN" associated with my account. This was immediately met with skepticism and a demand to know why I needed these details. I advised I was moving to another country where there was no T-Mobile coverage and I wanted to port the number to a new provider. The representative confirmed my account details (name and number) and sent a temporary verification code via text message to the cellular number. It is vital that you either have cell coverage or calling via Wi-Fi enabled during this process. After confirming the verification code to the representative, I was provided my account number and PIN (last four digits of the cell number). The account number is required for porting.

On September 11th, 2021, I began the porting process with Twilio. I completed the "Letter of Authorization" form which is available on their site. This is where I encountered my first issue. My Twilio account details include my real name in order to prevent account suspension. My Mint Mobile account had alias details. If these two sources do not match, the request will be denied. I modified the Mint Mobile account details to reflect my first initial as the first name and a misspelling of my last name (Bazel). Since I was no longer using this account, I saw this as acceptable. On the "Letter of Authorization" I made sure my name on the form was identical to the Mint Mobile details, but included my name at bottom as "M. Bazzell". This is close enough for porting. I provided a random hotel address in NYC and signed the form. I included a screen capture of the Mint Mobile account displaying my new name details and submitted all information through the Twilio porting website.

While I waited for a response, I associated this real cellular number with a new Google, Gmail, and Google Voice account. Since a real cellular number is required to generate a new Google Voice number, and I was going to port this number into VOIP anyway, I figured I may as well collect yet another voice number. I could have also associated this number with any other online account which required a "real" number, such as a bank, social network, or credit card.

On September 14th, 2021, Twilio confirmed the porting request and submitted it to the carrier (Mint Mobile).

On September 16th, 2021, Twilio confirmed the porting request was received by Mint Mobile, and scheduled the final port for September 29th, 2021. On that date, the port completed. I was unable to log into that account via Mint Mobile, and the number was available within my Twilio dashboard. I used the previous tutorials to set up voice and text communication.

This Mint Mobile (T-Mobile) cellular number was now a Twilio VOIP number. However, many online services will still assume it is a true cellular number since it is within a block of numbers originally assigned to T-Mobile. I can continue to associate this number with various accounts, and those services will think I am providing a true cell number. This will not last forever. Various carrier identification services will eventually update their records. However, and services locked in before that date should continue to function. This is why I always associate my true cellular number with various accounts during the interval between the original porting request and the final porting process.

The process for MySudo was much simpler and faster. I wanted to port a number I had been using with MySudo into Twilio so I could use it with the VoIPSuite application. I emailed Twilio and explained that I possessed a Twilio number through the service provider MySudo and wanted that number ported into my own Twilio account. I had to copy MySudo support in the email and they had to confirm the request with Twilio. Since the

number was not leaving the Twilio network (MySudo numbers are provided by Twilio), the entire process was completed in a few days.

I must now pay $1 per month for each of these numbers, but I am in control of them. I remind readers that I am extreme in my methods, and this is not appropriate for everyone. I like to test the limits of various methods, including number porting, mostly to learn of any pitfalls my clients may face. If you have the need for several numbers, it may be appropriate for you to port any cellular numbers you will be losing. For most, this is overkill.

Many readers have attempted to port numbers out of prepaid providers during a free trial period. This almost never works. When you contact Mint Mobile support and your number is still within a free trial period, you do not "own" the number. The representative is very unlikely to give you the account number and allow porting out of that number.

Number Forwarding

I mentioned previously that one of my VOIP numbers is for Google Voice forwarding. Over the years, I have accumulated many numbers from Google Voice. Some of these are heavily associated with my true name. As an example, I used a Google Voice number when I worked as a Detective at a police department. We were all required to disclose our cell numbers on a callout list, and I only provided a Google Voice account. To this day, I hear from former colleagues through that number. Many of them assume it is my cell number, and I have no need to correct them. While I have moved all of the people with whom I continuously communicate over to better options, this Google number still receives a lot of activity. The following explains how I interact with these numbers without using the official Google websites or apps.

First, let's assume that you have either a Twilio, Telnyx, or MySudo VOIP number of 202-555-1111 and email address of voip@protonmail.com. Any calls to that number will ring your phone through your VOIP provider and incoming emails will be received within your ProtonMail inbox. Your telephone carrier and manufacturer will not know of these calls or messages. Next, conduct the following.

- In your web browser, navigate to voice.google.com and select "Settings". Your Google Voice number could be the old cell number which you ported into Google.
- The "Linked Numbers" section should either be blank or possess the same number as your previous cell number. Remove any numbers within this block.
- Add a "New linked number" of your VOIP number for forwarding (202-555-1111).
- Confirm the code sent via SMS text to that number.
- In the "Messages" section, ensure that messages are forwarded to the Gmail account for this profile.
- In the "Calls" section, ensure that call forwarding is enabled.
- In the "Calls" section, ensure that "Get email alerts for missed calls" is enabled.
- In the "Voicemail" section, ensure that "Get voicemail via email" is enabled.

Let's pause and think about what is in place now. If anyone calls your old cell number, which was ported to Google Voice, the call is routed through Google Voice and then to your VOIP number. Your VOIP number will ring as normal and you can accept the call. The caller ID will show the number calling you. If you decline the call, the caller will be sent to your VOIP voicemail (if available). If you simply do not answer, it will be sent to the Google Voice voicemail. If the caller leaves a voice message within your Google Voice account, it will forward to your Gmail (which we will soon forward to ProtonMail). If someone sends you a SMS text message to this old number, it will also be received in the email account. Let's forward those messages in order to prevent checking the Gmail account.

- Navigate to gmail.com while logged in to the account associated with the old number.
- Click the gear icon on the right and select "Settings".
- Click the "Forwarding and POP/IMAP" option in the upper menu.

- Click "Add a Forwarding Address" and enter the desired email address.
- Google will send a confirmation email to your account.
- You should now have the option to select "Forward a copy of incoming mail to" and choose your email address in the drop-down menu. Choose "Delete Gmail's copy" and save your changes.

Now, when someone leaves you a voicemail or sends you a text message to the Google Voice number, it will appear in your primary email and Google will delete the original after 30 days. You can now receive calls, voicemails, and text messages from your old number within your VOIP and email strategies without ever logging in to Google again. You can also respond to text messages via your email address and the recipient will only see the previous cellular number that is now assigned to Google Voice. I do not recommend this since the message is sent on behalf of Google. It is vital to test all of these options before relying on them. If you have VOIP, test all calling and texting options and make sure everything appears as desired. If you do not have a VOIP solution, let's repeat the entire process with alternative options.

- In your web browser, navigate to voice.google.com, click on the left menu, and select "Settings". Your Google Voice number should be the old cell number which you ported into Google.
- The "Linked Devices" section should either be blank or possess the same number as your previous cell number. Remove any numbers within this block by clicking the "X" next to each.
- In the "Messages" section, ensure that messages are forwarded to the Gmail account for this profile.
- In the "Calls" section, ensure that "Get email alerts for missed calls" is enabled.
- In the "Voicemail" section, ensure that "Get voicemail via email" is enabled.

If anyone calls your old number within this configuration, the call is routed through Google Voice and then immediately to voicemail (unless you are logged in to Google Voice via web browser). If the caller leaves a message, your email account will receive the audio and text version of the call. If someone sends you a SMS text message to this old number, it will be received in the email account as well. Now, let's forward those messages in order to prevent checking the Gmail account at all, similar to the previous steps.

- Navigate to gmail.com while logged in to the account associated with the old number.
- Click the gear icon on the right and select "Settings".
- Click the "Forwarding and POP/IMAP" option in the upper menu.
- Click "Add a Forwarding Address" and enter your email address.
- Google will send a confirmation email to your account.
- You should now have the option to select "Forward a copy of incoming mail to" and choose your email address in the drop-down menu. Choose "Delete Gmail's copy" and save your changes.

Now, when someone leaves you a voicemail or sends you a text message, it will appear in your email account and Google will delete the original email after 30 days (the text messages must be manually removed). You cannot receive calls, but will be notified of voicemails and text messages from your old number without ever logging in to Google again. You can also respond to text messages via your email address and the recipient will only see the previous cellular number that is now assigned to Google Voice. Again, this should be tested before actual use.

I have replicated this process across many of my old Google Voice numbers. This may seem sloppy, as Google now knows I am the owner of all of the accounts. My stance on this is that it likely does not matter. Google probably already knows. Their heavy use of browser fingerprinting, analytics, and IP documentation allows them to know when people use multiple accounts. Since I no longer have these numbers as part of my normal usage, I consider them all "burned" and only wish to have the ability to receive any notifications. Note that Google allows any VOIP number to be connected with only one Google account. We can no longer forward multiple numbers to a single VOIP number. We can also no longer forward SMS text messages to other VOIP numbers, but I never used this feature anyway.

If you call any of my old numbers, my primary device receives the call through various VOIP numbers. If you send a text to any of my old numbers, they are received in my email inbox. I never use these Google accounts to make any outgoing calls or send texts. These are only used for incoming content from people who do not know my true new number(s). This presents a small annoyance with this plan. You can only call out from your old Google Voice numbers if you log in to the corresponding Google account. I try to avoid this unless the caller ID on the other end needs to be the old Google Voice number. There are a few reasons you may need to do this. Imagine that you contact your credit card company in reference to your account. The cellular telephone number that they have on file is your previous Google Voice account. For security purposes, they mandate that you contact them from a known number to protect your account. You could call from the Google Voice dashboard and the number would be sent through via caller ID. If you do need this outgoing call feature, consider associating a dedicated browser for this purpose. Brave is based on Chromium (Chrome) and works well with Google Voice. I prefer to eliminate association with any Google accounts within my primary browser, which is Firefox as explained later.

Telephone Number Considerations

Are you confused yet? With so many options, I find the complexity of choice within telephone communications to be a real issue. Twilio, Telnyx, MySudo, Google Voice, and traditional numbers present numerous usage options. Overall, I hope these previous guides help you determine your own usage strategy. However, I want to present one final summary of how I use these services for myself and clients. I think this may help your own decisions.

I carry a GrapheneOS Android mobile device while traveling. It has a SIM card with a true cellular number, but I never use it for calls or texts. I have Linphone installed on the device and four VOIP numbers configured. Two are through Twilio and the others through Telnyx. I can make calls from any of them, and all numbers ring directly to the device. All numbers are also connected to my home laptop. I leave Linphone open on my laptop all day, and it reliably notifies me of incoming calls. I have an old Google Voice number which is required by some banks due to the history of use. I never make calls from it, but I have forwarded all incoming calls to a VOIP number. If my credit card company insists on calling me at a known number, I can receive a call through Linphone via VOIP, originally from Google Voice. Google has a log of the call, but no details about the conversation. All incoming text messages are forwarded to my email. I have MySudo on my devices which is used as previously outlined. I have over 30 total active numbers today including several old Google numbers.

I deviate a bit from my own strategy with clients. Many also receive a GrapheneOS device with Linphone, but most only need one Twilio or Telnyx number. They use it for all traditional incoming and outgoing calls and never use their newly-assigned cellular number. Their laptop is also configured for incoming and outgoing calls with this number. The number can be abused any way desired, and is the line used for all traditional phone calls. All text messages are facilitated through the VoIPSuite application. I then create a new Google Voice account. When prompted to enter a valid cellular number, I provide their previous true number associated with their old phone (which still has service). I then add the Twilio number to this Google account as a secondary number. When I am ready to shut off their old service, I port that previous cellular number to the Google Voice account. I configure this Google Voice account to forward any incoming text messages to an email account. This way, an incoming text to their old cell number is routed to email. This message can be read regardless of location.

The Google Voice number is provided any time a telephone number is required for Two-Factor Authentication (2FA, which is explained later). The Google account is secured with a YubiKey (also explained later). The likelihood of an attack toward Google is much less than the abilities with a standard cellular number. The text codes arrive securely within an email account, which can be accessed from anywhere. Google Voice also supports text messages from short code numbers. **Overall, try every service by taking advantage of free trials and identify the option best for you.** Things change quickly with technology and you may find my results inaccurate.

VOIP Acceptance Issues

VOIP numbers work great for incoming and outgoing calls. They can work well forwarding incoming text messages if you are willing to configure the options. Outgoing text messages can be a pain unless you are using VoIPSuite, MySudo, or Google Voice. The real problems occur when an organization refuses to allow you to provide a VOIP number for services. Many banks require a true cellular telephone number in order to use their online banking. When you provide a VOIP number, you are likely denied the connection. If you try to provide a VOIP number during account creation with many social networks, you are declined an account. This is a constant battle, but I have some solutions.

If you ported your true cellular number to a VOIP provider, such as Google Voice, Twilio, Telnyx, or MySudo, that number will probably pass VOIP scrutiny for several months. This is because banks and other online services query the provider number through a carrier identification service. These are notoriously outdated and your ported number will appear to be associated with a true cellular provider for some time. Even though you may have ported a number from AT&T into Google Voice, the carrier ID will display AT&T until various databases are updated. I currently have a ported number which passes scrutiny on every online service I have tried (for now).

We can apply this strategy with new numbers in many scenarios. The following are the steps I recently took in order to provide a client a VOIP number which would appear to be associated with a true cellular number. These steps are often blocked due to abuse, but hopefully you will be able to replicate something similar.

- Activate a Mint Mobile SIM card for a one-week trial.
- Immediately purchase one month of access.
- Two weeks after the purchased plan begins, port the number to your desired VOIP provider, such as Google Voice, Twilio, Telnyx, or MySudo.

These actions will cancel the Mint Mobile account. When you provide the number issued by Mint to any online service, it will appear to be associated with T-Mobile. This association should last between one and six months (sometimes longer). Immediately attach this number to any desired online accounts. Once the number is confirmed, they should never check carrier records again. Mint does not like this behavior and may block you from porting a number. If they do, wait until the next billing cycle and try again. Ultimately, they must allow you to take your business (and your number) somewhere else.

Secure Messaging Configuration

You should now have a new device that has no connection to you. It possesses prepaid cellular service with no name attached. Since you do not use the number provided by Mint Mobile for any communications, they have no log of your calls and messages. If I wanted to attack you through your mobile device, I have no information to begin my hunt. All of your outgoing calls are made through VOIP numbers, which may not know your true identity. While any mobile telephone is a tracking device which always possesses some type of digital trail to the owner, you have created numerous layers of privacy which will keep you protected from traditional attacks and monitoring. We now need to harden your communications.

- **Secure Messaging**: There is nothing I can say about secure messaging applications that has not been said elsewhere, and I suspect that anyone interested in privacy has already adopted a favorite service. However, a book on privacy would not be complete without mention here. Standard SMS text messaging leaves a huge amount of metadata within the systems of your cellular provider, and they can access the content of the messages. Cellular companies store years of this data, which can then be released intentionally or accidentally.
- **Zero knowledge, End-To-End Encrypted (E2EE)**: This means that all communication is completely encrypted and even the provider cannot allow the content to be intercepted in any way.

Trusted providers have no ability to view the contents of your communications because the level of encryption from your devices prevents them from any ability to access your data.

- **Ephemeral Message Expiration**: SMS messages leave a history with cellular companies. Secure communication services give you more control. Reputable services allow you to set an expiration of your messages. Once the expiration passes, the messages disappear on your device and the recipient's device. This is not bulletproof, as screen captures or exports can create additional copies, but it provides a basic layer of protection.
- **Encrypted Voice Calling**: When I need to talk with a client, I only use services which provide true encrypted calling. This prevents network wiretapping and other technologies from intercepting and recording my call. There is still a risk that the other party could record the conversation, but interception by a third-party is unlikely. Compare this to a telephone provider which can intercept any call.
- **Adoption**: If no one else in your social circle is using your favorite secure communications application, then it is useless. The security only works for communication within the network. Services with a high adoption rate will always be preferred over niche applications with minimal users. There are many secure messaging apps emerging every day. I will disclose those which I use and recommend and those which I believe should be avoided.

Secure Communication with Signal

There are things I do not like about **Signal** (signal.org), but it has the largest user base and is therefore my primary secure communications platform. There is a decent chance that many of the people in your circle already use the service. I would rather communicate over Signal than SMS text, and most people in my life possess Signal as their only secure option. I have great faith in their encryption protocols used to protect my communications from any outside party. Unfortunately, Signal prioritizes mass adoption and unnecessary features over extreme privacy, but we will make it work well for our needs. Let's tackle the biggest issue first.

Signal requires a telephone number in order to create an account, which is a huge privacy violation. You must then give out this number in order to communicate with others securely. This shares your number in a way we typically try to avoid. If you choose to use Signal, you should create an account associated with a VOIP number, as previously explained, such as a Twilio, Telnyx, MySudo, or Google Voice number. I typically prefer to use a client's previous personal number which has been ported to Google Voice for this use since it may already be known by others in their circle. This shares the VOIP number with all contacts, but that does not expose the new true cellular number. Using this old number can make communications easier and more trusted by the other party. Never use your true cellular number with Signal.

Signal notifies people when one of their contacts creates an account. This may be beneficial to you if your ported Google Voice number is already trusted by your friends. If you do not like this feature (I do not), you might consider using a brand new VOIP number unknown to anyone else. This eliminates any contacts knowing you are now on Signal. I created a VOIP number which is only used to establish communications with others through Signal. This may be unnecessary for you. Let's walk through a typical configuration of Signal.

- Download the Signal app through Aurora Store (GrapheneOS) or App Store (iOS).
- Launch the app and accept the default requirements.
- Enter a VOIP number and confirm a text message or voice call.
- Provide a desired first name, which can be a single letter.
- Enter a secure PIN.
- GrapheneOS users: Tap the alert about missing Google services. Select "Allow" if you want the app to always run in the background and receive notifications of messages. Tap "Deny" if you want to preserve minimal battery life and retrieve messages only when you open the app without notifications.

Once you have an account, you have access to secure (encrypted) text, audio, and video communications, including group conversations. Signal has a desktop application which supports all features available to the

mobile version, which we will install in the next chapter. If you are using GrapheneOS, Signal may be the only messaging application which will reliably send notifications of received messages. If you have children or other family members which need immediate access to you, then I highly recommend configuring Signal on their devices. This will ensure that you do not miss important messages due to the lack of Google services on your own device. It will also introduce secure communications to the family. Let's configure a few more settings to make things more private.

- Open the "Settings" menu by tapping the icon in the upper left of Signal.
- Tap "Account" and enable "Registration Lock". This requires your Signal PIN to register a new device.
- Tap the back button and open the "Privacy" menu.
- Enable "Screen lock" if desired. This forces a fingerprint or PIN to open Signal.
- Disable "Show Calls in Recents" to prevent call details from being stored within the operating system.
- Disable PIN reminders if desired.
- Click "Advanced" and disable "Allow from Anyone" if desired. This prevents any unsolicited contact.
- Disable "Show Status Icon" to hide your availability.
- Tap the back arrow twice to return to the "Settings" menu.
- Tap "Chats" and disable "Generate Link Previews" to prevent loading of websites.
- Tap the back arrow to return to the "Settings" menu.
- Tap "SMS and MMS" (Android) and enable Signal as default messaging application.

When you participate in a conversation with someone on Signal, tap their name on the top menu to access settings for them. Consider enabling "Disappearing Messages" and choosing an appropriate length of time. I typically enable "1 week" for all contacts. A week after I send any message, it is erased from both devices.

Signal is far from perfect. Many elitists insist on using robust apps such as Session and avoid widely-adopted services such as Signal. I understand the desire for extreme privacy, but we must always place emphasis on products which our contacts will actually use. My entire family made the switch to Signal because it was quite easy for them. They did not need to memorize an additional username and password. They simply connected the account to their true cellular number which they have had for many years. Privacy and security are likely not as important for everyone in your life as to you. We must choose our battles wisely. If your non-technical contacts are willing to use Signal but do not want to fuss with more complicated options, I still consider this a win. Your conversations are encrypted and much more secure than any traditional protocol, such as SMS.

Secure Communication with Wire

Wire (app.wire.com) is my second preferred secure messenger over all others. While not perfect, it offers features currently unavailable in other providers. Wire is free for personal use, and has adopted a large audience of users within the privacy community, but it is usually ignored by the masses which flock to Signal. Only an email address is required to create an account, and I recommend ProtonMail for this purpose, as explained later. Wire has native applications for iOS, Android, Windows, macOS, and Linux. GrapheneOS users can download through Aurora Store. If you are using any other system, you can also connect via their website within a browser. Regardless of your connection, you can communicate securely via text, audio, and video across all platforms. This is a rarity and makes the service easily accessible in any scenario. I often provide existing Wire account details to a new client, which allows them to open a browser and immediately connect to me without creating their own account. This has been very valuable in my line of work.

I do have minor complaints about Wire. First, I have witnessed messages appear within the mobile application but not the desktop or web versions. If I search for the user, I then see the text content, but this can be a hassle. This only applies when the desktop or web versions are closed. When they are open and active, the messages appear fine. Fortunately, deleting a message on one device removes it from all. Signal does not offer this. Next, Wire seems to purposely make it difficult to find the free version. Visiting wire.com only presents their paid

tiers. Visiting app.wire.com and selecting "Personal" allows a free account creation. This is also not a huge deal, but it should be acknowledged when introducing the service to others.

Installation and configuration of Wire is much more straight-forward than Signal. Download the app; create a "personal" account; and share your chosen username with others. Click the silhouette icon in the lower left to search for a user and initiate a text, voice, or video conversation. One unique feature of Wire is the ability to configure up to three user accounts within the desktop application (two on Android). On both my mobile and desktop versions of Wire, I have the same accounts which I can use for various purposes. This alone justifies Wire as one of my preferred services. Note that Wire does not receive notifications within GrapheneOS.

Some may question my endorsement of Wire. In 2020, they transitioned their company headquarters from Switzerland to America. This immediately triggered those who distrust 5-eyes governments. In this scenario, you would also not want to use Signal, MySudo, or most other secure messaging options. I am not concerned with the location of their headquarters. I am more interested in the security of their product and encryption protocols, both of which I trust. Both Signal and Wire have completed numerous third-party security audits, all of which are publicly viewable online. These audits will always outweigh the location of a team or building when I consider use of a secure product.

Secure Communications Summary

Overall, you should adopt whichever secure service will be used by those in your circles. If no one in your life is using secure communications, you have an opportunity to select the best service for your needs and start recruiting people to it. If everyone in your life already uses a specific service, jump on board. I have great respect for many other secure messaging applications, but various reasons have prevented them from appearing within my primary recommendations. Consider the following.

- **MySudo** (mysudo.com) offers free secure communications within their network. This includes E2EE text, audio, and video. If the majority of your contacts already have MySudo for their VOIP solution as previously explained, then this may be the only secure option you need. It did not make the "top two" because of lower adoption and no ability to place calls or messages through a browser or desktop application. This is vital for clients who do not bring a mobile device into their homes.
- **Session** (getsession.org) has very private text messaging options, but adoption is extremely low and voice calling is not supported.
- **Matrix** (matrix.org) is a phenomenal open-source and decentralized platform, but their focus is on community chat rooms for a niche tech-savvy audience.
- **Threema** (threema.ch) meets all of my requirements with exception of adoption. Their paid app is justified, but payment prevents many people from downloading it.
- **Jitsi** (jitsi.org) possesses a great video conferencing protocol, but few people use it for traditional text communication. I use this weekly in place of Zoom, but never for text.
- **NOT RECOMMENDED - Wickr** was the first secure communications app I ever used. However, I stopped using it in 2020 when I discovered that they were sharing user details with third party services including Microsoft and Google. The CTO of the company confirmed analytical data and IP addresses of all users are shared. In 2021, they were acquired by Amazon. I have deleted the app.
- **NOT RECOMMENDED - WhatsApp** provides secure end-to-end encrypted text and voice communication with a very trusted protocol. However, the service is owned and operated by Facebook. Furthermore, a privacy policy shift in 2021 allows them to share account details with Facebook servers and users. While the company says this is isolated to business Facebook profiles who wish to incorporate secure communications with customers, I have no room for this product in my arsenal. Furthermore, their user backups are not encrypted and often stored within Google cloud products.
- **NOT RECOMMENDED - Telegram** supports E2EE communications, but the setting is optional. The default configuration potentially exposes content internally. I never rely on a communication platform which requires user customization to make the content secure.

Secure Communications Conversion

You may have found your desired secure communications platform. Now what? If no one within your circle of friends and family uses it, it is of little use. Obviously, a polite request and explanation of the benefits may draw a few people in, but you may want to convert all of your contacts over to something secure. That is what I did. I first asked each person within my immediate communication circles if they had a preference of a secure communications provider. If they did, I connected with them through that option. If they did not, I asked them to download Signal. This is because Signal is the easiest to implement without any requirements for a username, email address, or password. It just works. Most people do not have any issue using their true cellular number for this purpose. Although Signal is easy to install and execute, some people simply will not transition to it in order to communicate with you. When you encounter these scenarios, consider the following conversion strategies.

Response Delay: When a contact refuses to adopt a secure messenger, and only sends messages via SMS to one of my VOIP numbers, I politely explain the ways in which SMS is insecure. If that does not help, I place them on a delay. When I receive a message via SMS, I do not respond for at least 24 hours. I then state "Sorry, I rarely check SMS, contact me on Signal if you need anything immediately". If they contact me via Signal, I respond right away to reward the attempt. After a few weeks, they only contact me on Signal.

Missed Connection: I once had a close friend who simply refused to use anything secure. He had downloaded Signal but never opened it. He would send sensitive communications over SMS which I found troubling. The delay option did not work on him. Therefore, I had to get creative. This friend was a huge 80's rock fan. On the night which his favorite band Def Leppard was in town, I sent a message via Signal asking him if he wanted free front row tickets to the show. I knew he would not check and respond, so I was not too worried about my bluff. A week later, he noticed the pending message notification for Signal and read the message. He was very regretful, and began checking Signal more often. The next time I had a true offer for free entertainment, I reached out via Signal and we met up.

Daily Reward: The most difficult conversion has been my extended family. My siblings joined right away, but some family members were hesitant. I was able to convince them to install Signal, which allowed me to add them to a group conversation, but they did not open the app often. My solution was to create a new group of all immediate relatives, and engage them in a daily chat. I identified the people who were not seeing the conversation, and started sharing old family photos of them. Childhood pictures of myself and other relatives at holidays generated a lot of conversation around the memories of our past. Those who were participating then copied some of the images to others who were ignoring Signal, which immediately encouraged them to launch the app and see what else they were missing. I have found that sharing old family photos is a great way to draw people in. If you are uncomfortable sharing images of yourself or others within secure chat, consider ancestral images. Every week, I post random photos of my deceased grandparents to my sisters in a secure group chat. This not only presents an opportunity to bond over memories, but it also creates a pattern of behavior which encourages daily use of the app. If desired, you could set a timer for the images which makes them disappear after a set amount of time. This encourages people to look right away.

I warn readers to avoid secure messenger switching fatigue. I am guilty of this. Many years ago, I asked people to join the secure messenger called Wickr. Once I realized they were collecting user analytics and forwarding to Microsoft and Google, I asked them all to switch to Wire. Once I began using Signal heavily, I asked the same people to switch to that. This creates an annoyance and discourages people from playing along with your antics. Choose the most appropriate option first and test everything. Make sure you are comfortable with the product and are confident in its long-term availability. Only then, invite people in, and do not ask them to switch unless there is a good reason. Again, this is why I like Signal. I believe it will be around a long time and it is easy.

VPN Configuration (Mobile)

Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) provide a good mix of both security and privacy by routing your internet traffic through a secure tunnel. The secure tunnel goes to the VPN's server and encrypts all the data between your device and that server. This ensures that anyone monitoring your traffic before it reaches the distant server will not find usable, unencrypted data. Privacy is also afforded through the use of a distant server. Because your traffic appears to be originating from the VPN's server, websites will have a more difficult time tracking you, aggregating data on you, and pinpointing your location. I break this down further in the next chapter.

Virtual Private Networks are not a perfect anonymity solution. It is important to note that VPNs offer you privacy, not anonymity. The best VPNs for privacy purposes are paid subscriptions with reputable providers. There are several excellent paid VPN providers out there and I strongly recommend them over free providers. Free providers often monetize through very questionable means, such as data aggregation. Paid VPN providers monetize directly by selling you a service, and reputable providers do not collect or monetize your data. Paid providers also offer a number of options which will increase your overall privacy and security.

I currently use and recommend ProtonVPN as my primary VPN and Private Internet Access (PIA) as a LIMITED secondary option when VPNs are actively being blocked (explained in Chapter Four). Navigate to **inteltechniques.com/vpn.html** for further information and the best affiliate purchase links. Purchases include unlimited use, connection to multiple devices simultaneously, and fast speeds. Many people consider discounted packages which include both ProtonVPN and ProtonMail, but I discourage this. **I want separate accounts for email and VPN.** I pay for my VPN with Bitcoin in an alias name, but I pay for ProtonMail with a credit card in my true name. My email addresses will be associated with my true identity at some point anyway, and I do not want to lose access to that account. Anonymous online purchasing solutions will be presented later.

For most readers, and almost every client I have consulted, I recommend sticking with the standard application provided by the VPN company. These branded apps should suffice for most needs. ProtonVPN can be downloaded from the App Store, Google Play, or F-Droid on GrapheneOS. Once installed, simply provide your account credentials and launch your VPN connection. Fortunately, ProtonVPN has made their applications completely open-source. This makes it much more difficult to hide malicious programming within them.

Another option is to manually configure your VPN through your mobile device's system settings. With iOS and Android, I can specify the exact VPN details and make a connection without any third-party software. At the time of this writing, instructions for ProtonVPN were available at https://protonvpn.com/support/protonvpn-ios-manual-ikev2-vpn-setup (iOS) and https://protonvpn.com/support/android-vpn-setup (Android). The iOS option uses the IKEv2/IPSec protocol, which is built into iOS. Most will agree that OpenVPN provides slightly more secure encryption, but it requires a third-party app. IKEv2/IPSec does not require an app, but has slightly weaker encryption. If using ProtonVPN, stick with their app. I simply want you to know of all options.

My VPN policy is quite simple, but my opinions about VPN companies can be complex. Any time that I am connected to the internet from my laptop, desktop, or mobile device, I am connected through my VPN. I know that my internet traffic is encrypted and originating from an IP address not associated with me. I never deviate from this policy. I believe that every reader should consider a paid VPN. In a later chapter, I will present a more hardened home solution for a constant VPN in your home. In the next chapter, I share more insight on the use of VPNs for privacy within desktop environments.

What do I use? I rely on ProtonVPN through their app on my mobile device(s) and laptop(s) while I am traveling. Home devices are protected through a firewall with ProtonVPN, as explained in Chapter Four. I trust them more than most commercial options and I believe their business model is the most transparent. Being hosted in Switzerland provides some aspect of privacy from vague government intrusion, but international servers could always be compromised. Any updates in regard to my VPN recommendations will be posted on my website at **inteltechniques.com/vpn.html**. Throughout the remaining chapters, I will present much more information about VPN usage and services.

Secondary Device Configuration

Your new private Android or iPhone may be all you need in regard to a mobile device. Most people carry it with them everywhere they go and leave it connected to the mobile network at all times. I believe this is risky behavior and a desire for extreme privacy will require you to take more extreme action. Many of my clients' primary mobile devices have never entered their homes and have never connected to a cellular tower within five miles of their houses. This prevents their phones from announcing their home locations. If someone did figure out a mobile number, and paid a bounty hunter or private investigator to locate a device, it would not lead anyone back to a home. The last known location should be a busy intersection with no connection to anyone. You can accomplish this and still possess a mobile device in your home with all of the communication apps you need with the following instructions. First, we should discuss whether you need a secondary home device.

I began presenting a secondary device option when I was still recommending Apple iOS devices. This was before GrapheneOS was available and I believed that Apple was our best option for privacy and security. This has changed. Apple is now collecting more information than ever before and continuously introducing new "features" which give us no control over their functionality. This presents a new dilemma for me. I had previously recommended Apple iPod Touch devices for use in the home while an iPhone could be used outside the home. While the Touch devices possess no cellular connectivity, they still collect and send data about you back to Apple every minute. Therefore, I am drastically changing my advice for secondary device usage. My current recommendation is as follows, in order of most private to least.

- Primary GrapheneOS device for use while traveling and a laptop within the home
- Primary GrapheneOS device outside the home and secondary GrapheneOS device within the home
- Single GrapheneOS device for use within the home and while traveling
- Primary GrapheneOS device outside the home and secondary iPod Touch device within the home

I will discuss all options, but we should first understand the reasons why any of this might matter to you. When you travel, your phone is always by your side and is your primary means of secure communications. When you return home, things might change. When you are about five miles away from home, at a very specific location, you might drop your device into a Faraday bag. This shielded pouch (amzn.to/3gmNJnZ) prevents any signals from reaching or leaving the phone. It stops all communications with cellular towers. The device might stay in this bag until you are at least five miles from home heading out on another trip. Since the phone is never connected to any network while near your home, it cannot reveal the overnight location of the device (or your home address). You might be surprised at the number of private and government organizations which have unlimited access to device location data.

While at home, you can still possess a secondary mobile device for secure communications. Many use an iPod Touch for this. The iPod Touch possesses the same iOS operating system as the iPhone. It connects to your wireless network in the home (behind a firewall with VPN as discussed later) and has internet access, but no cellular connectivity. It possesses a unique Apple ID never used on any other device. Most secure communication apps, such as Wire, work the same as on your primary phone and can share accounts. Neither Apple or Google will know this association. Many use this strategy in order to possess a small device within the home without the need to rely on a large laptop all day.

You can configure Linphone on your secondary device for all incoming and outgoing voice telephone calls using the same numbers as your travel device. This gives the best of both worlds while at home. Upon arriving home, connect the secondary device to your home Wi-Fi and it never leaves the house again. This secondary device replicates all communications options you may need. Aside from lack of a cellular-provided number and service, it appears identical to your "phone". MySudo can also possess the same telephone numbers for incoming and outgoing calls across all devices. In order to replicate an installation of MySudo, and share the same numbers across two mobile devices, both must be active at the same time during configuration. You must scan a barcode from the primary device within the secondary unit. Both devices need internet access during this process. Therefore, I set all of this up on public Wi-Fi behind a VPN before taking the secondary device to a client's

home. This is a one-time exception. First, I enable power on the secondary device at any library with free Wi-Fi and allow my cellular telephone to be connected to a cellular data connection. I configure everything on the secondary device as needed, which will require access to the primary device to allow these connections. I then "forget" the Wi-Fi network on the secondary device. An optional step here is to tell the device to forget all networks, if desired. I then turn it off completely.

An issue with this plan is the installation of Signal on the secondary device. Unlike username-based services such as Wire, Signal relies on a telephone number. Furthermore, it only allows usage on one mobile device at any given time. However, it provides a desktop application which can be used on multiple machines. Therefore, a secondary mobile device would not possess your primary Signal account, but your home laptop could. You can send and receive text, audio, and video over Signal while using a laptop.

I insist on preventing any devices from connecting to any cellular network while in my home. These connections can immediately identify someone's location. The iPod Touch has no cellular connectivity, but a secondary GrapheneOS device can also be fairly safe. Unlike Apple iPhones, GrapheneOS does not re-enable cellular and Bluetooth radios upon reboot after every software update. When you place the GrapheneOS device into airplane mode, the cellular connection sends absolutely no data to any cell towers. If your secondary GrapheneOS device does not possess a SIM card, this concern becomes even less.

The idea of a secondary device is that it never leaves the home and never connects to any other network. I think of it as a landline which only functions in the home. If you possess an anonymous telephone with prepaid service and an anonymous Wi-Fi only device, both of which have no connection to your identity or each other, you have an amazing layer of privacy protection. However, this could be overkill. Now that I have explained the reasons I have changed my view of the secondary device, let's revisit our options and expand on each. I begin with the most private and secure.

Primary GrapheneOS device for use while traveling and a laptop within the home: Your travel device possesses an anonymous prepaid account, but all cellular usage is logged forever. The location of this device can be tracked any time the cellular radio is enabled. Dropping it into a Faraday bag before going home truly protects you. While at home, you may only need a laptop computer for all communications. This option has become much more popular lately with clients. They realize that they can conduct almost all of their typical mobile device usage within a laptop. In some cases, the laptop is more stable than a mobile device. Email, Signal, Wire, Linphone, voice calls, and SMS texting can all be accomplished on a laptop without any mobile device requirement. There is no option for cellular connectivity. The only limitation is the absence of MySudo, but calls can be made through Linphone. Some clients say they appreciate the lack of "playing" on their mobile device all night, and simply check their laptop on occasion throughout the day. Traditional VOIP and secure Signal calls audibly ring on the device.

Primary GrapheneOS device outside the home and secondary GrapheneOS device within the home: Your primary travel device stays in a Faraday bag while near the home. Upon arrival at home, the secondary GrapheneOS is practically identical to the travel device. It is in airplane mode and only connects via Wi-Fi. All of your apps work the same way, with the Signal exception. If airplane mode is accidentally disabled, there is no SIM which would associate the device to a specific account. A connection to a cell tower would be made, but this would not expose any phone number or account.

Single GrapheneOS device for use within the home and while traveling: This option eliminates the secondary device completely, but would require some serious discipline. You could place the device into airplane mode while traveling and connect to Wi-Fi while at home. For extra credit (and comfort), you could remove the SIM before placing the device into airplane mode. Since there is no Google or Apple account associated with the device, there is no central repository collecting data about the device's location and usage. If you were to accidentally disable airplane mode, a connection would be made to a nearby cellular tower which could expose your location. However, who would know it is you? Your prepaid account is in an alias name and you never use that number for anything. The risk here is low, but there is still risk. I would never encourage a high-risk client

to use their primary device in the home, but the majority of GrapheneOS users might have no issue with this. The pressure would be on you to enter airplane mode any time you are near your home. Only you can decide if this is feasible.

Primary GrapheneOS device outside the home and secondary iPod Touch device within the home: Finally, you have the traditional option of a GrapheneOS device while you travel and a Wi-Fi-only iPod Touch for the home. This was my method for many years, and I have no regrets. My current distrust of Apple and their data collection has eliminated this possibility for me and my high-risk clients. Apple requires an Apple ID which will be used to assimilate all collected data into your profile. Apple will know a lot about you, but there will be no evidence of your true location, as long as you are connected to a home network VPN (explained later). It may surprise some readers that I recommend a single GrapheneOS device for travel and home usage over this option. I believe that you have the discipline to stay in airplane mode while near your home, but consider all of these options carefully.

I followed the secondary iPod Touch strategy until 2021. Today, I do not use any iOS devices due to their requirement to possess a valid Apple ID, constant data collection, and increasing privacy invasions. What do I do now? I have two GrapheneOS devices, but I rarely use the "home" device. One is my "travel" device which is dropped into a Faraday bag at a specific place before going home. The other is my "home" unit which has never possessed a cellular SIM card and never leaves the house. It only uses Wi-Fi in my home and is almost a clone of the travel device. I find myself relying on my laptop for the majority of my communications from home. There are days when I never turn on the secondary device. This may be extreme and paranoid, but remember why you are reading this book.

Since my "home" GrapheneOS operating system does not share any device information to third-party servers, and a Google or Apple account is not required to use the device, my fears of data collection from my VPN-protected home network are minimal. This also applies to my laptop. Since there is no cellular connection enabled and a SIM is missing, I do not worry about cellular network connections associating my usage to my travel device or a cellular account. GrapheneOS updates and reboots do not reset the radio connections similar to Apple, so accidental disabling of airplane mode is also minimal. Is this perfect? No. The worst-case scenario is that I accidentally enable the cellular data connection; the home device connects to a cellular tower without a SIM card; and that cellular company now has a record of that specific hardware's location. The device was purchased with cash and it has never registered to any cellular account. The damage would be extremely minimal. The cellular tower company would have no information to offer. Is it best for you? Only you can determine that. I present this here to simply disclose my own modifications as my privacy plan changes.

Reality Check: Do you need two mobile devices? If your prepaid service is in an alias name; you have never used the number assigned to the account; and your device was purchased with cash, it might not matter. I know many people who place their GrapheneOS device into airplane mode before they approach their homes and do not have issues of being tracked. Stock Apple and Android devices present greater risk. Ultimately, this all depends on your level of discipline and overall privacy and security threats.

If you go through the troubles of obtaining an anonymous home as discussed later, these steps may be vital so that you do not expose yourself. Airplane mode is not always enough, especially with iOS. Apple system updates disable airplane mode on reboot. It only takes one accidental connection to create a permanent record of the location of a device. These steps prevent unintentional exposure that could ruin all of your hard work.

Some readers of the previous edition expressed concerns of Apple eliminating the iPod Touch from its lineup of mobile devices. Fortunately, they released a 7th edition in 2019. This device supports the current version of iOS (15). Based on previous support models, I expect the latest iPod Touch to receive support updates through 2023. You should note that all iPod Touch models lack Touch ID, Face ID, 3D Touch, NFC, GPS, an earpiece speaker and a noise-canceling microphone. However, all communication functions work well with a set of earbuds which contain an in-line microphone (such as those included with most older iPhones).

Faraday Bag Selection and Testing

I insist on thoroughly testing any Faraday bags I purchase. Over the past ten years, I have acquired at least five bags which failed to prevent signals from entering or escaping the sleeve. Some may place their device in a bag, seal it, and call the phone number of the device to see whether it rings or forwards the call to voicemail. I do not believe this is an accurate test as you are relying on the signal strength of the nearest tower. A test in a rural area may be successful while that same test in an urban city could fail. Also, a failed call due to poor coverage may provide false assurances of the functionality of the bag. Instead, I rely on Bluetooth as my primary signal test. I can control the test better and apply strong local signals. The following is my routine with a $15 small, portable, battery operated Bluetooth speaker.

- Connect the mobile device to the speaker via Bluetooth.
- Play music from the device to the speaker.
- While music is playing, drop the mobile device into the bag and seal it.
- After the previous test, with music playing, drop the speaker into the bag and seal it while the mobile device is NOT in the bag.

In both scenarios, the audio should stop a few moments after sealing the bag. With some devices, the audio may play a while before stopping due to buffering. If the device continues to send multiple songs or a live audio stream to the speaker, then the bag is not performing appropriately. Now we should test other wireless signals.

- Connect the mobile device to Wi-Fi; stream an internet radio station from the mobile device through the internal speaker; drop the mobile device into the bag; and seal it. The audio should stop after any buffering of stored data.
- Disable Wi-Fi; enable a cellular data connection; stream an internet radio station from the mobile device through the internal speaker; drop the mobile device into the bag; and seal it. The audio should stop after any buffering of stored data.

In my experience, a poorly constructed Faraday bag is more likely to block cellular or Wi-Fi signals than nearby Bluetooth frequencies. I have yet to see a successful Bluetooth blocking test reveal that cellular frequencies were allowed. Therefore, Bluetooth is my baseline to detect the function of all Faraday bags. I also believe you should test the other connections as explained above. A Faraday bag should never be used before thorough testing. If your bag begins to show wear, repeat these tests. If your bag does not function properly 100% of the time, there is simply no point in using it at all. I currently rely on the Silent Pocket nylon bag (amzn.to/3gmNJnZ) for my GrapheneOS device. Silent Pocket offers a discount to readers at https://slnt.com/discount/IntelTechniques, and I receive small affiliate payments from purchases. I sought this relationship after using the products.

Mobile Device Usage

Now that you have an anonymous telephone and possibly an isolated Wi-Fi only "Home" phone, we should have a conversation about general usage between the two. I believe that we should all use mobile devices as they were originally intended: as a means of communication. I do not believe privacy-conscious people should ever consider a mobile phone as an entertainment device. It should not be used for games, video streaming, or extensive web browsing. We should be reserved with the applications installed. Consider the following.

- **Telephone**: As explained previously, my clients rely heavily on the Linphone app on all devices. It allows then to replicate their accounts on a second Wi-Fi device or laptop so they can make and receive calls from any of their VOIP numbers.
- **Email**: I use the standard ProtonMail application and connect my premium account to each device. This allows me to send and receive secure emails from multiple ProtonMail addresses as well as accounts associated with domain names which I own. We tackle ProtonMail soon.

- **Secure Messengers**: I rely on Signal and Wire for secure communications with clients. The Wire software on both mobile devices and my laptop is connected to two Wire accounts. This allows seamless communication. My mobile device and home laptop share a single Signal account for consistent communications on that platform.
- **VPN**: I have the ProtonVPN app on both mobile devices, but I leave it disabled on the home unit because it is protected by my home firewall (explained later). While traveling, I leave the ProtonVPN application executed and connected at all times with the "Always-On" option enabled.

These apps allow me to communicate securely via email, encrypted text, encrypted voice, encrypted video, and traditional VOIP telephone service. I have every avenue of communication covered, and each device allows full use through all of my accounts. The end user does not know which device I am using. My cellular service provider knows absolutely nothing about my activity, only the amount of data used. T-Mobile also has no record of any calls or text messages, and does not know the name attached to the account. Neither Apple nor Google know the details of each account or the VOIP numbers being used.

Web Browser: Your choice and configuration of a web browser on your desktop computer is very important, and is explained in detail in the next chapter. If using GrapheneOS, I recommend the included hardened browser Vanadium. For some users, I recommend Firefox Focus as a secondary browser which can be quickly "cleaned", as explained in a moment. Your privacy and security options within the Apple iOS and stock Android operating systems are more limited. Apple mandates that any third-party browsers rely on its own rendering engine. This means that every browser on an iPhone is still using Apple's code, regardless of the brand. Chrome, Firefox, and every privacy-themed option is still using Apple's internal browser software. Android allows more options, but pushes users toward Chrome as a default browser. I believe there are better alternatives than the stock Safari and Chrome applications. I prefer Firefox Focus for all web browsing from within stock Apple or Android devices. Firefox Focus provides three key features which I find useful.

- Easy History Removal: A trash can is present next to the URL bar at all times. A single click on this icon removes all internet history, search queries, and active pages from the application. This is much easier than opening Apple's Settings menu, scrolling to Safari, and then clicking the "Clear History" option.
- Tracking Protection: Firefox Focus offers embedded tracking protection from various online trackers and analytics. Furthermore, you can allow Firefox to force Safari to share these blocking settings. This way, when an application opens a link within Safari, you have some additional protection.
- Simplicity and Speed: I believe Firefox Focus offers the most simplistic and speedy web browsing experience out of all the popular options.

Additional Apps: As you proceed through the book, I present numerous technologies which apply to both desktop and mobile environments. As I do this, I provide recommendations for both Android and Apple systems. Overall, this is your device to personalize as you desire. Never let me or anyone else completely control the way your device is configured. Make sure you understand the reasons behind the recommendations and skip anything which does not apply to you and your usage.

Exit Strategy: I offer a final unorthodox telephone call strategy which may not be well-received with some readers. If you are ever on a call which becomes invasive, such as a company asking too many personal questions which you were not prepared to answer, never hang up the phone. This sends a message to the other party claiming the call was "ended" by you. Instead, place your device into airplane mode, including disabling of Wi-Fi. This will also end the call, but will send a message that the call "failed" but was not "ended" intentionally. You can later state that you had a service disruption without displaying the appearance of suspicious behavior. If you want to apply an extra dose of emphasis, disconnect the call while you are actively talking. If the other party calls you back, they will receive immediate voicemail instead of ringing without an answer.

Mobile Device Firewalls

When you launch an application within your mobile device, several network connections are executed. By default, we do not know much about these transmissions. Obviously, communication apps need to connect to servers in order to function. However, what else is happening behind our backs? Is your favorite "privacy app" sending data to social networks without your consent? I was surprised to learn of the number of privacy violations occurring when popular applications were opened. In previous editions of this book, I recommended software applications which served as a firewall in order to block any unwanted outgoing connections. These included Blokada for Android and iOS. While I still use this software application for mobile app testing purposes, **I no longer recommend it for most users**. There are several reasons behind this change. Blokada for iOS has moved to a paid cloud-based model which has replaced its local on-device filtering; some features are not always reliable due to operating system changes made by Apple; the Android version of Blokada now whitelists some connections (preventing full control) and generates non-blockable traffic to their own servers; and any software firewall will conflict with most VPN apps. Today, I rely on DNS filtering to prevent unwanted connections, which is thoroughly explained in the next chapter. Blokada is only used temporarily for testing.

Linux Phones

In 2020, I saw the emergence of two privacy-respecting Linux telephones from **Purism** (puri.sm) and **Pine64** (pine64.org). Both offer the ability to physically disable the cameras, microphones, and communications hardware. This alone is a huge feature for us. Both devices possess Linux operating systems which provide enhanced privacy and security. On the surface, these devices sound perfect. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Both devices rely on your cellular service provider for standard calls and communication. VOIP is possible, but extremely limited. Linphone is supported, but difficult to configure. At the time of this writing, Wire, Signal, and ProtonMail do not fully support the operating systems. This eliminates the vast majority of features I require in a mobile device. I truly hope that the future presents a scenario where a Linux phone meets all of my needs. Until then, I do not recommend these devices. I believe GrapheneOS is far superior (and free).

Camera and Microphone Blocking

Our mobile phones are designed to make life simple and fun. Most devices possess at least two cameras and numerous microphones. Selfies, high resolution photos, and speakerphone calls are simple thanks to the hardware present. However, these features can be used against us. Malicious software can enable a microphone or camera without our knowledge. The most recent iOS and Android operating systems possess protections from this type of misuse, but bad things can still happen. In 2019, Facebook was caught secretly enabling the front camera of mobile devices while users were viewing their feeds within the app. Most social network apps circumvent security software by convincing you to authorize the necessary permissions to access your microphones and cameras. If you possess apps from Facebook, Amazon, and other providers, you will likely find that they all have unlimited access to your microphone and camera. Because of intentional and accidental exposure, I embrace camera and microphone blockers for the devices of all clients (and my own).

Camera blockers are easy. Much like a laptop, you can cover your mobile device cameras with black electrical tape or a dedicated sticker. Silent Pocket (amzn.to/3twUUxq) offers reusable stickers designed to block embedded web cameras. They are more stable than generic options and are available in multiple sizes and colors. At a minimum, I encourage people to consider covering the front-facing "selfie" camera, as blocking the rear camera would also prevent any intentional photos. Due to paranoia, I keep both of my cameras covered until I need to use them. There are sliding metal products which easily enable the camera when desired, but I have found all of these to be poorly made and unreliable.

Microphone blocking can be tricky. Modern iPhones possess four unique microphones, none of which can be easily disabled. If a rogue app or virus began listening to your conversations, you would never know. The only fool-proof option would be to destroy each microphone, but that would make the device much less usable. Our best consideration is to "plug" the microphones. First, we must understand how microphones are chosen by

system applications. Think about your current mobile device. If you make a call and hold the phone up to your ear, you likely hear the other person through the small speaker near the top. The other party hears you through a microphone near the bottom. If you enable the speakerphone, you now hear the person through the speakers at the bottom. They hear you through the microphones at the bottom. Now imagine plugging in a set of earbuds with an inline microphone. You now hear the other person through your earbuds and they hear you through the microphone within the cable. The operating system of the device detects all of this activity and adjusts the input and output based on your actions. Let's focus on that inline microphone attached to your earbuds.

When you attach any type of headset which includes a microphone, your device detects this and switches the default microphone to the headset. It does not disable the other microphones. It only "listens" to the microphone which is plugged in. Now imagine if the microphone within the headset was broken. If you made a call through it, you would hear the other party, but they would not hear you. The device is only listening for the active microphone.

If you have an old set of earbuds you do not wish to use again, consider the following experiment. Cut the cable directly below the in-line microphone, but above where the cable splits for each ear. The remaining earbud will still work, but there is no microphone. The phone believes a microphone is present due to the plug structure. The phone enables the missing headphone microphone as the default and no one will be able to hear you on calls. This is the design behind a microphone plug.

Fortunately, you do not need to keep a pair of destroyed headphones plugged into your device in order to achieve these same results. Many companies offer "mic plugs" which virtually disable the working microphones of the device. Figure 2.03 (left) displays one of these options, a standard 3.5mm microphone plug made by **Mic-Lock** (amzn.to/2B6QvXw). This unit is larger than other flush-fitting models, but I have found it to be more reliable. When you plug this device into your phone, it tells the operating system that you just inserted a pair of headphones with an inline microphone. Therefore, your device makes this new mic the default option and tells all applications to listen to it if audio is needed. Since a microphone does not actually exist within this device, only silence is delivered. The Pixel 4a device I used with GrapheneOS has a traditional headphone jack ready for these blockers. This is another benefit of the Pixel GrapheneOS strategy over devices which have eliminated the standard headphone port, such as any modern iPhone.

Many newer mobile devices present a problem. Some do not possess traditional headphone jacks, and only offer a Lightning or USB-C connection. Mic-Lock makes Lightning and USB-C (https://amzn.to/3v56Mso) plugs for these devices, as displayed in Figure 2.03 (middle and right). There are numerous "L-Shaped" and miniature microphone blockers which are much smaller and fit flush to the device, but I avoid these for two reasons. First, many of these units unintentionally activate Siri or other apps because they send a virtual "long press" to the device. This causes battery drain and undesired Siri activations. Second, the smallest devices are often lost when removed. The larger plugs are easy to find and control. Also, their presence is obvious and you will know that you are protected.

Figure 2.03: Microphone blocking devices.

Obviously, there are ways to defeat all of this protection. A truly malicious app or virus could be configured to ignore a headset microphone and force activation of internal mics. While possible, it is not very likely. I never consider these plugs to stop an extremely targeted attack. However, I believe they are valuable in blocking the common threats from social network apps and shady advertising practices. If you believe you would never be targeted for surreptitious video or microphone monitoring, consider the accidental "butt dial". Most of us have accidentally dialed someone from our mobile device while placing it into our pocket or a bag. That person can then answer the call and listen to us without our knowledge. A microphone blocker prevents this unintentional transmission of audio.

In 2021, a vulnerability with numerous communications applications, including Signal, was patched after a security researcher reported his findings. A call could be placed to a mobile device along with a malicious command which instructed the recipient's device to automatically answer the call. This would have allowed the intruder to listen to you at any time without your knowledge. While this specific issue has been fixed, we all patiently wait for the next problem. A microphone blocking device would have prevented this attack from successfully monitoring your conversations. The moment I end an audio call on my mobile device, I insert the mic blocker into the headphone port. This way I know that I can no longer be heard. I do not trust the tap of a virtual button on a piece of glass to properly inform the software to end the call. Have you ever participated in a group FaceTime call or conference chat and accidentally pressed the option to activate your device camera? Have you ever accidentally un-muted yourself during mandatory company group calls? I know I have done both. Fortunately, my camera blocker stopped any video transmission to the other participants and my microphone blocker prevented an embarrassing moment. Hopefully, you will never need to rely on the protection of these blockers. Proper protection eliminates threats and provides peace of mind.

Wi-Fi & Bluetooth Tracking

There is a new trend in customer tracking which concerns me. Many retail stores, shopping malls, and outlet centers have adopted various wireless network monitoring technologies in order to follow customers throughout a shopping area. These rely on your Wi-Fi and Bluetooth emissions from your mobile device. When you enter a store, your signals are collected and stored. As you move around, various sensors attempt to identify your exact location and length of time within a specific area of a store. If you leave without purchasing any items, you might be tracked by the neighboring store and your pattern is helpful to their customer analytics. This may sound too futuristic, but it happens every day. Random spoofing features being adopted by Apple and Android help with this invasion, but companies always find new ways to track us via the signals our devices broadcast at all times.

My solution to this is simple. The Bluetooth and Wi-Fi signals on my travel phone are always off. If you are using an iPhone, tapping the network options on the home screen will not suffice. You must go to the Settings application and manually disable both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. Many will resist this, as keeping these connections enabled is very convenient. Your device will immediately connect to your car stereo and switch over to your work Wi-Fi when you enter the building. However, this comes at great risk. As stated previously, my travel phone never connects to any public Wi-Fi (or my home's network). I only rely on the cellular data package and I do not use my device for internet browsing or video streaming. It is a basic communications device and not an entertainment screen. This eliminates most privacy and security risks associated with mobile devices.

If I want to connect my device to my car stereo in order to listen to music or a podcast, I rely on a physical audio cable. I do not recommend connection via a USB cable within vehicles which offer a USB port into the entertainment system. This can be abused if your vehicle collects device details and transmits them over a cellular data connection. Instead, I insist on a standard audio cable which plugs into the 3.55mm stereo port available in most modern cars. If you have an iPhone, you will need a lightning to 3.55mm adapter, but Androids with a traditional headphone jack, like the Pixel with GrapheneOS, are ready for this connection natively. Once you have a device which is capable of this connection, rely on a standard 3.55mm male to male stereo audio cable without requiring any wireless signals or USB connections. Please eliminate technologies which makes you easier to track.

Decoy Phone

I have been carrying a secondary phone during travel for over a decade. This began as a Wi-Fi device which did not possess a SIM card or cellular service. I used VOIP options such as Google Voice to make calls without any connection to my primary device, which was a government-issued Blackberry at the time. One day, I dropped this device and shattered the screen. I needed to make a personal call while in a meeting at a hotel. I walked to the front desk, showed the receptionist my phone, and asked if I could use the hotel phone. She obliged without any hesitation, and even offered her sympathy to my situation and need to purchase a new device. This ignited a spark in my brain. Today, I keep a small, lightweight, and severely outdated Android device with a cracked screen in my backpack at all times. I removed the battery to eliminate further weight. The following explains a few usage scenarios I have found beneficial. I am confident you will find others.

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, I found many restaurants which only offered carry-out services and no inside dining. These businesses required patrons to download invasive apps to place orders and retrieve the food. Many required scanning of QR codes which then prompted download of questionable software. Polite requests to pay with cash and avoid the apps were denied. However, displaying my broken phone magically presented an option to order food without sharing my personal details.
- While in a library using public Wi-Fi in order to create anonymous online shopping accounts (explained later), I needed to attach and confirm a telephone number with my account. I explained to a staff member that I had broken my phone (while holding the device in obvious view) and asked if I could receive a confirmation code through one of their telephones. She happily allowed me to use a fax machine to receive the call and obtain the code.
- While seeking chiropractic care with a new provider, I was told I had to enter a cell number into their system for text-based appointment reminders. This was mandatory for all patients and any data collected was shared with third parties. I sadly displayed my broken device and asked if I could provide these details on the next visit after I activated a new device. This was allowed and I was never asked again.

I often see mobile devices with cracked screens for sale on Swappa, eBay, and Craigslist. You may have an old device which can be dropped a few times until the desired result is achieved. If you do not want to carry two devices or have no desire to break your own phones, you might consider a "cracked screen" application. These apps create a simulation of a cracked screen. They are not always convincing, but should work from a distance.

911 Phone

You may now have the perfect mobile communications configuration with an anonymous device and service with VOIP calling options to protect your true number. What will you do if there is an emergency? If you call 911 from your device, your true number will be captured and documented. If the police contact you, your name and other details may be added to a public report. I encourage you to think about this now and have a plan. If you have a true emergency and only have your primary device to call 911, do it. Your health and safety are more important than anonymity. You can always buy a new SIM later. However, I keep a "911 phone" in my vehicle at all times, along with a power cable. Mine is an old Motorola flip phone. It has no SIM card or account details. Any functioning cell phone will allow a call to 911 through the closest tower without any activation.

Pagers

I received my first pager in the mid-nineties. It was amazing. I could be anywhere, and receive a ten-digit number requesting a callback. This sounds archaic today, but the technology was fascinating at the time. This eventually led to alpha-numeric pagers which could deliver full text messages from standalone devices connected to a landline. This may seem unnecessary today, but the technology still exists and pagers are still available. The biggest consumer is the medical industry, where pagers work well when cellular signals cannot reach portions of hospitals. I have had only one client request a pager for daily use, but I know of a few people in my circles who continue to carry these devices. I will explain some extreme use cases that may encourage you to investigate further.

The benefit of pagers over cellular telephones is coverage and privacy. Your traditional mobile device is constantly communicating with multiple cellular towers, all of which are documenting your location. Contrary, pagers receive communications without sending an exact location back to the tower. The outgoing message is sent like a "blanket" over the entire coverage area. This also occurs on a much lower frequency, allowing the signals to reach further than a traditional cellular carrier. This is over-simplified, and I am not a pager frequency expert. Overall, pager companies do not know exactly where you are, but can still get messages to you wirelessly. There are three main types of pagers for our use, and each may have benefits and limitations for your needs. Each of these can possess various protocols for message delivery, and all have security weaknesses. It is common for network penetration testers to intercept pager messages.

- **Numeric**: I can call your pager number, enter a telephone number, your device notifies you of the number entered. I also have the option of leaving you a voicemail message which presents a notification in order to retrieve the message.
- **Alpha-numeric**: I can send you a text message via email, internet, or standalone unit. I can also replicate the features of a numeric pager.
- **Two-way**: You can receive messages via the previous options, and an attached keyboard on your device allows you to respond.

My client that desired a pager only required a numeric unit. He was an extremely high-risk target who did not carry a cellular telephone at all times. He subscribed to my Faraday bag usage and only removed his device when he needed to make a call. However, he had concerns about his children. The school was aware of threats made to the entire family, and had strict orders to contact my client if anything suspicious happened. The school possessed the number to his pager, and would leave a message when they needed to reach my client. His wife also had this number. If a voicemail was left on his account, he received notification of this almost instantly. I must confess that I do not possess or require a pager, nor do many people I meet. For those that need extreme privacy and security, it is a viable option.

Typical Client Configuration

There is a lot of information to digest here. In effort to minimize the decisions required to incorporate a private and secure mobile device into your privacy strategy, I present a common configuration for a typical client in need of extreme privacy.

- Purchase a Google Pixel 5a or newer with cash locally.
- Install and configure GrapheneOS on the Pixel device.
- Configure at least one VOIP number through Twilio or Telnyx.
- Install and configure F-Droid and Aurora Store on the device for app installations.
- Install and configure Linphone on the mobile device and laptop for traditional calls.
- Install and configure Signal on both mobile and laptop using the VOIP number.
- Install and configure Wire on both mobile and laptop.
- Install and configure the Mint Mobile app on the mobile device.
- Activate cellular service through Mint Mobile.
- Port any prior phone numbers to Google Voice.
- Forward any Google Voice calls to the VOIP number.
- Forward any Google Voice text messages to email.
- Install and configure ProtonVPN on the mobile device.
- Provide a Faraday bag, cam covers, and mic blockers for the device and explain usage.
- If desired, configure a secondary mobile device with an iPod Touch or second Pixel.
- Manually update the device apps via F-Droid and Aurora Store regularly.

Summary

Hopefully, you now possess a new phone with absolutely no public connection to you. It has service through a prepaid provider which does not know your true identity. The service is paid through either prepaid cards or your Privacy.com account (explained later). The phone has never connected to any cell towers near your residence thanks to your new Faraday bag. There is no cellular location history associated with your home. Your secondary device is the only mobile (or laptop) device used in your home. It possesses a unique Apple ID if using iOS, while never leaving the house. Your old number forwards to Google Voice and eventually reaches both your primary and secondary devices. This all happens with zero knowledge from your cellular carrier.

All mobile telephones are tracking devices. We can never change that. When there is no association to your true identity, the threat of this tracking is minimized. There will always be a digital trail, but these tactics make you a very difficult target.

CHAPTER THREE
DIGITAL LIFE

I assume you now have a private and secure mobile device and computer. This provides a great backbone for secure and private digital activity, but we are far from ready to defend ourselves online. This chapter presents many considerations for extreme privacy and security on the internet. This may be the most important chapter in this book and is applicable globally. Most tactics presented here are completely free, and the others possess minimal cost. I hope you find a few ways to strengthen your online security.

Password Vulnerabilities

In 2018, I had a client that kept getting "hacked". Someone was accessing her email, calendar, and private messages. Changing her password never helped much, and her stalker was showing up any time she had plans with her friends. Her mistake was the use of recycled passwords. She had a single word that she liked to use, and simply added the name of the website after it. If her word was "privacy", her passwords were "privacyfacebook", "privacygmail", and "privacyapple". It was easy for her assailant to access her accounts. He knew the main word in her password because of data breaches.

There are thousands of breached databases floating around online, and you are likely in one or more of them. Searching your own email addresses or usernames on websites such as https://haveibeenpwned.com may reveal the places you are exposed. However, none of these sites reveal the password. For that, you would need to collect the breaches yourself or pay for one of the premium lookup services. Most popular and known data breaches can be found online easily, including the plain text passwords associated with each. For our purpose, it will not matter whether you are exposed. Assume that all of your passwords have been compromised. During an initial visit with a client, I determine the important sites which will need to be accessed, and begin the process of changing every password in their digital life. This will require a password manager. This is where I try desperately to avoid a debate about which password manager is best. Simply choosing a side of offline or online managers is likely to cause a dispute quickly. Remember, we want extreme privacy and security. Therefore, all of my clients in immediate danger transition to an offline password manager, specifically **KeePassXC** (keepassxc.org).

Password Managers

KeePassXC is an open-source password manager that does not synchronize content to the internet. There are many convenient online password managers that are secure and keep all of your devices ready for automated logins. Those are great for entry-level security, and millions of people are safely using them. It is not enough for our needs. Furthermore, I believe that my clients should choose an individual machine for sensitive account access, eliminating the need for synchronization between devices. My clients all receive a tutorial on KeePassXC. KeePassXC is cross-platform and free. It will work identically on Mac, Windows, or Linux. Download the software from the official website at keepassxc.org, or install into Ubuntu via Terminal with "sudo snap install keepassxc". After installation, conduct the following as an exercise.

- Launch KeePassXC and select "Database" > "New Database".
- Provide a name to your new password database, such as "Passwords".
- Move the encryptions settings slider completely to the right and click "Continue".
- Assign a secure password which you can remember but is not in use anywhere else.
- Click "Done "and select a safe location to store the database.
- Close the program and verify you can open the database with your password.

You now have a secure password manager and database ready for use. Assume you are ready to change the password to your email provider. Navigate to the menu which allows change of password for your provider. Next, conduct the following within KeePassXC.

- Right-click within the right column and select "New Group".
- Name the group "Email" and click "OK".
- Select the "Email" group on the left menu.
- In the right panel, right-click and select "New Entry".
- Provide the name of your email provider as "Title" and username for the service.
- Click the black dice icon to the right of the "Password" field.
- Click the eyeball logo to see the generated password.
- Slide the password length slider to at least 40 characters.
- Click the "Apply Password" button to save it to the entry.
- Add the full URL of the login page for this service.
- Change your email password to this selection within your email provider.
- Click "OK" and save the database.

You successfully created a new, secure, randomly generated password for your email. You will not remember it, but your password manager will. From this moment forward, you will change every password to any site that you access upon logging in. The next time you log in to your secure sites, change the password. Allow your password manager to generate a new random password containing letters, numbers, and special characters. If the website you are using allows it, choose a password length of at least 24 characters. When you need to log in, you will copy and paste from the password manager. For each site which you change a password, your password manager will generate a new, unique string. This way, WHEN the site you are using gets breached, the password collected will not work anywhere else. There should be only a handful of passwords you memorize, which brings us to the next point.

The password to open your password manager should be unique. It should be something you have never used before. It should also contain letters, numbers, and special characters. It is vital that you never forget this password, as it gives you access to all of the credentials which you do not know. I encourage clients to write it down in a safe place until memorized.

Finally, it is vital to make a backup of your password database. When you created a new database, you chose a name and location for the file. As you update and save this database, make a copy of the file on an encrypted USB drive. I will explain more about this later, but be sure to always have a copy somewhere safe, and not on the internet. If your computer would completely crash, and you lose all of your data, you would also lose all of the new passwords you have created. This would be a huge headache. Prepare for data loss now.

Personally, I keep my KeePassXC database within an encrypted VeraCrypt container (explained later) within a laptop drive with full-disk encryption. I then backup this entire drive to an external hard drive with full-disk encryption. This external drive is left with a trusted friend who could ship it to me if ever needed. Without knowing the passwords to the encrypted drive, VeraCrypt container, and KeePassXC database (all unique), this drive is useless. These three passwords are the only passwords in my life I keep in my memory.

If you want integrated browser support, KeePassXC has this option. You can install the browser extension into Firefox (addons.mozilla.org/firefox/addon/keepassxc-browser/) or Chrome and easily populate passwords into websites without leaving the browser. I believe this is safe, and that passwords never travel over the internet from the app, but I do not use it. I believe that copying passwords into websites should be a deliberate act that requires effort. I do not want a machine doing this for me. However, many clients insist on having this convenience. Therefore, let's walk through the process.

- Once you have KeePassXC installed, configured, and in possession of your passwords, install the KeePassXC Browser extension into the browser of your choice (I prefer Firefox).
- In the "Preferences" or "Options" of the KeePassXC application, click the "Browser Integration" option in the left menu. Select the "Enable browser integration" option and select your browser.
- Return to your browser and open the KeePassXC Browser menu. Choose to connect to the database, and authorize this connection within the KeePassXC application. Provide a name, such as "Firefox", in order to identify this pairing.
- If desired, select the "Never ask before accessing credentials" option in the Advanced menu of the Browser Integration menu within KeePassXC. This will prevent the application from requiring your authorization for every website you visit.

You should now be able to populate passwords for various websites directly within the browser. Note that the URL field within an entry on KeePassXC must contain the exact address of the login page of the site you are visiting. This will take some tweaking over time, but will eventually provide a seamless experience within the browser. Remember, the benefit of this scenario is that your password database never leaves your computer. It is never stored online anywhere.

The concern I often hear from clients is how they should sync their offline database to their other devices. While you could copy the database and manually sync it to other computers and mobile devices, is that really necessary? My stance is that you should only log in to sensitive accounts from a single trusted computer. My primary laptop possesses my KeePassXC program and database. This is the device I use when I need to log in to an account of any type. I never log in to anything from my phone(s) or other devices and computers. I realize this is limiting, but I also remind you that we are only considering extreme privacy techniques. If you insist on possessing your password database on a mobile device, I recommend **Strongbox** (strongboxsafe.com) for iPhones and **Keepass2Android Offline** (F-Droid) for Android, including GrapheneOS.

Strongbox is a free iOS application with premium purchase options. The free version allows you to open any KeePassXC database on your mobile device, and copy passwords from it into other applications, such as your browser. There are two big advantages to this scenario. Obviously, you have the convenience of passwords being present on your mobile device. This allows easy login to various apps and websites. Second, it provides a backup in case of corruption on your primary device, such as a laptop. Once you have Strongbox installed on your mobile device, the following steps will copy your database over.

- Connect your iPhone to a macOS laptop.
- Launch Finder and click on the device.
- In the top menu, click "Files".
- Drag your database into the window.

If using a Windows device, you could install iTunes and import the database through that software. You could also transmit the file securely to yourself through encrypted email and download the file within your mobile device, but that is outside of my comfort zone due to it touching the internet.

You can now open Strongbox on your iOS mobile device and access your KeePassXC database. You will need to supply the password to this database each time you open it. You can make this easier by allowing your biometrics options, such as a fingerprint, to automatically log you in, but this is a paid feature. While convenient, it adds more risk. Changes made to your primary database on your laptop will not be applied to this mobile version. You would need to replace the mobile version with a new copy on occasion. There are numerous customizations you can make within Strongbox. The most important option for my clients is to make the database read-only. This is to ensure that they do not accidentally modify this database and present a conflict between their database on their laptop. They should only make changes on that primary database, and consider the iOS version as a read-only backup. If you want to replicate this, click on the "Database Management" option in the lower left of the KeePassXC database, and enable the "Open as Read-Only" setting.

GrapheneOS users can simply connect their devices via USB to any Linux, Mac, or Windows computer and copy the database onto the phone. You can then open the Keepass2Android Offline app and browse to the file. If desired, you can configure the Pixel fingerprint reader to unlock the database upon opening.

Again, I want to stress that browser extensions and mobile solutions are optional. In a perfect scenario, you do not need access to your passwords on a mobile device or within automated browser extensions. Only you can decide the balance of security versus convenience which is best for you. I confess I have used a mobile password manager and database while configuring apps on a new device. The attraction to online password managers such as Lastpass and Dashlane is the ability to sync the password database to all devices over the internet without manual interaction. I understand the benefits of these features, but it also comes with risk. All reputable online password managers encrypt the passwords locally on the user's device before syncing with their own servers. Theoretically, no one at the password manager company would have the ability to see your individual passwords. However, nothing is hack-proof. It is only a matter of time before something goes wrong.

By keeping your passwords in an offline database such as KeePassXC, you eliminate this entire attack surface. However, I respect that some clients do not want to apply the time and effort of maintaining a secure password database locally. If you insist on using a cloud-based password manager, I highly recommend **Bitwarden** (bitwarden.com). Bitwarden is open-source software with all of their source code free for anyone to review. They have been audited by reputable third-party security auditing firms as well as independent security researchers. While nothing is bullet-proof, I believe this is the most secure option for an internet-based solution. Bitwarden does not store your passwords in plain text. It stores encrypted versions of your passwords that only you can unlock with your master password. Your information is encrypted locally on your device before being sent to their cloud servers. Most of my clients rely on the free version of this product, but advanced users may require a paid tier. Installing the Bitwarden application on all of your devices simplifies the synchronization of your database. It eliminates the headaches of manual updates.

Creating and storing secure passwords through Bitwarden, or any other online service, should be similar to other password managers, such as KeePassXC. Due to constant user interface updates, I will not present detailed usage instructions. It is vital that you feel comfortable with the application you choose, and that you understand how to update and save any changes. If you choose to rely on an online password manager, be sure to export all of your data on occasion. If the service should shut down, terminate your account, or experience data corruption, you might find yourself in a bad situation. Many online password managers experienced cloud-based outages in 2021 which prevented online logins for approximately 30 minutes. If using Bitwarden, the following steps will download an offline copy of your passwords.

- Log in to your web vault at https://vault.bitwarden.com.
- Click "Tools" in the top navigation bar.
- Click "Export Vault" under the side navigation.
- Choose a file format, type in your master password, and click "Export Vault".

I recommend placing your backup within your VeraCrypt protected container, as explained momentarily. In the worst-case scenario, you could import this backup into another password manager solution and have the ability to access all of your accounts. I have had three clients who lost access to their passwords through their online password managers and had to attempt password resets through every account. A backup would have prevented this frustration. Again, I do not use cloud-based password managers, and I encourage my clients to avoid them, but I respect those who require this level of convenience. ANY reputable password manager is better than none at all. Regardless of the password manager route you choose, you want to slowly change all the passwords you use to unique, random replacements. This does not need to be done overnight, but I encourage you to start with the most important accounts such as your primary email addresses and any online calendars. Make sure you are using a trusted device, such as your new laptop, while making these changes. If you change all of your passwords from your old Windows machine which possesses a keylogger or other malicious software, you could be sending your changes to an adversary. Also, make sure you are on a secure network. Never change passwords while on public Wi-Fi.

Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

You are likely already using some form of 2FA without asking for it. Have you ever logged in to a financial institution website and then be told to check your email for a code? That is 2FA. It is something you know (such as a password), and something you have (such as access to your email address or cell phone number). It is vital to enable 2FA anywhere possible. This includes banks, email accounts, social networks, credit card companies, and sometimes software applications. 2FA is mostly associated with receiving a six-digit temporary code via text message any time you need to log in to an online service. This is actually the least desired method. My preferences are the following.

Hardware Token: I use a **YubiKey** (amzn.to/2HZlT0Z) daily. This small device which plugs into my USB port is required before I can access my business email and other sensitive accounts. When I log in to a website set up for 2FA through YubiKey, the site waits until I touch my finger to the device, which sends a one-time code to the service. The online site confirms the correct YubiKey was used and provides me access to the service. Without the presence of this physical USB device, I cannot gain access to my accounts. The configuration instructions for adding a YubiKey to any online service varies, but you should find instructions on the appropriate websites for each service. I explain an alternative hardware token (OnlyKey) in a moment.

Software Token: If a service does not support a hardware token, then I prefer using **Authy** (authy.com) as my software-based 2FA. I choose Authy over open-source options such as **Aegis** (getaegis.app) because it is much easier on my clients (and myself). I have learned that making anything overly complicated will result in lack of use. I do believe that other options are possibly more private on an extreme level, but they are more difficult to use on multiple devices. Authy works on Linux, macOS, Windows, iOS, and Android, and you can use a temporary code from any device at any time. At the time of this writing, the Linux version could be installed via Terminal with "sudo snap install authy". GrapheneOS users can install through Aurora Store. I download Authy to all mobile and desktop devices then create a new account through the mobile application. Under "Devices", enable "Allow Multi-Device", then open the desktop Authy app and follow instructions to connect to an account. Once you successfully have Authy working on all devices, be sure to disable "Multi-Device".

You can now add any services to your Authy account which allows a software-based 2FA. You must configure each account through the service's security settings. As an example, I conducted the following to secure my ProtonMail account.

- In ProtonMail via web browser, click "Settings" then "Account and password".
- Enable the "Two-factor authentication" toggle.
- Click "Next", then "Enter key manually instead".
- Copy the "Key" presented (this is your seed code).
- Open Authy and click the "+" to add this account.
- Enter the key provided and assign a name to identify the account.
- Click "Save" and copy the six-digit code presented within Authy.
- Return to ProtonMail and click "Next".
- Provide this six-digit code (you may need to also provide your password).
- Click "Finish".
- Securely document the original seed code and temporary codes within your password manager, for the reasons explained in a moment.

Opening Authy on any of my devices now presents a new code for this account every thirty seconds. After providing my username and password to ProtonMail, I am prompted for this temporary code. Entering that code completes the login process. Without it, I am locked out of my account (and so is anyone else who might obtain my password). You can visit https://authy.com/guides for details about the most popular services. I use it with Amazon, my web host, and numerous additional accounts. I probably have over 100 services configured within my Authy account.

Authy does not know the account details associated with each service. As an example, Authy does not know my multiple ProtonMail addresses or that I have three Amazon accounts under different aliases using their service for 2FA. They simply have the randomly generated seed code and whatever descriptive name you provided. They have no way to reverse these details and identify your email address or other sensitive account details.

I have two gripes with Authy. First, it requires a telephone number in order to associate your account across multiple devices. Always use your VOIP number previously created. The benefit of this requirement is that you can regain control of your account in the event of broken devices. I simply wish this was optional. Since VOIP numbers are allowed, I do not see a huge privacy invasion compared to benefit. Make sure you provide a number which you will own long-term.

Second, Authy does not allow you access to your "seed codes". In the previous example, I documented my seed code for ProtonMail within my password manager. If I should ever need to leave Authy, I can use this code to assign another service as my 2FA provider. Make sure you keep these somewhere safe. In order to have true 2FA, I store all of my seed codes and 2FA backup codes within a separate offline KeePassXC password manager database (with unique password). This is likely overkill, but I feel better knowing that my primary password database does not contain the information needed for the second factor of each login. This seed code or the temporary access codes provided by ProtonMail would allow anyone in my account if the password was known. These are great as a backup option, but harmful in the wrong hands.

Many privacy purists detest my usage of Authy. They insist on relying solely on a an open-source solution installed within GrapheneOS. I respect the discipline, but this could be problematic. I have multiple online accounts which I cannot access or reset without knowing the 2FA code. If I were to lose the mobile device which generates these codes, I could be locked out of my accounts permanently. Authy allows me to access my codes in multiple locations and the VOIP number connection provides a redundant access option if desperate. Choose your best option based on your own threat model. I demand the ability to access my 2FA within a desktop environment or my mobile device.

SMS Token: If an online service you use only supports 2FA via a text message, it should still be used. While not optimal, it is better than no protection at all. I never recommend using your cellular number provided by your carrier, as it is prone to SIM swapping attacks. Instead, I use Google Voice. This may seem surprising due to my criticism of Google's privacy policies, but their security is top-notch. Their Google Voice service is free and can be protected by a hardware token, such as a YubiKey. Once you have a Google Voice account created using the previous instruction, you can provide your Google Voice number whenever required for SMS 2FA. If you enabled the email forwarding protocol, those codes will appear in your inbox. If you adopted the Linphone strategy, you could also use your new VOIP number. However, you may encounter issues with short codes being blocked. This is why I prefer Google Voice.

Be sure to secure the Google account with a hardware or software token, preferably a hardware token. Some readers of the previous edition of this book expressed concern over the ability of companies to track us through use of a single hardware token (YubiKey) across multiple accounts. This is a valid concern if you are using the One Time Password (OTP) option of YubiKey, but not a concern if using the more secure Universal 2nd Factor (U2F) option. I will explain each.

OTP provides a unique code every time you touch your YubiKey. You can test this while within a text processing application. Every time you activate the YubiKey, a new line of data is entered. However, the first 12 characters are always the same and represent the serial number of the YubiKey. This is concerning, as it could associate two accounts with the same device; therefore, associating multiple accounts to the same individual (you). It could also leak your YubiKey serial number upon accidental touch during a text conversation or make you slightly more prone to a phishing attack when someone attempts to steal a valid token in order to access your account. However, most sites do not use OTP today. If they do, they also offer a U2F option.

U2F creates a unique challenge and response each time it is configured for an account. There is no static line of text which can be misused. Google, Twitter, and others offer hardware token service through U2F only. Therefore, using the same YubiKey within multiple Google accounts does not clearly connect them to each other. Always look for a U2F option when registering a YubiKey with a service. If no clear protocol is identified, do your research. Today, I only see U2F options.

"Proactive" Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

In 2021, I witnessed numerous online services automatically enrolling customers into 2FA. On the surface, this sounds like a great idea. However, the execution can actually harm our privacy strategies. This is where I consider "proactively" initiating 2FA before a company forces you to use a cellular telephone number as part of your login process. Consider the following experiences from myself and my clients.

A client logged in to her PayPal account with the correct username and password. She was prompted to enter a six-digit code which would be sent to her cell number. She had never provided a cell number within her account, so PayPal demanded a number be added before she could access the account. PayPal would not accept a VOIP or landline number. She had no way to access the account until she had provided a true cellular number to be used for 2FA. If she had added 2FA through a software program such as Authy, she would not have been prompted to enter a cellular number in order to complete the login process.

Another client found herself locked out of her online banking. After successfully providing her credentials, the bank demanded a cellular number for a one-time confirmation code to verify her identity. Due to her usage of a VPN, the bank found this login attempt suspicious and wanted an additional layer of confirmation. Similar to PayPal, she was not allowed to enter a VOIP or landline number. She was forced to enter her true cellular number in order to access her funds. If she had implemented any form of 2FA before this login, she could have used that for the confirmation and avoided disclosure of her cellular number.

I conduct a lot of online investigations which requires me to maintain hundreds of alias social network profiles. Many of these do not get used often. When I log in to an account after it has been dormant for several months, I am often asked to provide an additional form of identity confirmation. If 2FA is activated on the profile, I rarely see these demands and I can simply enter a temporary software token. This is why I configure 2FA on any social network profile immediately after account creation. It prevents me from losing access to the account due to demands for a valid cellular number.

In late 2021, I was locked out of a Google account which possessed an active email address and Google Voice number. I had not directly accessed the account in over a year and Google believed my connection attempt was suspicious. Since no true cellular number was associated with the Google account, there was no way to verify my login. I was presented the dreaded notice that I could not log in and there was nothing I could do. To this day, I cannot access the account. Immediately after this event, I secured every Google account I owned with 2FA. I logged into each, enabled hardware-based 2FA, enabled software-based 2FA, and generated one-time security codes. I have yet to lose access to any more accounts.

In summary, I encourage you to activate 2FA on every online account which supports it. This may prevent many headaches and also secures the account from intruders. ANY 2FA is better than NO 2FA. Practically every "hacking" scenario which happens to a client could have been prevented by using 2FA. Hardcore privacy and security enthusiasts should look into the OnlyKey, which is explained in a moment. While I use one, I have yet to have a client commit.

Advanced Hardware Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

Previously, I explained the usage of a hardware token as part of a Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) strategy, such as the YubiKey, in order to protect your online accounts. In that writing, I explained the benefits of U2F over traditional OTP, both of which are provided by the USB YubiKey device. In this section, we will take

things to another level. First let's revisit the best practices for a YubiKey, and I will demonstrate with a new Fastmail account created specifically for this explanation.

After logging in to the Fastmail account, I navigated to Settings > Password & Security > Two-Step Verification > Add Verification Device. This allowed me to choose to use an authenticator app (such as Authy), U2F through a hardware token, or OTP with an older YubiKey. Since U2F is the most secure option, I chose that. Fastmail walked me through the steps to activate my YubiKey for their service. Now, any time I log in to Fastmail, I am prompted to touch my flashing YubiKey in order to complete the process. This prevents remote access to my email, even with a known password. I replicated the process to associate this YubiKey with test Gmail and Twitter accounts. Both used U2F by default. My YubiKey is now required for all of these accounts. However, there are additional features available to us through the YubiKey.

YubiKeys possess two virtual "slots" which can store small amounts of data. These slots can be used to facilitate a One-Time Passcode (OTP), static password, challenge-response credential, or OATH credential. By default, the first slot is designated for OTP. Since I do not use any services which rely on OTP (because I always use U2F), I can modify both of these slots. For the first slot, I will add a static password. In order to do this, we must download the free YubiKey Manager application, available for Windows, Mac, and Linux, from their website at https://www.yubico.com/products/services-software/download/yubikey-manager. After installation and launch, I conducted the following steps.

- Click on "Applications" and then "OTP".
- Under "Short Touch (Slot One)", click "Delete" and confirm.
- Under "Short Touch (Slot One)", click "Configure".
- Select "Static Password" and click "Next".
- Click "Generate" and click "Finish".

Your YubiKey now possesses a long and secure password in the first virtual slot. Any time you touch the device, it will type in this static password into any active window. The password never changes. This is not any type of 2FA, it is merely a convenience. This static password could be used to strengthen account security, especially when associated with a desktop application. Consider the following examples, assuming that my static YubiKey password is RkDNTRggchNceYTknLBjDNiNrJrhcFvjbRCHrt (my actual test password).

Secure Messaging: When I open Wire on my Desktop, I must provide a password. Since I insist on my passwords being lengthy and secure, I must either manually type in the credential or copy and paste one from my password manager. Alternatively, I could make my Wire password RkDNTRggchNceYTknLBjDNiNrJrhcFvjbRCHrt and simply tap my YubiKey each time I need to log in. While convenient, this does pose some risk. If anyone possessed my YubiKey, the password could be entered without my input or knowledge of the credential. Therefore, I always add unique characters before the password, such as wire!4RkDNTRggchNceYTknLBjDNiNrJrhcFvjbRCHrt. In other words, I could type wire!4 and then tap and hold the YubiKey. This would allow me to continue using this static password with other applications and services without replicating the exact same password everywhere. Overall, this is more convenience than security, but it can add password complexity in various scenarios. I would never recommend this for all your online accounts. I bring up Wire because it is an application which I open many times every day. In order to access my account, you would need to know my username, my added characters (wire!4) and my long YubiKey static password. If you have an application which requires constant input throughout the day, this could be a useful strategy. Be sure to store your static password within your password manager in case you lose or break the YubiKey.

Operating Systems: I use many computers throughout a typical day. I have my primary Linux laptop, a MacBook Pro for production purposes, a media center, a firewall, and other various devices. Let's focus on my media server. There is nothing overly sensitive present, but I do insist on a strong password and an encrypted drive. When booting this computer, it boots to Ubuntu Linux and prompts for a password. I do not have a physical keyboard or mouse attached to this unit, and the monitor is my television. Since I leave my YubiKey attached to my primary keyring, it is always with me. I simply plug the YubiKey into the front USB slot of the

media center, touch the YubiKey, and my lengthy password is entered. The computer finishes the boot process and launches Kodi, which allows me to stream all of my audio and video. I do not recommend this strategy for personal computers containing sensitive information. If someone stole your YubiKey and laptop, they would have everything needed to log in. I only recommend this for household devices which are not sensitive.

Encrypted Containers: As I mentioned previously, I possess a VeraCrypt container which contains my KeePassXC database. In order to open the container, I must know the password. Since I cannot open my password manager without first opening the container, I cannot store my container password inside KeePassXC. Therefore, I must remember the password to the VeraCrypt container. Assume my memorized password is VC!76T84R911. That might be easy for me to remember, but it is not very complex. It is not obviously a VeraCrypt password, but it could use more characters. I could make my password to VeraCrypt extremely strong by using VC!76T84R911RkDNTRggchNceYTknLBjDNiNrJrhcFvjbRCHrt. I would then type VC!76T84R911 into the VeraCrypt password field and then touch my YubiKey.

Now that I have explained some uses for static passwords stored within a YubiKey slot, let's consider a "challenge-response" option for our KeePassXC database. Currently, you may have a secure password memorized for your KeePassXC password manager. You may want to add a layer of security to that strategy. After all, your password manager likely stores access to all your accounts. Open the YubiKey Management application, and conduct the following.

- Click on "Applications" and then "OTP".
- Under "Long Touch (Slot Two)", click "Delete" and confirm.
- Under "Long Touch (Slot Two)", click "Configure".
- Select "Challenge-response" and click "Next".
- Click "Generate" or create your own randomly generated secret key.
- Enable the "Require touch" option and click "Finish".

The second slot of your YubiKey is now configured for a challenge and response. Launch KeePassXC and open your password database. To be safe, you may want to make a copy until you have tested your final project. I save a copy any time I make security changes to a database. You can now enable this challenge and response feature within your password manager. Conduct the following.

- Click "Database" in the file menu and choose "Change Master Key".
- Click "Add additional protection".
- Click "Add YubiKey Challenge-response".
- Ensure the application detects the YubiKey and click "OK".
- When prompted, touch the flashing YubiKey.
- Close the database and application completely, then reopen KeePassXC.
- Input the password, select the YubiKey in the "Hardware Key" field, and click "OK".
- When prompted, touch your flashing YubiKey.

You have now added an additional layer of security to your password manager. Every time you log in to the database, you will be required to insert your YubiKey and touch it. If you prefer, you could make this second slot another static password instead of a challenge and response. If you choose this route, a short press of the YubiKey will type the first static password while a long press of two seconds will present the second static password. Personally, I prefer the challenge and response availability. Since YubiKey allows only two slots, we have reached maximum capacity for our device. However, this is where the **OnlyKey** (amzn.to/2CVUF7l) enters our password strategy. This device applies the same benefits of the YubiKey, but provides 24 virtual slots.

OnlyKey

The OnlyKey device is similar in size to the standard USB YubiKey hardware token. I prefer the YubiKey Nano device for daily use, as they sit practically flush with either a USB-A or USB-C port. However, the OnlyKey is much more powerful, and is always on my key ring. This device requires the OnlyKey application on a computer in order to easily program a PIN and customize complete function, but can be used on any computer without the software after it is configured. Therefore, let's install the application and configure the device. A current online guide is always available at docs.crp.to/usersguide.html.

- Navigate to the above website and download the OnlyKey app for your OS.
- Install the app with default options, launch the app and click the "Guided setup" button.
- When prompted, choose and enter a PIN to protect the first 12 slots.
- When prompted, choose and enter a different PIN to protect the second 12 slots.
- When prompted, if desired, enter a self-destruct PIN.

When complete, your OnlyKey is now ready for use. When you insert it into a USB slot, you must enter the PIN assigned to either bank one or bank two before it can be used. After you have unlocked the bank, you can use it as a U2F device right away. You would set it up the same as the previous instructions for the YubiKey. Pressing any button (1-6) confirms the response as a U2F device. The power of the OnlyKey is the 24 slots which can be programmed with URLs, usernames, and passwords. Figure 3.01 displays the OnlyKey application. After you have inserted the OnlyKey, opened the OnlyKey app, and entered the PIN for either bank one or two, you are ready to customize a slot. I conducted the following on a new OnlyKey which contained no prior programming. This example allows me to navigate to Twitter, enter a username, enter a password, execute the login, and apply U2F as a second factor of authentication.

- Click the button for the desired slot (Ex. example "1a"), and enter "Twitter" as a label.
- Provide a URL of "https://twitter.com/", enter a delay of "2", and enter the Twitter username.
- Enable "Tab after UserName", enter the account password, confirm, and click "Set slot".

I can now open a new browser tab and tap the "1" button on the OnlyKey and the device will go to Twitter and log me in. If I had set up U2F on the account, the OnlyKey would blink in order for a second tap (after login) which would complete the 2FA login. I can repeat this process to store up to 12 logins for each bank. Each button (1-6) has two options. Option "a" requires a single short tap of the button while option "b" requires a touch and hold of two seconds. You can also choose to store only a password if desired. Before you configure your credentials for 24 sites, we should discuss any security risks from these actions. The availability of all needed credentials within a single hardware device is enticing. It can also be reckless. If I steal your OnlyKey and know your PIN, I have everything I need to log in to any accounts represented on the device. This is a scary, even if rare, possibility. I do not use the OnlyKey this way. Instead, I rely on it to strengthen other passwords, similar to the previous options. The following is a fictional example of my OnlyKey slots based on my real usage.

1: Entire password to media center login
2: Entire password to media center FTP
3: Last 20 characters of email password
4: Last 20 characters of Wire password
5: Last 20 characters of Authy password
6: Last 20 characters of Notes password
7: Session app ID 1 (to send to contacts)
8: Session app ID 2 (to send to contacts)
9: Forum URL, user, and password
10: Twitter URL, user, password, & 2FA
11: GVoice URL, user, password, & 2FA
12: Amazon URL, user, and password
13: Last 20 characters of MacBook login
14: Last 20 characters of Apple password
15: Last 20 characters of Linux login
16: Full credentials to Wi-Fi router
17: Password to unlock this book in Word
18: Password to unlock my OSINT book
19: Terminal command
20: Terminal command
21: GVoice URL, user, password, & 2FA
22: GVoice URL, user, password, & 2FA
23: GVoice URL, user, password, & 2FA
24: GVoice URL, user, password, & 2FA

I present these storage options to give some ideas for your own configuration. Often, I use the OnlyKey to easily generate complicated text. As an example, I use Session as a secure messaging option with some clients. It relies on a randomly generated "Session ID" which is used in place of a username. I need to send this information to clients, usually via email. I could never remember this long string of random characters, but it is only a button press away. Some services which are used as "burner" accounts, such as Google Voice, are not vital to keep extra secure. Storing the URL, username, and password for these accounts allows me to quickly and easily log in to the service. If I am expecting an incoming Google Voice call, I can press one button and be ready to answer in seconds versus opening my VeraCrypt container, providing a password, opening KeePassXC, providing a password, copying the Google username, pasting into the website, copying the password, entering into the website, and executing the login. Hopefully you now see the benefits of an OnlyKey. Figure 3.01 displays the OnlyKey application which identifies my old configuration for the first 12 slots.

Now that you have configured your OnlyKey device, you should make a backup of the data. If you lose the device, or need to reformat for any reason, you can replicate your hard work easily. Personally, I keep a clone of my OnlyKey in a safe place for emergency usage. The following steps generate a backup file which can be imported into any additional OnlyKey.

- Launch the OnlyKey app, insert the device, and enter your PIN for the first bank.
- Click "Setup" and then "Set Backup Passphrase or Key".
- Click "Save passphrase or key" and document it in your password manager.
- Click "Backup/Restore" and click within the text box.
- Hold the "1" button on the device for at least five seconds.
- Allow the backup text to populate the input box.
- Click "Save file" and store the backup file safely.
- Repeat for the second bank of slots.

There are many additional benefits of the OnlyKey, and I have only focused on the most common features. Unlike the YubiKey, OnlyKey requires you to unlock the device when inserted into a USB port. This prevents a stolen device from being used without your consent. If the wrong PIN is entered ten times, the device wipes itself as a precaution. The device is not a threat if stolen or seized. I encourage you to visit docs.crp.to/usersguide.html and explore other possibilities.

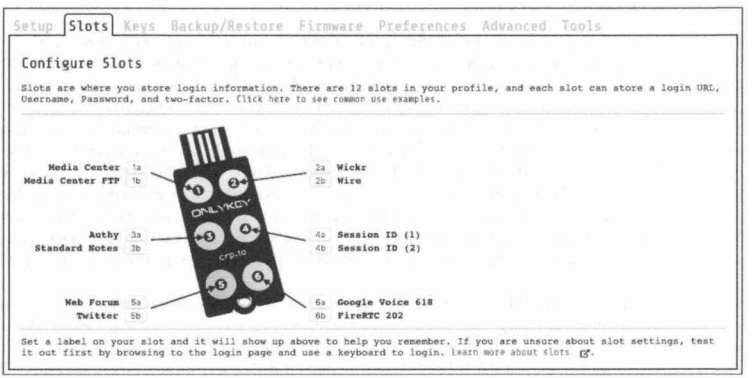


Figure 3.01: The OnlyKey application displaying configuration.

Encrypted Storage & Backup

I mentioned encryption earlier, and it has been a popular hype word over the past few years. Encryption can mean many things, depending on how it is applied. Previously, we applied full-disk encryption to the entire drive of the computer. In this section, it refers to software encryption on a physical device, such as a USB drive. This works by automatically converting data on a drive into a form that cannot be understood by anyone who does not have the password to reverse the conversion. Without the proper password, the data remains inaccessible. This is extremely important in case you lose a device, especially a portable drive used as a backup. If I steal your USB device, and you did not apply encryption, I can access all of your files without the password to log in. If you encrypted your data, I cannot extract anything. I apply the following backup and encryption practices for the removable devices.

I first choose a backup device appropriate for the situation. For most clients, I choose a SanDisk Ultra Fit USB drive. These can be easily found in 64GB, 128GB, and 256GB options, and I choose the largest possible. These are small and reliable. I then install VeraCrypt (veracrypt.fr) on the computer. The download for Mac and Windows is easy to install, but Linux requires a few extra steps. Enter the following commands within Terminal in Ubuntu. Modify these commands if using an operating system after 20.04.

- sudo wget https://launchpad.net/veracrypt/trunk/1.25.4/+download/veracrypt-1.25.4-Debian-11-amd64.deb
- sudo apt-get install ./veracrypt-1.25.4-Debian-11-amd64.deb -y

We can now begin the process of creating an encrypted container for our data. Launch VeraCrypt from the Activities menu and conduct the following.

- Click "Volumes" > "Create New Volume" > "Create an Encrypted File Container".
- Choose "Standard VeraCrypt volume".
- Click "Select File", choose a name such as "Backup", and select your USB device.
- Click "Save" > "Next" > "Next".
- Enter the volume size lower than the specified limit (round down to nearest number).
- Choose a strong password for this container and click "Next" > "Next" > "Next".
- Move your cursor randomly as the pool completes. When finished, click "Format".

You now possess an encrypted container on a USB device. You can store anything within this container once it is mounted. To do this, open VeraCrypt, click Select File, choose the "Backup" file on the USB, select "Mount", enter the password, and you should see that container as a new drive on your computer. Now that the device possesses an encrypted container ready for storage, we need to establish a backup solution. I prefer an open source solution rather than proprietary offerings from Apple or Microsoft. For my clients, I recommend **Free File Sync** (freefilesync.org). This site possesses free tutorial videos which demonstrate usage better than I can explain in a couple of paragraphs. Always understand your backup solution before relying on it. The vital lesson here is that you should have a backup strategy which involves encrypted data. Backup anything important often, and only backup to an encrypted drive. If, or more likely when, this USB device is lost or stolen, you will not panic. The content is never visible without your password. If your computer suffers a drive crash, you have a backup to restore the data. I am extreme on my own backup solution and whenever I have a targeted client.

First, my computer possesses full-disk encryption. Within that drive, I possess a VeraCrypt encrypted container 128GB in size. Within that container is everything important to me including photos, videos, documents, business data, and even my password manager. You must know the computer password and the VeraCrypt password to see anything. I possess a 128GB USB drive with full-disk encryption. It then contains a 127GB VeraCrypt container. I use Free File Sync to occasionally backup the content of the container on my computer to the content of the container on my USB drive. I then replicate this process with an additional external media

which is stored off-site in case of true emergency. Is this overkill? Maybe. I would rather be safe than sorry. My clients store sensitive information which would be very valuable in the wrong hands. I take every precaution.

In 2019, I was forced to test my encryption and backup strategy during a series of unfortunate events. I had recently updated my password manager, KeePassXC. This new version possessed a bug in the code which would delete the database if stored on a Mac computer but inside another operating system file structure. Since my KeePassXC database was stored within a VeraCrypt container on my MacBook Pro, I was part of a small minority of users who experienced this flaw (this problem was patched a few days later by KeePassXC). When I closed KeePassXC, the database was completely deleted without any possibility of recovery. There was no warning, and I was unaware of the issue. When I conducted a daily backup of all data to my USB drive, it removed the copy of the KeePassXC database on it and replaced it with an empty folder. I now had absolutely no copy of my KeePassXC database, which was a catastrophe. When I opened my password manager, there was no option to see my passwords. After a brief moment of panic, I reached out to a friend who could help.

In my previous example of how I store my data, I mentioned an off-site external media which possessed a duplicate copy of all vital data. This is in the form of a 1GB micro SD card which contains a single 1GB VeraCrypt container. The password to open this container is unique from anything else, and I have it memorized. Without this password, the data is useless to anyone who takes possession of the card. This card was placed inside a "hollow nickel" and stored secretively inside the home of a friend and former colleague. This is a real U.S. nickel which is made from two unique coins. Each coin is die-cut in order to create a top piece (heads) which fits into the bottom piece (tails) and allows for a hollow space in between, large enough to store a micro SD card, as seen in Figure 3.02. These cost approximately $20-$25.

Figure 3.02: A hollow nickel with a micro SD card stored inside.

I called my friend and told him I was in a serious situation, and I needed his help without asking many questions. This person works in the intelligence community, so the request was well-received. I advised him to go into his upstairs bathroom and remove the power receptacle cover next to the mirror. He would then notice a nickel resting on the bottom of the outlet box within the wall. Remove that nickel and tap the edge of it on the bathroom sink. The top of the nickel will come loose and can be removed, revealing an SD card. The SD card should be inserted into a computer and the 1GB file should be uploaded to my own web server in a specific directory. My friend agreed and completed each step. I then asked him to place everything back where it was, and that I would further explain everything over a beer the next time I was in town. Whenever I visit my friend's home, I update the contents of this drive without anyone's knowledge. It is much smaller than my other backup, but only contains the absolutely necessary data I would need in case of an emergency. This includes a current copy of my password manager, client documents, business files, and scanned copies of any identification I may need while abroad. I chose this friend carefully, as I know he is home often, he is extremely trustworthy, and he respects my extreme privacy antics. Hopefully you have someone similar in your life.

After he uploaded the 1GB VeraCrypt file, I was able to open it and destroy the online copy. I then had access to my password manager and could now access my passwords. This version of the database had not been updated in a few months, so I was still missing some recently changed passwords, but my email archive identified those accounts quickly. I was relieved to have my accounts back, as many of them date back over ten years.

I hope this serves as a reminder to the importance of an offline backup away from your home. If I ever find myself overseas with a lost passport, my friend can give me the data I need to obtain a new copy. If my hotel is

burglarized and all of my data is stolen, my friend can get the essentials to me. I also maintain a hollow nickel near my home which contains a 128GB card with a full backup of all data. It takes me at least 20 minutes to retrieve it from my property. If someone can find my home, locate this nickel, open it to reveal the card, and beat the encryption, I may deserve to be hacked.

Web Browser Configuration

Before we consider connecting to various websites in order to harden our accounts, we should configure a secure web browser. I recommend, and solely use, the Firefox web browser at all times. Your new Apple computer has its own browser called Safari, but I rarely touch it. Windows possesses Microsoft Edge, which I have not opened in several years. The only time I would consider using these options is to connect to www.mozilla.org/firefox and download Firefox. Once Firefox is installed and configured, I hide any references to Edge or Safari on my clients' machines. Installation of Firefox is easy and guided, and you can accept all default options. It is included within Ubuntu as the default browser. Once installed, execute the application and consider the following modifications.

- Click on the menu in the upper right and select "Settings", "Options", or "Preferences".
- In the "General" options, uncheck "Recommend extensions as you browse" and "Recommend features as you browse". This prevents some internet usage information from being sent to Firefox.
- In the Home options, change "Homepage and new windows" and "New tabs" to "Blank page". This prevents Firefox from loading their own sites in new tabs.
- Disable all Firefox Home options.
- In the Search options, change the default search engine to DuckDuckGo and uncheck all options under "Provide search suggestions". This prevents queries from going directly to Google, and blocks the Google API from offering search suggestions.
- Click the "Privacy & Security" menu option and select "Strict" protection.
- Check the box titled "Delete cookies and site data when Firefox is closed".
- Uncheck the box titled "Show alerts about passwords for breached websites".
- Uncheck the box titled "Suggest and generate strong passwords".
- Uncheck the box titled "Autofill logins and passwords".
- Uncheck the box titled "Ask to save logins and passwords for websites".
- Change the History setting to "Firefox will use custom settings for history".
- Uncheck "Remember browsing and download history" and "Remember search and form history".
- Check the box titled "Clear history when Firefox closes". Do not check the box titled "Always use private browsing mode", as this will break Firefox Containers.
- Uncheck "Browsing history" from the "Address Bar" menu.
- In the Permissions menu, click "Settings" next to Location, Camera, Microphone, and Notifications. Check the box titled "Block new requests..." on each of these options.
- Uncheck all options under "Firefox Data Collection and Use".
- Uncheck all options under "Deceptive Content and Dangerous Software Protection". This will prevent Firefox from sharing potential malicious site visits with third-party services.
- Select "Enable HTTPS-Only Mode in all windows".

Firefox allows users to modify many configuration settings, and some of these deal with privacy and security concerns. Though some of these changes can be made in the menu of Firefox's preferences, changes made through about:config tend to be more durable and granular. To access the list of configuration settings, open Firefox and type "about:config" into the URL bar. You will receive a warning about making changes within this area, but the modifications we make will be safe. Choose to accept the risks. Some of these about:config settings may already be on the "correct" setting, but most probably will not. To change most of these settings you can simply double-click the setting to toggle it between "True" and "False". Some may require additional input, such

as a number. Because the list of about:config settings contains hundreds of entries, you will probably wish to search for all of these through the search bar in the about:config interface.

- geo.enabled: FALSE: This disables Firefox from sharing your location.
- browser.safebrowsing.malware.enabled: FALSE: This disables Google's malware monitoring.
- dom.battery.enabled: FALSE: This setting blocks sending battery level information.
- extensions.pocket.enabled: FALSE: This disables the proprietary Pocket service.
- browser.newtabpage.activity-stream.section.highlights.includePocket: FALSE: Disables "Pocket".
- browser.newtabpage.activity-stream.feeds.telemetry: FALSE: Disables Telemetry.
- browser.ping-centre.telemetry: FALSE: Disables Telemetry.
- toolkit.telemetry.server: (Delete URL): Disables Telemetry.
- toolkit.telemetry.enabled: FALSE: Disables Telemetry.
- toolkit.telemetry.unified: FALSE: Disables Telemetry.
- devtools.onboarding.telemetry.logged: FALSE: Disables Telemetry.
- media.autoplay.default: 5: Disables audio and video from playing automatically.
- dom.webnotifications.enabled: FALSE: Disables embedded notifications.
- webgl.disabled: TRUE: Disables some fingerprinting.
- network.http.sendRefererHeader: 0: Disables referring website notifications.
- identity.fxaccounts.enabled: FALSE: Disables any embedded Firefox accounts.
- browser.tabs.crashReporting.sendReport: FALSE: Disables crash reporting
- pdfjs.enableScripting: FALSE: Prevents some malicious PDF actions.
- network.dns.disablePrefetch: TRUE: Disables prefetching.
- network.dns.disablePrefetchFromHTTPS: TRUE: Disables prefetching.
- network.prefetch-next: FALSE: Disables prefetching.

WebRTC: These settings address a potential vulnerability of leaked IP addresses. If you use audio or video communications within your browser, such as virtual conferencing software, these could break those services and should be ignored. If you are protected within a home network VPN, as explained later, these are not vital changes.

- media.peerconnection.enabled: FALSE
- media.peerconnection.turn.disable: TRUE
- media.peerconnection.use_document_iceservers: FALSE
- media.peerconnection.video.enabled: FALSE
- media.navigator.enabled: FALSE

It is not vital that all of these security settings be applied to your systems. Firefox natively respects your privacy and security more than other browsers. These recommendations are for those that want to tweak additional settings that may provide a layer of protection, even if minimal. Next, I will discuss the abundance of helpful browser extensions called add-ons.

The first vital add-on I install on every computer is **uBlock Origin**. It blocks many ads and tracking scripts by default, but it also can block any other type of script that is attempting to run on a page. This helps prevent tracking, malicious code execution, location sharing, and a number of other processes that could undermine your privacy and security. This add-on is completely free and open source. It is highly customizable, while remaining relatively easy to work with. uBlock Origin works from blacklists which block trackers specified in the list(s). The add-on comes with several lists enabled, but there are several more that can be added through simple checkboxes in the preferences. Keep in mind that the more blacklists you enable, it may be more difficult to work within the browser. This section may seem a bit overwhelming but experimenting with the advanced settings should help you understand the functionality. Let's start with the basics.

Install uBlock Origin from the Firefox add-ons page or directly by navigating to the application's website at addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/ublock-origin/. You are now protected on a basic level. By default, most known invasive advertisements, tracking code, and malicious content is blocked. This step alone would provide much needed protection from the internet. However, we can take it a step further.

Click on the uBlock Origin icon in the menu and select the Dashboard icon to the right. This will open a new tab with the program's configuration page. On the Settings tab, click the option of "I am an advanced user". Click on the Filter lists tab and click the "Update Now" button at the top of the page. This will refresh all of the data and apply your new settings. Enable the "Block outsider intrusion to LAN" and "AdGuard" options under "Privacy". This applies additional ad block filters and protects the local devices on your network. You now have extended protection that will be applied to all visited websites without any interaction from you. When you encounter a web page with a lot of advertisements, such as a news media website, it should load much faster. It will block many of the pop-ups and auto-play media that can be quite annoying when conducting research. This protection will suffice for most users, but dedicated privacy enthusiasts may choose to take a more advanced approach.

After you have enabled the Advanced settings as explained above, clicking on the uBlock Origin icon should now present an expanded menu which will change as you visit different sites. In order to explain the function of this menu, I will conduct a demonstration by loading the website cnn.com. Within the uBlock Origin menu while viewing cnn.com, you will see all scripts that have either been loaded or blocked. You may see several questionable scripts such as "Twitter-ads". These scripts allow tracking across multiple websites and are the technology responsible for monitoring your interests, web history, and shopping habits.

This menu is split into three columns. The first simply identifies the type of code or domain name of the script. The second column is global settings. Anything changed here will apply to all website visits. The third column contains settings for the current website. A single plus sign (+) indicates that less than ten scripts were allowed from that specific option. Two plus signs indicate that between ten and one hundred scripts were allowed. The single minus sign (-) indicates that between one and nine scripts were blocked from that domain, while the dual minus signs tell us that ten to one hundred scripts were blocked. This is all default behavior and provides a balance of functionality and security. uBlock Origin decides which content should be allowed and which should be blocked.

Using this same page, let's modify the options. Click on the far-right portion of the first cell in the third column. This turned the entire third column red in color. This action activated an option to refresh the page (arrows) and an option to save the change (upper left "padlock"). Since I blocked every script, the page would not fully execute. It could not load images, design scripts, or any JavaScript. This is not useful at all, so I reversed my actions by clicking on the left section of the top cell in the third column, which turned the entire column back to grey in color. Saving these changes and refreshing the page brought me back to the original site.

Next, we will modify the second (middle) column, which will apply the settings globally. By default, all options are grey in color. This indicates that the default block list is applicable, and only invasive scripts will be blocked everywhere. Click on the far-right portion of the top cell in the second column. This turns the entire column red, and indicates that all scripts across all websites will be blocked. After saving changes, every website will only load the most basic text content. This will break practically every website.

Loading a page such as a Twitter profile results in no usable content. By clicking on the uBlock Origin icon and clicking the left sections of specific cells within the third column, you can enable those scripts without allowing everything on the page. In this example, the entire second column is red. This indicates that all scripts are blocked globally. The third column is mostly red, but the options for twitter.com, twimg.com, and others are grey. Those scripts will be allowed, if approved by uBlock Origin's rules, only for that domain. If you loaded a blog that has scripts from Twitter, they would still be ignored.

These are extreme examples. Let's bring this back to some sanity. The following is how I recommend using uBlock Origin. Install, enable advanced options, and proceed with your work. Know that you have great protection against most invasions. Before you navigate to a questionable site that may try to install malicious code on your machine, click on the far-right section of the top cell in the second column. That will block all scripts on all pages. Conduct your internet usage, enabling any desired scripts as needed on the questionable page, and reverse the changes when you are finished. Remember to click the save button (padlock) after each change.

I also use this plugin to bypass website restrictions. As an example, consider my local newspaper, The Chicago Tribune. When you navigate to chicagotribune.com, you are allowed to view three articles before being blocked with a message which states "You've reached your monthly free article limit. To continue reading, subscribe now". Clicking any further articles blocks your access. You may have seen similar messages from websites when using any type of ad blocker. Clicking the uBlock Origin icon reveals it is blocking 14 scripts, but something is still running in order to know the number of articles I have read. Choosing the far-right option (red) within the line titled "Inline scripts" blocks these types of annoyances from this domain. Clicking the lock (save) option and reloading the page eliminates the barrier permanently. It also makes the page load much faster. I can now browse this website with unlimited access.

Hopefully, you are practicing these settings and learning how this program functions. It is an amazing option that has protected me many times. If you are doing things right, you have likely completely messed-up your settings and are now blocking things you want while allowing things you do not. Do not worry, we can reverse all of our mistakes by first making the global (second column) settings back to grey (left section of top cell). Next, return to the dashboard settings of the add-on, and click on the My Rules tab. In the second column (Temporary Rules), click Edit, highlight all of your customizations, and delete them. Click the Save button in this same column and then the Commit button to apply all changes. The huge benefit of uBlock Origin over other options is the simple ability to block malicious scripts without customization, while having an option to allow or block any or all scripts at our disposal. This is a rarity in these types of add-ons.

The next Firefox add-on which I use daily is the **Multi-Account Containers** option from Mozilla. It can be found at addons.mozilla.org/firefox/addon/multi-account-containers. Prior to 2021, I used this service to create individual containers which isolated website cookies from each site. However, Firefox introduced "Total Cookie Protection" within version 86 released in February of 2021. Because of this, temporary internet files from each domain are confined to the websites where they originated (when "Strict" is selected under "Enhanced Tracking Protection"). Firefox creates a virtual container for each site loaded. Facebook cannot see the cookies downloaded from Amazon and vice-versa. Many believe this eliminates the need for Multi-Account Containers, but I disagree.

Multi-Account Containers allows you to separate your various types of browsing without needing to clear your history, log in and out, or use multiple browsers. These container tabs are like normal tabs except that the sites you visit will have access to a separate slice of the browser's storage. This means your site preferences, logged-in sessions, and advertising tracking data will not carry over to the new container. Likewise, any browsing you do within the new container will not affect your logged in sessions, or tracking data of your other containers.

Consider an example. I have a container tab open which I use to log in to a Twitter account. I want to log into another Twitter account within the same browser. If I open a new tab and go to twitter.com, I am automatically logged into the same account as the previous tab. However, if I open a new container tab, I am presented the option to log in to a new Twitter account. I simply open a unique container tab for each of these events. Each sees the session as unique, and no data is shared from one service to another. Once installed, you will see a new icon in the upper right which appears as three squares. Click on it and select the container you want to open. Default options include choices such as Personal and Shopping, but you can modify these any way you desire. I have ten containers titled Private01 through Private10. You can create, delete, and edit containers from the Containers menu. When you click the Edit Containers or the + buttons, you can change the color or icon associated with a container or change the container name.

I also use this extension in order to have quick access to all of my Google Voice numbers. I installed the Beta version of Firefox onto my computer in order to possess two unique versions of Firefox which do not share data between them. I then installed Multi-Account Containers and created a new container for each Google Voice number I own. I then logged into the appropriate account for each container and disabled the option to clear my cookies upon exit. Today, I can launch Firefox Beta, select the container titled with the number I want to use, and immediately place or accept a call via my desktop. I can close the beta browser completely when I am done. I also changed the icon and name to reflect this purpose. This has been most beneficial when I have been on a call with a financial institution and they want to call me back at a specific number which they have on file. Opening the browser and being immediately ready is better than connecting to Google Voice; opening my password manager; inserting my credentials; providing 2FA; accessing the account; allowing my microphone; and accepting the call. My device is encrypted and protected with a strong password in the event it is stolen.

Some readers may be frustrated with my setup for Firefox and may insist on using a Chromium-based browser. I completely respect this, and offer the option of Brave Browser. Brave is based on Chromium, which is the bones of the Google Chrome browser. Brave insists they have removed all calls to Google which Chromium makes by default, implementing the use of Quad9 as the DNS provider (instead of Google). However, Brave has faced strong criticism for injecting code to hijack affiliate web links and their overall push to use their embedded rewards program. If you NEED a Chrome-like browser, I recommend Brave over Chrome. If you can use Firefox, I find it to be much more privacy-focused. Personally, I would never use any Chromium-based browser, including Brave. Regardless of your chosen web browser, you should test your configuration for any potential leaks. I rely heavily on the free service **Browser Leaks** at https://browserleaks.com. There are numerous options within this site, and I outline my favorite below.

- **https://browserleaks.com/webrtc**: This page displays whether your browser is blocking WebRTC IP leaks as previously mentioned. The goal is to receive all red "False" responses.
- **https://browserleaks.com/geo**: This page identifies whether your browser is sharing location data or the about:config changes we made are blocking it. The optimal response is a red "Denied" result.
- **https://browserleaks.com/proxy**: This page discloses any unique filtering within your network which could make you a more unique visitor to a site. The goal is to receive all red "not detected" results, unless you approve of the technology filter. You may see uBlock filters, which eliminate specific data from entering your session.
- **https://browserleaks.com/social**: This page displays any social networks or online marketplaces which place a login cookie on your machine. As an example, if you are logged in to an Amazon account, you should see evidence of this. This is a good test to ensure your containers are functioning properly.
- **https://browserleaks.com/javascript**: This page displays connection information for any site you visit. Interesting areas include local time, browser identifiers, and operating system data.
- **https://browserleaks.com/flash**: This page displays whether the Flash plugin is installed. My preference is that it is never used.
- **https://browserleaks.com/silverlight**: This page displays whether the Silverlight plugin is installed. My preference is that it is never used.
- **https://browserleaks.com/java**: This page displays whether the Java plugin is installed. My preference is that it is never used.
- **https://browserleaks.com/donottrack**: This page displays your "Do Not Track" browser settings. A display of "1" confirms that your browser is blocking requests to track the user. In Firefox, this can be enabled under the "Privacy & Security" menu, but this option may be redundant with their latest site isolation technologies.

Again, this is not a comprehensive list of digital security best practices for various operating systems. This is the bare minimum recommendations in order to continue your journey through extreme privacy strategies. My scope here is to disappear completely and possess better privacy. My own education on digital privacy and security is never-ending. I learn a new or better way to execute my own strategies monthly.

VPN Configuration (Desktop)

I mentioned the importance of a VPN in the previous chapter in regard to your mobile device. This also applies to any computer you use. The same service you selected for your phone should provide an app for your computer. Most reliable VPN providers grant you multiple consecutive device usage. Therefore, you can use the same account credentials on your laptop which you use on your mobile devices. Even if you choose to replicate the home firewall with constant VPN, as explained later, you should still possess a VPN application on your laptop for travel usage. When traveling, I rely on a VPN application any time I am connected to the internet. This is especially important if using public Wi-Fi. Similar to the previous chapter, I rely on **ProtonVPN** (**inteltechniques.com/vpn.html**) as my primary VPN provider for my laptop(s). Installation on a Windows or Mac machine is straight-forward, but Linux will take a few tweaks. Mac users with Brew installed can simply enter "brew install protonvpn" into Terminal. The following steps will install it within Ubuntu.

- Navigate to https://protonvpn.com/support/linux-ubuntu-vpn-setup.
- Click the "Download the ProtonVPN DEB Package" link and choose "Save file".
- From the Downloads folder, double-click the downloaded file.
- Click "Install" and allow the process to complete.
- Open Terminal and execute the following:

```
sudo apt-get update
sudo apt-get install protonvpn -y
```

Reboot the computer. This will install the ProtonVPN application, which is available in the Activities menu. Launch ProtonVPN and enter your credentials. You can customize your settings to include features such as NetShield Adblocker, Permanent Kill Switch, Kill Switch, and Secure Core as desired. If you would like to add a system tray icon (recommended), execute the following within Terminal.

- sudo apt install gnome-shell-extension-appindicator gir1.2-appindicator3-0.1 -y

Relying on a VPN company is difficult. We place a lot of trust into the provider(s) we choose, without knowing much about the provider. I had recommended other VPN companies within previous editions of my books when ProtonVPN was new and unstable, but most of those have been acquired by larger companies. One could argue that the new parent companies might have ill intentions for the data collected from millions of VPN users. One could also argue that being a small needle within their huge haystack might possess its own benefits. Personally, I still maintain PIA as a "backup" provider, but rely mostly on ProtonVPN. I explain more about this in the next chapter. I believe all VPNs are flawed, but still a requirement for us. Almost every VPN provider relies on rented servers across the globe which are out of their control. Some providers unknowingly use the same servers as their competition.

A VPN is simply a single layer of protection. Always purchase your subscription anonymously, and I present multiple options for this later. When using a VPN, you are simply placing your internet history into someone else's hands. This sounds bad on the surface, but it is better than doing nothing at all. Without a VPN, we know our ISPs are monitoring, collecting, and sharing our internet activity. With a VPN, we are told that this information is not logged or shared. Are we bullet-proof? No. However, I would rather make the attempt to hide my traffic than do nothing at all. My main purpose for a VPN is to prevent services such as my email provider from knowing my true home IP address. Your needs may differ.

Some may question the amount of data shared about your online history when you send all of your traffic through a VPN versus your ISP. There are always vulnerabilities which could expose more data than intended, but we can discuss a few misconceptions about your internet traffic. First, we should tackle SSL/TLS. SSL (Secure Sockets Layer) and its successor, TLS (Transport Layer Security), are protocols for establishing authenticated and encrypted links between networked computers. This is related to the lock icon you see in your browser address bar when on any website which begins with "https". This indicates a secure connection, but what does that really mean? I will simplify this technology with a couple of examples.

Assume you are on your home computer connected directly to your internet service provider (ISP). You are not using a VPN. You connect to Google and conduct a search for "inteltechniques". The response URL presented to you, including the search results from the query, is https://www.google.com/search?q=inteltechniques. Does your Internet Service Provider (ISP) know you conducted a search on Google? Yes. Do they know you searched for "inteltechniques"? No. This is because Google encrypts the actual search URL. The provider of your internet connectivity can only see the domain name being accessed. It cannot see any details about specific pages or any credentials entered. This is why https versions of websites are so important. Your browser can see this entire URL, but it does not directly share any details with your provider. Now, let's introduce a VPN. After connecting to your VPN, such as ProtonVPN, you conduct the same search. Does your ISP know you conducted a search on Google? No. Does your VPN provider know you conducted a search on Google? Yes. Does your VPN provider know you searched for "inteltechniques"? No. Why does this matter?

Everyone has a unique threat model, but I will present a few scenarios where you may be concerned. First, consider that I am suing you through civil court, and I have convinced a judge to grant me a court order to collect your internet activity. Since I know where you live, I can assume the provider of your internet service. A court order is issued to your ISP for your internet activity. If your ISP logs your traffic, which most do, the response would tell me every domain which you visited and the dates and times of occurrence. I could use this to prove you were visiting specific websites or transmitting large amounts of data to designated services. If you had a VPN enabled, I could only prove your device(s) were connected through a VPN. I would not know any domains from your activity. A second court order to the VPN provider would not reveal this data. Reputable VPNs do not log this traffic, and IP addresses are shared between thousands of users.

Next, assume I want to know where you live. I know your email provider is Gmail, and a subpoena to them would reveal your IP address at a specific date and time. If this IP address belongs to your internet service provider, a second subpoena will disclose the address of service (your home). If the IP address belongs to your VPN provider, it will not disclose any details about you or the VPN account. A subpoena to the VPN for information about the IP address will reveal no logs and an education about IP address sharing between thousands of strangers. Now, let's combine the strategies mentioned previously to thwart this behavior. Since you are always connected to a VPN, your ISP knows nothing about your internet traffic. A subpoena to them would not reveal the sites you visit. Since ProtonMail does not log your IP addresses in clear text, they cannot determine your true IP address. Since ProtonVPN and ProtonMail are Swiss-based companies, they would not respond to a subpoena from the United States. If you purchased a VPN service without providing your true name, there is nothing to glean from the VPN provider about your account (such as a personal credit card number or home address). I hope you now see that all of these strategies strengthen each other.

What do I do? At home, my entire network is behind a fail-proof VPN. I will explain each detail in the next chapter. I do not need individual VPN applications running on my devices while at home. While traveling, I have the ProtonVPN desktop application ready on my laptops. As previously mentioned, I have the ProtonVPN app installed on my mobile device. Many readers may be tired of my promotion of ProtonVPN. After all, they require a valid email address and some type of digital payment (Bitcoin is accepted). I simply trust ProtonVPN more than the majority of VPN companies. Their third-party audits, open-source code, and transparent business plan weighed heavy in my decision. Practically every "VPN Review" site on the internet is owned and controlled by various shady VPN companies in order to trick people into buying their products. ProtonVPN is one of the few which do not participate in that nonsense. However, I present an alternative option within the next chapter.

No VPN company is perfect and all expose a potential digital trail. I choose the option which is most likely to protect me because it has the most to lose. If ProtonVPN were caught storing or selling user data, their entire company would lose all credibility and many customers. If a company which owns several VPN brands gets caught doing this, they can simply shut one down and spin up a new marketing campaign for another. I believe ProtonVPN has more motive to protect their product and reputation than the larger VPN companies. Current annual pricing for ProtonVPN is $48 to $96. However, your VPN choice should never be based on price alone.

DNS Configuration

In the simplest explanation, DNS translates domain names, such as inteltechniques.com, into IP addresses in order to locate the appropriate content. In a typical home setup, your internet service provider (ISP) conducts your DNS queries. In other words, your ISP knows every website domain you visit, regardless of SSL encryption, and knows your billing address. If you did not purchase internet service anonymously, then they also know YOU. ISPs collect a lot of valuable information about you this way, and often sell these details to third parties for marketing purposes. I want to stop that. Whether you use no VPN whatsoever (poor), rely on an application-based VPN directly on a computer (better), or execute a full home firewall as explained later (best), you should modify your DNS settings. First, let's identify the techniques to locate the DNS settings within the major operating systems.

- **Linux**: Launch "Settings"; click "Network"; open connection configuration; access DNS settings for IPv4 and IPv6; disable "Automatic"; and add desired servers.
- **macOS**: Launch "System Preferences"; click "Network"; select connection; click "Advanced"; click "DNS"; remove any entries and add your desired servers.
- **Windows**: Launch "Settings"; click "Network & Internet"; click "Change Adapter Options"; right-click connection; choose "Properties"; click "Internet Protocol Version 4"; click "Properties"; enter your desired DNS servers; click "OK"; and repeat for "Internet Protocol Version 6".
- **Android**: Launch "Settings"; tap "Network & internet"; tap "Advanced"; tap "Private DNS"; select "Private DNS provider hostname"; and enter your desired DNS information.
- **iOS** (Wi-Fi only): Launch "Settings"; tap "Wi-Fi"; tap the "i" associated with your connected network; tap "Configure DNS"; tap "Manual"; remove any unwanted servers; tap "Add Server"; and enter your desired DNS information.

If you are using a VPN application on your computer, it will likely ignore any DNS modifications made on your device and use its own server. This is acceptable for many situations, but not ideal for everyone. By allowing your VPN to secure all traffic and provide all DNS queries, you are placing all of your eggs within one basket. You are trusting your VPN provider with the ability to log all of your internet history and traffic. This is probably not a huge threat if you are using a trustworthy VPN, but we can do better. In the next chapter, I explain the home firewall which eliminates the need for an application-based VPN on any devices connected to that network. This allows you to modify your DNS configuration on those devices. Before I explain my strategy, we should discuss DNS services.

As explained later in the Home Firewall chapter, I recommend Cloudflare DNS service **for a home firewall** due to their speed, stability, encrypted options, no-logging policy, wide adoption, and third-party auditing through KPMG. However, **I do not always recommend it for device-based DNS**. I will explain both of these scenarios soon. Some may disagree with any promotion of Cloudflare, which I respect. Cloudflare supports illegal websites, hosts pirated content on their servers, and prevents law enforcement from taking action against criminal networks. However, I believe it is our best overall network-wide option in order to maintain "normal" appearances while taking advantage of the free protection. I would never encourage readers to engage with their paid services. Some people prefer niche privacy-focused community-driven DNS providers for their entire household, but I believe these can make our connections stick out more than widely-used secure options. I also trust the third-party audit of Cloudflare more than unproven promises of smaller operations. I do not like all of their policies, but their free DNS service provides a great value to my clients. Overall, I recommend Cloudflare as a "backup" DNS with alternative primary options on each device. I explain more about this in the next chapter, but let's dissect our options.

I always prefer to designate my own DNS configuration on every device, even if the protection is redundant. If you execute a home firewall on your network in the next chapter, and choose Cloudflare as your DNS provider on that firewall, you can have backup DNS protection on each device itself in the event the firewall DNS should fail or change. If you do not have a home firewall and are using a VPN application (which uses its own DNS), and that application fails, you would have a DNS option configured directly on the device as a backup. If you

are connected to a home firewall, this is all redundant, but not harmful. This prevents SOME snooping from your ISP. However, I think we can do better. If you already feel confused, I understand. At the end of this section I simplify the options.

Consider the service **NextDNS** (nextdns.io). It conducts the DNS queries required in order to navigate your internet traffic, but it also includes filtering options. I will explain with an actual configuration demonstration conducted from a desktop browser. First, create a new free account at my.nextdns.io/signup. Any masked email service should be accepted and no payment source is required. I used an alias name. The free tier allows 300,000 monthly queries at no cost. After registration, you should be taken to your user portal which should display a "DNS-over-TLS" address similar to 12345.dns.nextdns.io. You can now use this address, or the other configuration options, to use their DNS service and filtering options.

Assuming you have an Android device, enter the provided "DNS-over-TLS" address into your DNS settings as explained in the previous page. Your Android device is now using NextDNS for DNS queries, and you can see the logs of these requests in your NextDNS portal. This may be alarming to some readers. The "Logs" tab in your portal identifies every connection being made from your device. This can be a privacy concern, but it has many benefits. We can now apply filters which will block many undesired connections. Click the "Privacy" tab and notice the automatically-applied blocklist. This database blocks over 100,000 connections which are associated with ads, trackers, and malware. This will block a lot of unwanted connections such as ads, app telemetry, and user analytics. This is great basic protection, but I prefer to add the "Energized Ultimate" list. You now have greater protection.

Click on the "logs" tab again and take a look at the traffic. Open a few apps and visit a few websites on your device. Then, refresh the NextDNS Logs page and notice the difference. You will likely see several connections allowed and others being blocked. This is the filter lists in action. If you see a connection being allowed which you do not want to occur, you can copy that domain and add it to the "Denylist" tab. I did this for a domain which was being queried by an application in order to send "anonymous" analytics about my usage.

This may all sound familiar. In previous editions of this book, I explained how mobile device firewall apps such as Blokada provide many of these same benefits. There are many similarities, but I believe blocking connections on the DNS service level is superior. Apps like Blokada often include whitelists which you cannot control. With NextDNS, you see all of the connections and have the ability to disable anything desired. Furthermore, filtering connections via DNS does not interfere with mobile VPN applications in the way which Blokada might.

If you plan to use NextDNS full-time on your device(s), I highly recommend that you modify the logging aspects. Click the "Settings" tab within your NextDNS portal and review the "Logs" section. You can disable logs completely or change the retention period. I choose the latter while I am testing my devices. I leave logs enabled; disable "Log Client IPs"; enable "Log Domains"; and set the retention to "1 Hour". This way, I can always connect to the portal to see what is being blocked and allowed, but the logs will be purged an hour after each activity. I can make modifications while I am configuring my mobile or desktop devices and see my results immediately. Once I have all desired NextDNS configurations in place, I disable logging completely. This eliminates any history of my internet activity through NextDNS.

This may sound ideal for you and you may be wondering why I do not recommend NextDNS with filtering for the home firewall explained in the next chapter. NextDNS is great, but I only prefer it on the device level. I do not want every device within my home using the same NextDNS account for DNS queries and filtering. It ties too much history into one single account. I have absolutely no reason to believe NextDNS is collecting my data or using it inappropriately, but I have no evidence either way. Therefore, I believe NextDNS is a great option for devices, especially mobile phones. In the previous chapter, I offered an easy option to use AdGuard as your DNS provider on GrapheneOS (or any Android device). This blocks many ads but allows no customization. NextDNS allows full customization, but it requires an account which adds an opportunity for user history to be abused. I offer my entire DNS strategy in a moment, as there is still much to explain.

Another reason for applying DNS filtering per device is unintended blockage. If I were to place NextDNS with filtering on my entire home network through a firewall, every device would receive the same advertisement and telemetry protection. This may sound ideal, but it could cause great frustration for others in your home. If a spouse wants to visit a grocery store website, they will likely be blocked since those are basically full-page ads. If your children want to engage with their friends over various social networks, such as Facebook, they may be restricted due to heavy filtering of related domains. Video streaming may be blocked. This is another reason why I rely on Cloudflare as overall network protection, and customized NextDNS within devices which need the extra filtering. I filter traffic on the devices, but never the entire network. Your needs may vary.

The next issue is the ability to use NextDNS on non-Android devices. If you want to replicate this configuration on your Linux, Mac, Windows, or iOS device, you will be prompted to install the NextDNS application on these units. I do not like to add this type of third-party software, so I avoid this. Fortunately, there are alternatives. Mac and iOS users can create an "Apple Configuration Profile" which can be applied on the operating system level. All details can be found at apple.nextdns.io. Windows and Linux users can apply the NextDNS IP addresses for DNS queries, but no filtering will be available without more advanced configuration. Most importantly, any operating system can include DNS services within the web browser. This has many benefits and can be configured in Firefox with the following steps.

- Open Firefox and select "Settings" from the menu.
- Scroll down to "Network Settings" click "Settings".
- Scroll down and select "Enable DNS over HTTPS" and select Custom.
- Enter your NextDNS "DNS-over-HTTPS" address, such as https://dns.nextdns.io/12345.
- Click "OK" and type "about:config" in the address bar.
- Search for "network.trr.mode" and change it to "3".
- Navigate back to your NextDNS portal and confirm it recognizes the connection.

After this configuration, all browser traffic will be queried using NextDNS, and the filtering lists will block undesired traffic. This may be redundant to uBlock Origin's features, but there will be no additional resources required for this protection. The main benefit is that the browser will control its own DNS without any conflict from a VPN application. It also carries over to any network, such as public Wi-Fi. Some readers may now be wondering why I spent so much time explaining uBlock Origin when the same default blocking could occur within the DNS. I believe they are both required, and each have unique abilities. uBlock Origin allows you to block specific types of connections, such as inline scripts, within any single page. Browser-based DNS applies to every site you visit.

You should now ensure that your connections are encrypted. Navigate to cloudflare.com/ssl/encrypted-sni and conduct a test. You should see green checkmarks next to DNSSEC and TLS. If you do, you are hiding much of your internet traffic from your ISP and your VPN. The other two options on this page apply only to Cloudflare's DNS service. For this test, I only care that the traffic is encrypted with a TLS connection. This is all a lot to digest. Let's summarize some of the key takeaways. By default, your internet service provider supplies DNS services, and often uses that data maliciously. When you use a VPN application on your device, it supplies its own DNS, which prevents your ISP from seeing your history. When you configure NextDNS on your Android mobile device, the blocklists can prevent applications from sending out telemetry and analytics about your usage. When you configure NextDNS in your browser, all of your DNS traffic is facilitated by NextDNS regardless of your ISP or VPN application settings. When you use a home firewall (Chapter Four), it provides backup DNS services and you can set any desired primary DNS on each device.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, I no longer rely on application-based firewalls on my mobile devices to filter any traffic. Instead, NextDNS provides all filtering and DNS queries. DNS can be overwhelming. We have not even discussed IP-based DNS options within non-Android devices. The following is a summary of your options, ranging from easiest to most complex. As a reminder, most VPN **apps** provide their own DNS and override your customizations. The network **firewall** explained in the next chapter bypasses the need for apps.

- **Do Nothing**: Your ISP or VPN provider will facilitate all required DNS queries without any action from you. This is not advised.
- **NextDNS on all Devices (No Filtering):** Enter the NextDNS public IP addresses (currently 45.90.28.207 and 45.90.30.207) as your DNS servers on every device in your home, including mobile and desktop. This does not provide any ad or telemetry filtering, but it hides the queries from your ISP.
- **Cloudflare DNS Firewall**: If using a home firewall, enter Cloudflare IP addresses as your DNS provider (1.1.1.1 and 1.0.0.1), as explained in the next chapter. This provides a backup DNS provider in the event a device without DNS customization accesses your network.
- **NextDNS on Devices (Filtering):** Configure a custom filtering NextDNS address within any Android devices or desktop browsers. Each could also possess their own free account.

What do I do? I have three devices which I rely on daily. My Linux laptop sends very little data from the operating system, so I do not need DNS filtering there. However, I do want it on my browser. I configure NextDNS with filtering (dns.nextdns.io/12345) in the Firefox settings as previously explained. I configure NextDNS without filtering (45.90.28.207 and 45.90.30.207) as the device's DNS provider using the Linux operating system settings previously presented. This way, my browser is using my custom NextDNS settings. Any communications from other applications are protected by NextDNS for queries, but nothing will be blocked. If both of these settings should fail (unlikely), my DNS is being delivered by my home firewall with Cloudflare as the provider. If I connect to any public Wi-Fi, neither my browser or operating system queries are facilitated by the public network. Next, I have two mobile devices. One is always at home with Wi-Fi enabled but no SIM card or cellular connection. The other is a travel device which is never connected in my home and never uses Wi-Fi. I have created two separate NextDNS accounts and apply one to each device. These are both the free tier and never exceed the free monthly quota. I occasionally visit the NextDNS portal for each account; enable the logging feature; make sure there is no undesired traffic being allowed to transmit; then disable and delete all logs. If I were still using a Mac computer or iOS device every day, I would apply the Apple Configuration Profile method explained at apple.nextdns.io. If this is too technical, I would at least apply the public NextDNS IP addresses as the DNS servers for both devices.

Some readers may be upset that I have chosen NextDNS over AdGuard as a filtering DNS provider. My reasons are three-fold. First, I have more trust in NextDNS. The founders are publicly visible and I know who runs the company. They are reputable people who have been heavily involved in this space and are transparent about their reasons for the service. A premium-tier business model explains the funding for resources. AdGuard is a Russian company which was moved to Cyprus, but infrastructure remains in Russia. A Russian CEO has minimal presence on the internet, but there is no information about any other owners. Next, the support from NextDNS has been superior. When I contacted both companies with questions about the product, only NextDNS responded. One of the owners provided full details. Finally, AdGuard has announced a beta program which will allow custom DNS, but I was unable to test for this writing. My emails requesting information were unanswered. The custom options from NextDNS are publicly available and have been thoroughly tested.

The final privacy consideration in regard to DNS is account-based versus publicly-available servers. While a custom NextDNS account can be wonderful for blocking (or allowing) connections, it does carry some risk. Since you have an account, all queries could be tracked back to a specific user. Disabling logs should prevent this, but a court order could override your configuration. Using an alias name should provide comfort. Public NextDNS servers do not require an account, but provide no filtering. If you want to filter ads without an account, I do believe AdGuard is your best option (dns.adguard.com). This was explained within the GrapheneOS section. However, you cannot modify the protection. If they block a domain, there is no way to unblock it. Again, this is where custom filtering from NextDNS is superior.

Are you sick of DNS yet? There are many opinions of the proper way to use DNS services. None of them are perfect for everyone. I hope you take the information presented here and use it as a starting point toward your own DNS and VPN strategy. Please consider the next chapter before you lock in your own plan.

Email Usage

I believe I could devote an entire chapter to numerous options related to email usage. In the previous edition, I provided multiple email strategies which was overwhelming to many readers. In this edition, I will only present the exact methods in use by my clients and myself. This provides explicit detail which can be replicated without the need to determine the best route for your own situation. There are many ways to create a secure email strategy, and I do not claim mine to be the best. It is simply the most appropriate option for me and my clients. The following summarizes each step of my email strategy, which is outlined in detail within the following pages.

- **Encrypted Email Provider (ProtonMail)**: First, we establish a private and secure email provider. ProtonMail checks all of the boxes for my usage, as explained soon.
- **Alias Email Addresses**: Next, we configure the five accounts provided with any paid tier of ProtonMail. This allows us to send and receive email from five different accounts, displaying five different names to the recipient, without the need to log in to multiple accounts.
- **Email Forwarding from Previous Provider**: After we configure our new email account, we need to receive email being sent to our previous accounts without accessing those services. We will forward email to our new ProtonMail account.
- **Masked Email Forwarding**: Next, we will establish a masked email forwarding service which will protect the identity of our true accounts within ProtonMail. This provides numerous options to give to "junk" services which demand an email address.
- **Custom Domain Email Addresses**: This is the strongest piece of our strategy. We will purchase a custom domain and associate it with our ProtonMail account. This provides unlimited addresses without relying on the protonmail.com domain.
- **Offline Email Archive**: After we have everything configured, we should occasionally retrieve all email messages into an offline archive for use in the event of internet outages, catastrophe, or service disruptions.
- **Email Privacy Concerns**: We acknowledge various email privacy concerns and modify our behavior to avoid any traps.
- **Encrypted Email Alternatives**: If ProtonMail is not appropriate for your needs, I present alternatives which possess the same privacy and security benefits.

Encrypted Email Provider (ProtonMail)

All clients are given a new primary email address through the service **ProtonMail** (inteltechniques.com/proton). This service with a free tier provides Switzerland-hosted communications with true zero-knowledge data. This means that your email is encrypted from your device before it is stored on their servers. Even with a court order, an employee of ProtonMail would be unable to view any message content. If an email is sent from one ProtonMail user to another, it is never exposed to interception from a third party. Is this bulletproof? No, nothing is. There will always be some slight chance that an adversary could compromise your communications. However, it is extremely unlikely. On the other side, a court order to Google or Microsoft will hand over all of your account details and email communications stored with them without any resistance.

While I am not concerned about court orders being executed on my clients' accounts, I am very bothered by data breaches and internal abuses. If a breach occurs at ProtonMail, the thief gets a bunch of encrypted data that is of no use. In 2016, a large breach at Yahoo handed over access to over 500 million accounts to unknown criminal culprits. In 2021, Yandex caught an employee selling access to entire inboxes of targeted users. These scenarios are no longer theoretical. Verified threats toward your sensitive email content exist. A big part of being private is simply making better choices, even if they are not fool-proof.

I have a few opinions on email which may not be accepted by the security community. First, email is broken. It is outdated and was never meant to be private. I assume every email I write could be seen by someone else. I trust services such as ProtonMail over any other mainstream provider because of the zero-knowledge

environment. Even if they secretly had bad intentions, they could not access my data. Multiple independent third-party audits verify this protection. These audits carry more weight than online promises by the company. Some will wonder why I do not use Tutanota or other zero-knowledge providers. It is mostly due to adoption. Most people in my circles have ProtonMail and no other secure options. The more messages I can keep within one single encrypted ecosystem the better. However, I will identify options later for those with unique situations.

The primary ProtonMail email address created when opening a new account should be used only for communications associated with your real name. This could include your family, colleagues, or anyone else who knows your true identity. I recommend including your true name within this address, such as john.smith@protonmail.com. This is your new primary email account. It should possess a very strong password and two-factor authentication. I prefer Authy for this, as explained previously. Once you have an account, we can explore the benefits of paid accounts. You can order a free or paid account with the latest discounts on my affiliate site at **inteltechniques.com/proton**.

Alias Email Addresses (ProtonMail)

While a free ProtonMail account is fine for minimal usage, we will need a paid account to complete our email strategy. If you exceed a specific resource provided within this tier, you can increase individual thresholds as needed. Paid accounts include alias email addresses which can be accessed within the main account. I find the simplicity of one inbox and ability to send emails from multiple addresses within a single web client or mobile application to be extremely beneficial. There is no need to overly complicate things, and convenient options will be used more consistently than difficult tasks. The following is a typical scenario for the five email aliases provided by ProtonMail.

- real.name@protonmail.com: This account is considered a public email address, and is provided to family, colleagues, or anyone else who knows your true identity. It is an address that will be publicly visible eventually. Data mining companies and credit bureaus could eventually identify this as your primary email account.
- alias.name@protonmail.com: This account is in the name of an alias. This allows sending and receiving mail in a unique generic name. This can be vital when a home is titled in an alias name and the client wants to have immediate access to email messages intended for that recipient. It allows you to hide your true identity, but enjoy the benefits of secure email without multiple login requirements.
- purchases1980@protonmail.com: This account is used for all online purchases. The generic name allows usage with any alias or real name. This will likely be shared with third-party affiliate services and data mining companies. This could also be associated with travel-related purchases. I assign the name "Purchasing Department" to this alias address, which is visible to recipients.
- number@protonmail.com: This is a generic account with no personal identifiers, similar to 1980@protonmail.com. It can be used for practically any purpose without disclosing any name. It is often used for items which are not vital, but need to be received, such as a receipt from an in-store digital purchase. I assign the name of the number, such as "1980", to this alias address, which is visible to recipients.
- catchall@customdomain.com: We will associate a custom domain name to your ProtonMail account which will be configured as a "catchall" address. This will allow you to receive email from unlimited addresses and send from a generic account. A "Professional" tier account is required for this feature, as explained later.

When you create your ProtonMail account, you will provide a name for association with any addresses. When you send an email, this name is visible to the recipient. It is vital to configure the desired name for each address before usage. While logged in to your ProtonMail account, click on "Settings", "My Addresses", then "Edit" next to each address. You can then change the name attached to each. There are many additional options for your five addresses. Use the previous summary as a starting point to determine your best strategy. The next step I recommend is to create folders for every address. This will make it easier to identify which email is associated with a specific account. Conduct the following.

- Navigate to "Settings" > "Folders/Labels" > "Add Folder".
- Create a new folder for each email account.
- Navigate to "Settings" > "Filters" > "Add Filter".
- Create a new filter for each email address.

The following is an example which will route all incoming mail to the email address of purchases1980@protonmail.com to the folder I created titled Purchases.

> Name: Purchases
> Conditions: If the recipient is exactly purchases1980@protonmail.com
> Actions: Move to Purchases

Repeat this for each email alias. When finished, you should have all alias accounts listed in the lower left corner of your email portal. You can now easily identify which alias account received a message, and will be less likely to respond as your real name. No messages will appear in your global inbox, which provides isolation. Each folder will display an indication that a new message has been received.

While ProtonMail possesses great privacy and security with the default settings, there are things which can be improved. I apply the following for all clients.

Disable remote images: Many email images contain tracking pixels which identify the IP address and device information when opened. Click on "Settings", "Account", then change "Load Embedded Images" to "Manual". Next, change "Request Link Confirmation" to "Enabled". This will prompt you for authorization to open any links within a message. This prevents accidental link clicking, and displays the entire URL before opening.

Disable Auto-Contact Storage: By default, ProtonMail saves the contact details of any outgoing messages, including responses. This leads to a contact list full of people who are rarely contacted and leaves potential evidence of sensitive associations. I prefer to disable this option completely at "Settings" > "Account" > "Automatically Save Contacts" > "Disabled".

Account Access: Most ProtonMail users access their account from the official website at protonmail.com. I always prefer to use the Beta site at beta.protonmail.com. This always presents the latest features which are being tested, but have not been released publicly. I bookmark this page to make sure I access it instead of the main page. I use the ProtonMail app on all mobile devices, including my primary GrapheneOS unit. For that purpose, it can be installed via the Aurora Store, as previously explained.

Email Forwarding from Previous Provider

You likely have a current personal email address that you have been using for several years. This may be a Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, or other free provider. I recommend ceasing all outgoing activity from these accounts. These companies have the ability to monitor your communications and will provide all of your content if presented a court order, even as a result of a malicious civil lawsuit. An employee with ill intent has the ability to export all communications and send them to anyone willing to pay the appropriate fee for this illegal service. We simply cannot trust any company to access our most sensitive messages.

However, I never recommend deleting any accounts. If you start using your new ProtonMail account for all of your personal communication, that does not eliminate the need for your old accounts. You will continue to receive desired email through these accounts, and you may need to use an old account to verify your identity to a service such as your bank. Instead of manually checking these accounts, consider forwarding all of your email to your new ProtonMail account after you archive and delete all stored content (as explained momentarily).

All major email providers allow you to forward incoming email messages to another address. This allows you to receive the emails being sent to your old accounts without logging in to the services (and providing details about your computer and connection). You will not be able to send email from these old accounts, but that should be avoided anyway. All of your email to old accounts will appear in your new ProtonMail account. Any outgoing message will be from this ProtonMail account. The following steps will forward your email from the old accounts. If yours is not listed, an internet search will provide all you need.

- Gmail: "Settings" > "Forwarding and POP/IMAP" > "Add a Forwarding Address"
- Yahoo: "Settings" > "Accounts" > "Forward"
- Microsoft: "Settings" > "Options" > "Mail" > "Forwarding" > "Start Forwarding"
- Apple: "Preferences" > "Forward my email to"
- Fastmail: "Settings" > "Filters & Rules" > "Create New Rule"

Overall, think of your new ProtonMail address as your primary email account, replacing anything previously used, such as a Gmail account. It should only be used for desired communications. It is your personal email account and can be registered in your real name. I actually recommend this in case you ever need to prove yourself as the true owner. Know that your stored email messages cannot be accessed by anyone without your authorization, including ProtonMail employees, criminal hackers, or governments. Try to avoid using this address for newsletters and junk registrations. You should consider creating a masked forwarding account for anything that is not vital to you, as explained next.

Masked Email Forwarding

For several years, all of my clients had received a free email forwarding account from **Blur** (dnt.abine.com), **AnonAddy** (anonaddy.com), **33Mail** (33mail.com), or **SimpleLogin** (simplelogin.io/?slref=osint). Some clients activated accounts at all four services. **Today, I only configure an account with SimpleLogin** in order to simplify the benefits of email forwarding services. These companies protect your personal email account by allowing you to create numerous unique email addresses. Any email sent to these addresses will be forwarded to your personal (ProtonMail) email account. These prevent merchants and services from knowing your real email address, but allows you to receive email communication and confirmation links. I choose SimpleLogin as the priority service due to the following features included with the free tier.

- Completely Open Source: The source code from every SimpleLogin application, including the website itself, is completely open source and available to the public.
- Mobile App Availability: Many forwarding services require access to a web portal to create aliases, SimpleLogin has a dedicated mobile app which I use often.
- Unlimited Bandwidth: There is no limit to the amount of incoming email messages.
- Unlimited Sending: You can send email from a masked alias forwarding account, which is typically a paid feature in other providers.

SimpleLogin offers free and premium tiers, and the free option is usually sufficient for most clients. You can choose either a custom username based on a keyword, such as contact.boatkeeper@simplelogin.co, or something random such as 98f11458-7c6f-457f-a045-c58d05ccf70@simplelogin.co. Both allow unlimited incoming messages and outgoing replies to incoming mail, but the free plan limits users to fifteen alias addresses. A premium plan costing $30 annually provides unlimited aliases and allows a catchall domain option. Let's begin with a typical configuration for a client.

I create a free account, providing the alias ProtonMail email address during registration. I believe that all forwarding email from services such as SimpleLogin should be sent to the alias account instead of the primary address. This prevents SimpleLogin from knowing your true identity. I then activate two-factor authentication (2FA) within the "Settings" link. I use Authy for this security. The account is now ready for use.

In the "Aliases" tab, you can either generate a random email address or configure a custom option. The random option, which may appear similar to contact.boatkeeper@simplelogin.co may be sufficient, especially when used for newsletters or other automated registrations. I prefer the custom option, which allows me to designate and identify the addresses easily. I may make an address similar to newsletters.resources@simplelogin.co. I can then use this for all online newsletters and blogs which require an email address. This is simpler to remember and will allow me to compartmentalize all of this usage within a single forwarding address. I may create another similar to removals.resources@simplelogin.co. This may be used when websites demand an email address in order to remove my personal information from their websites, which is explained later. This can be completed within the website or the mobile app as needed.

Once you have an alias created, you can also send email from that address. Click the "Send Email" from within the app or site and provide the recipient's email address. Click "Create reverse-alias" and then "Copy reverse-alias". Create a new message from your alias ProtonMail account which was used to create the SimpleLogin account. Paste the copied reverse-alias into the address field. You can now compose and send your email message as normal. The message will bounce through SimpleLogin's servers and appear to come from your chosen alias. Your ProtonMail address will not be visible. This may seem like a lot of effort, but should only be required on rare occasion. These accounts are mostly used for receiving email.

Most importantly, NEVER use a forwarding or masking email service for anything vital. I would never recommend a Blur, AnonAddy, SimpleLogin, or 33Mail address for use with anything related to finances or banking. If these email services would disappear tomorrow, you would lose access to the accounts. Some of these services, such as 33Mail, have a bandwidth limitation. If your incoming messages exceed ten megabytes per month, all future messages will be rejected. This could be catastrophic if you are anticipating an important email. This is another reason I prefer SimpleLogin.

If forced to provide my next recommendation, it would be AnonAddy. I no longer use Blur or 33Mail due to global recognition that these are forwarding services. Many sites refuse their addresses due to abuse. To be fair, this could happen to SimpleLogin eventually.

Let's pause and take a look at this strategy of email usage. Assume your alias ProtonMail address is joe.johnson@protonmail.com. Any time you need to sign up for something that will likely send junk mail which is not vital to you, you have an optional forwarding account of newsletters.resources@simplelogin.com. If you begin receiving too much unwanted email from an alias, you can block all future communications by simply disabling the address within the "Aliases" tab. If you know you never need that alias address again, you can delete it and recover that option within your fifteen free aliases.

I rely on the paid tier in order to possess unlimited forwarding aliases. This allows me to generate a unique address for every need. This also provides an option to assign my own custom domain with their service, but I do not do this. I will explain my preference for a custom email domain next. After about one year of personal usage, I became a SimpleLogin affiliate. You can throw a few bucks toward my free podcast by signing up with my affiliate link at **simplelogin.io/?slref=osint**.

Custom Domain Email Addresses

I now present the strategy I use for almost all of my email communications. It is a bit extreme, but provides a new level of digital security which is missing from the previous examples. In each of those, you are relying on third-party services outside of your control for your email communications. This alone is not that bad, as we always rely on SOMEONE to host our email. What if you should lose your access to that account? In those scenarios, I chose ProtonMail as my email provider and SimpleLogin as my email forwarder. What if they disappeared, terminated my account, or suspended my access due to suspicion of fraud? While all of this is extremely unlikely, the chance still exists. Therefore, I prefer to take advantage of the secure hosting provided by ProtonMail while controlling the avenues of communication with my own domain. This will require many steps, but the end result is worth the effort.

A "Professional" tier ProtonMail plan is required in order to bring in your own domain with catch-all support. I prefer to pay via Bitcoin, but an "anonymous" debit card could also be used (both are explained later). A paid domain registrar is also required in order to secure a custom domain name. For domain registration, I prefer Namecheap. However, I never recommend their other products. I find their web hosting to be awful compared to other providers, but their domain services are ideal. Namecheap provides affordable domains and includes their own WhoIs privacy service for free. This masks your registration information from public view. Some registrars charge up to $20 annually for hiding these details. Our first step is to secure a domain name. What should you choose? Here are three considerations.

- **Do Not Choose Your Name**: You may be tempted to secure your real name within the domain, similar to michaelbazzell.com, but this has many disadvantages. While it works well when giving out an email address while using your true identity, it appears suspicious when trying to use an alias. Bob.Smith@michaelbazzell.com would raise some eyebrows and give away your real name.
- **Keep It Generic**: I prefer a domain name which could be associated with any real or alias name I choose. I also prefer to stay away from privacy-themed domain names, as they can also raise suspicion during online purchases. Generic domains including the term "mail" work well for me. During this writing, I purchased the domain "securemail.work" from Namecheap for $2.88 with a $6.88 annual renewal. Trying to obtain a short domain name with a ".com" extension can be difficult as most good options are taken. I can now be myself with michaelbazzell@securemail.work, create an alias email account such as bob.smith@securemail.work, or become generic such as office@securemail.work. I also created a landing page at securemail.work.
- **Top Level Domain (TLD)**: There are many ways to end your domain such as .com, .net, .biz, etc. In the previous example, I chose ".work" in order to test my strategy cheaply. However, this extension may confuse people. If you are choosing a domain name which you will use for many years, a ".com" TLD is probably most appropriate. For daily use, I rely on michaelbazzell.com for most work email addresses, including accounts configured for employees, which are all hosted at ProtonMail.

During checkout, Namecheap will demand to know your real name and physical address. While they do not share this publicly, they can legally sell and share it with third-party partners. Using John Doe at 1212 Main Street will earn you a quick account suspension from Namecheap, as false information violates the rules imposed by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN). Their policies require you to be honest about the details you provide. I do not see a problem with this since the domain will eventually be associated with your true name anyway. I offer the following solution which may work well for some.

During my purchase, I created a new Namecheap account, provided my first name as "M", my last as "Bazzell", and placed my order with a Privacy.com card (explained later). During checkout, Namecheap demanded a full name, physical address, telephone number, and email address of the registrant for the domain. While you could lie on each of these, you risk losing the domain and you would be violating ICANN rules. Instead, I again provided "M. Bazzell" as my name, and the full mailing address of the hotel where I was staying at the time. I even included the room number in order to be transparent. Technically, this was my current physical residence.

I supplied my "Purchases" ProtonMail email address and a VOIP telephone number which I could access if needed. I executed the purchase, and my new domain was generated. My total cost was $3.06. I provided my true name, my true current physical address, an email address which forwarded to my ProtonMail inbox, and a VOIP number which forwarded messages to my email. I believe all of these details were accurate at that moment in time, and I violated no ICANN rules. You may disagree.

Next, I needed to configure this new domain to forward messages to my ProtonMail account, and configure my ProtonMail account to receive the messages sent to that domain. The following steps walk through the process at the time of writing.

- In the Namecheap dashboard, I clicked the "manage" button next to my new domain.
- In ProtonMail, I clicked "Settings", "Domains", then "Add Custom Domain".

- In the ProtonMail pop-up menu, I entered securemail.work as my domain.
- In the Namecheap Domain settings, I clicked "advanced DNS".
- I then clicked "Add New Record" in the "Host Records" menu.
- As instructed by ProtonMail, I chose "TXT Record", "@", and the values presented in the ProtonMail configuration pop-up within the Namecheap settings.
- In the ProtonMail dialogue, I clicked "Next".
- In the "Add Addresses" dialogue, I entered EP@securemail.work and a name of Secure Mail. I clicked "next" and allowed ProtonMail to generate my new keys.
- I clicked the "MX" button in the ProtonMail configuration menu.
- In Namecheap, I chose "Custom MX" in the Mail Setting menu. I then provided the custom settings displayed in the ProtonMail dialogue, visible in Figure 3.03.
- I added the SPF record into Namecheap as instructed by the ProtonMail dialogue.
- I added the DKIM record into Namecheap as instructed by the ProtonMail dialogue.
- I ignored the DMARC options and closed the ProtonMail pop-up window.
- When finished, I checked the "Catch All" option next to my new email address.

Within an hour, the settings were applied and ProtonMail was happy with my configuration. Figure 3.04 displays my Namecheap TXT records applied with the previous instructions.

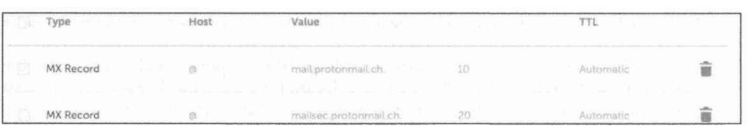


Figure 3.03: MX records for a custom domain.

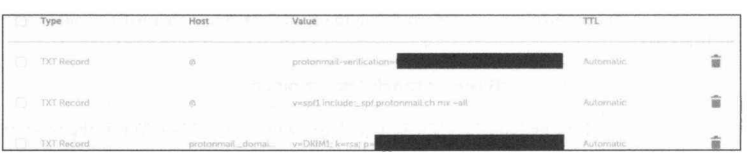


Figure 3.04: TXT records for a custom domain.

Let's pause and reflect on what we have accomplished. I purchased a domain name of securemail.work semi-anonymously. It possesses my true name but not my real address. The details of this registration are hidden from the public. I created a paid ProtonMail account. I forwarded the mail servers of the domain name to the ProtonMail service. I configured both a real email address and a wildcard address within ProtonMail. Any email sent to my domain is received in my ProtonMail account. If you send an email to EP@securemail.work, 12@securemail.work, or ihatethisbook@securemail.work, it will get to me. I can provide an unlimited number of email addresses for this domain, and all will end up in my inbox.

This is very similar to the way email forwarders work, but I have all control. My email content is stored as encrypted data, and no one at ProtonMail can view my messages. If ProtonMail should ever become unavailable, I can forward my domain within Namecheap to a new email provider and continue to access my accounts. As of this writing, over 90% of my communications are conducted within my own domains associated with my ProtonMail account. I believe this is the best email strategy.

If Namecheap refuses to activate an account due to fraud, or demands a "selfie" to prove your identity, I recommend replicating these steps with the service at **Hosting Matters** (hostmatters.com). If you encounter any issues there, tell them you are reading my book. They should unlock your account, as they have a deep respect for privacy.

Always create an account with a domain registration service BEFORE purchasing a domain. Make sure the provider does not flag your account as suspicious before locking in a desired domain with that service. Never rely on this new domain until you are confident that the registration provider has not flagged your account for review. Unfortunately, this is always a concern when we refuse to provide our true home address and cellular number to an online service provider. You may be questioning my inclusion of a real last name with my domain registration. I do this for the following three reasons.

- First, I do not want to risk losing the domain. If ICANN or the domain registration provider should demand proof of my identity in order to keep the domain, I want to be able to do so. I cannot risk someone else buying my domain because I cannot prove I am "John Doe". It could allow someone to buy my domain and impersonate me with real email addresses.
- Next, Namecheap protects my details from being publicly released with their free WhoIs privacy service. This is not perfect and there is always a chance of exposure, but it is minimal. My provided physical address and contact details are not personal, so there is not much threat.
- Finally, this domain will often be used in my real name. It is likely that a personal email address such as michaelbazzell@securemail.work will leak out eventually, so the association to my name will be obvious.

My final thought on domain registration is that there is a balance between privacy and security. If I claim to be John Doe, I risk losing the domain. If I provide all accurate details, I risk exposure. I find the previous strategy's balance to be appropriate. I prefer to provide my real name when purchasing any domains which will be publicly associated with my true identity. I will be able to prove my identity if something bad should happen. If I need something completely private, such as a website displaying controversial content, I will purchase the domain anonymously with Bitcoin at **Njalla** (njal.la). However, I would never use a domain from this service for email. Njalla technically owns the domain and you just pay them to use it. There is a higher risk of domain loss with a service such as this.

Business Email Considerations

All of the email options I have presented assume you need access as an individual. This is the most common scenario I have experienced with my clients. However, you may have more advanced needs. If you own a small business, you may want multiple employees to access their own email accounts within the same custom domain. You may currently have email addresses assigned within your domain registration and hosting service and employees may log in there via a web portal. If so, all messages are exposed in the same way which Gmail and other non-encrypted providers could be abused. I offer two options for these situations.

ProtonMail: Professional and Visionary paid tiers offer support for additional users. You can assign specific email addresses within your custom domain to unique user accounts. These accounts can be accessed by other people. You maintain all of the benefits of E2EE as you would with an individual account. You can also add extra storage as needed. My complaints about this method are two-fold. First, each account is allowed only 5GB of initial storage. If starting a new account, this should be sufficient for a while, but importing any email messages will quickly deplete this allotment. Next, the pricing is steep for the space. At $75 annually per user, five employees and yourself will cost $450 annually. You might consider the Visionary plan which allows six users to share 20GB of storage for $288 annually. It also offers more custom domains and addresses. Finally, the Visionary plan provides unlimited access to ProtonVPN. However, this associates your name with the VPN service. Choose wisely based on your own threat model.

Fastmail: This service does not provide E2EE communications. It is a traditional email service and all communications are accessible by the provider. I present it here as an appropriate option within some business

scenarios. Fastmail is the best traditional email provider I have found. My training company uses it for all email sent to our custom domain. I can assign unique addresses to each user or configure single addresses to forward to multiple people. The cost is $50 per user annually which allows up to 30GB of storage for each employee. That is very robust for the cost. This includes access to shared calendars, notes, and contacts. Again, none of the data is completely encrypted. I believe this is a great option for small businesses considering that the majority of your messages will be associated with other addresses which are also not E2EE.

Fastmail is an Australian company. They monetize all of their services and provide no free tiers. Their business model is simply fast and efficient email. A court order from an Australian government will indeed disclose any targeted communications. I use Fastmail for two of my domains which include email addresses which need to be monitored by multiple employees. My privacy consultation domain (michaelbazzell.com) is hosted on ProtonMail with addresses accessed by two employees. Either of these methods can work in these scenarios, and you should consider the overall sensitivity of your communications before making any decisions. After using Fastmail for three years, I became an affiliate. You can earn a couple of dollars for my free podcast by using https://ref.fm/u14547153 to sign up for your account.

Offline Email Archive

The ProtonMail paid plans include unlimited usage of the Import-Export utility available on their website at https://protonmail.com/blog/import-export-beta. This tool easily exports all of your messages for archival purposes. More importantly, it allows you to import all of your content from your previous email provider. If you had a Gmail account for several years, you likely possess messages which need to be accessed on occasion. You can import all of this content into your ProtonMail account for easy access without logging in to your previous account(s). Be sure to pay close attention to the storage requirements. I prefer a different strategy for most clients.

Whether you use a Mac, Windows, or Linux machine, I highly recommend possessing a backup of all email, calendars, and contacts. I rely on an open-source third-party solution called **Thunderbird** (thunderbird.net). This product is a very minimal open-source email, contacts, and calendar application. I do not recommend using it for daily access to these services, but only as an archiving solution to make sure you always have a copy of your data offline. First, let's discuss why this is so important.

Consider your primary email account. What do you possess inside of it? You likely have years' worth of valuable emails, important documents, priceless photos, and evidence of practically every online account. Could you replicate your contacts list from memory? Do you know all of your upcoming appointments without relying on your online calendar? What if it all disappeared tomorrow? If your service unexpectantly shut down, kicked you out, or was "hacked", you would not have access to all of this data. This is why everyone should always possess a full backup of all this content.

If you use Fastmail, Gmail, or any other standard email service, you can connect through a protocol known as IMAP. Clients such as Thunderbird allow you to specify the settings of your accounts, and then keep your entire email, contacts, and calendars synced to your computer for offline use. If your online accounts disappear, you still have access to your offline copies of all the data. Every reputable email service provides tutorials for connecting your client to their service via IMAP. Calendars sync via CalDAV and contacts sync via CardDAV. However, we will not use these protocols.

Encrypted email providers, such as ProtonMail, present a difficult scenario. Since the email is fully encrypted, they do not offer standard IMAP access from a third-party client. However, ProtonMail addresses this with their bridge and export applications. Available only to paid accounts, these utilities allow an email client to download all messages from their servers. This provides a full backup, the possibility of offline access, and full search capabilities within the content of the messages. Installation of the bridge application through Windows or Mac is very straight-forward. The Linux installation can be awkward. Let's set it up together.

- Within Linux, navigate to https://protonmail.com/bridge/install.
- Download the ".deb" file under the Linux option.
- Open the Files application and right-click the downloaded file.
- Select "Open with Software Install" and click "Install".
- From the Applications menu, launch the ProtonMail Bridge program.
- Click "Okay", "Add Account", enter your credentials and 2FA, then click "Next".
- Quit the Bridge app, reboot, and confirm account is present upon launch of Bridge.

Now that you have the bridge application installed and configured, you have a direct connection from your Linux operating system to the ProtonMail environment. Regardless of your operating system, we must now configure the email client. The following steps should apply to Linux, Windows, or Mac computers.

- Launch Thunderbird, which should present an email configuration menu.
- Enter your name as configured with your primary ProtonMail address.
- In ProtonMail Bridge, under "Accounts", expand the username account menu.
- Click "Mailbox configuration" and copy the username.
- Paste the username into the Thunderbird email configuration menu.
- In ProtonMail Bridge, copy the generated password.
- Paste the password into the Thunderbird email configuration menu.
- Click "Continue" and "Done".

If you receive an error about your account, you may need to verify your account is present within the Bridge app and reboot. I had to repeat these steps. You will receive an error about a security certificate once the connection is made. This is expected behavior. You can safely click "Confirm Security Exception" when this happens. Thunderbird should begin collecting your ProtonMail email, which could take a long time.

I only use this only as an offline backup of all email in the event I cannot access my ProtonMail account online. I never send email from this application. Please make sure you have a continuously updated offline copy of your data. Hopefully, you will never need it. Once configured, launch Thunderbird weekly or monthly to download new content, and verify you can access the data without an internet connection. This preparation may save you a lifetime of regret in the event of a data catastrophe. I explain this process with your encrypted contacts in just a moment. Some readers may be aware of a free program called ElectronMail which allows ProtonMail users to retrieve their offline messages through a native application. This is a well-respected option, but it is not an official ProtonMail project. While it is open-source software, I would never allow any third party to intervene within my secure encrypted email. Therefore, I do not recommend this application for those seeking extreme privacy.

Our next concern is your "old" email account. I will assume that you utilized a traditional email provider at some point in your digital life. For me, it was Gmail. I possessed many years' worth of messages within my primary Gmail account before making the switch to ProtonMail. I wanted all of those messages in both my offline archive and my online ProtonMail account. I also wanted to delete all content from within Gmail in order to prevent them from having access to my sensitive information. There are two ways to archive and remove the messages, and I will walk through each. You should be able to replicate this overall method with other traditional email providers.

Import & Archive: If using ProtonMail, you may want to import all Gmail messages into your account. This allows you to search through past messages and easily respond to a message from your new ProtonMail email address. ProtonMail offers an option to import all email from Gmail, Yahoo, and Outlook through a traditional web browser. Navigate to https://beta.protonmail.com/u/0/settings/import while logged in to your account and follow the tutorial. Once all of your email is within your ProtonMail account, you can synchronize to your

offline email client, such as Thunderbird, and you will have all email stored securely online and locally. Be sure that your storage within ProtonMail supports the data within Gmail. This may exceed your storage quota.

Archive Only: If you do not want to bring in all of your old email into your new account, you could still archive it all through your mail client. If you know you want to delete the originals from the old email host after retrieval, you can choose the "POP" protocol. This retrieves email from a provider such as Gmail and then removes the original from Gmail's servers. I typically avoid this strategy because something could go wrong. Instead, I enable "IMAP" within Gmail ("Settings" > "Forwarding and POP/IMAP" > "Enable IMAP"); launch my email client (Thunderbird); configure a new account ("File" > "New" > "Existing Mail Account"); and follow the directions. When complete, you should see all of your old email within Thunderbird as a locally-stored copy. Be sure to move all of these messages into "Local Folders" in order to prevent Gmail from deleting them on a future synchronization. I also prefer to disable synchronization by right-clicking on the new account within the mail client and disabling all options under "Server Settings", such as "Check for new messages". If paranoid, you could also change the password here to something inaccurate to prevent accidental synchronization and deletion.

Delete Originals: Regardless of your import or archiving strategy, I believe it is important to delete all email from the old service. Otherwise, all of your previous communication is available for future abuse. With Gmail, you can click a label such as "Inbox" or "All Mail"; click the drop-down arrow next to the top check box; and then select "All". This should offer a secondary option to select all emails and "Delete" them to the trash. Clicking "Trash"; selecting the emails; and clicking "Delete Forever" begins the permanent purge from Google's systems. This is not reversable, so make sure you have all data and a backup in place.

Email Privacy Concerns

A decade ago, my main concern about email privacy would have been exposure of a true IP address. Most of us still used email clients which shared the local IP address within the email headers of every sent message. The risk today is minimal. If you send an email from within a web browser through a service such as ProtonMail, Fastmail, Gmail, etc., the recipient should only see the IP address of the email server. Your true home IP address should not be exposed. If you send an email from an email client while using these services, you are also usually protected. The emails bounce through the service provider's servers before going out and only includes those addresses. However, sending email through a client configured for corporate email may expose your true IP address. As an example, sending an email from your employer's provided address through a traditional email client from home could expose these sensitive details. This is why a VPN is so important.

A larger concern is exposing your time zone within every email response. While services such as ProtonMail try to protect your location, the overall functionality of email allows for daily exposure. Consider the following example. If I send you an email at noon while I am in Los Angeles, it is received in your inbox at 3:00 pm if you are in New York. If you respond to the email, I can look within the content and see something similar to "On Feb 27, 2021, at 3:00 PM, Michael Bazzell wrote...". This confirms that you are in the Eastern time zone based on my record of sent time. This may be no big deal, as this covers a lot of land. However, if you are running from a stalker, you have just provided a starting point. This is why all of my devices stay on a specific time zone, regardless of my actual location. I also insist that my employees replicate this method in order to protect their true location.

One final consideration is email attachments. When you send documents, images, or other data, you may be disclosing personal details. Documents typically possess metadata which identifies the name of your computer, local account identifiers, and specific software version details. Images from your mobile device typically share operating system details and location information (if enabled). Screenshots, especially those generated within Apple systems typically include full date and time details within the file name. Before sending any email attachments, consider modifying the file name and removing all metadata. Mac and Windows users can right-click a file to remove metadata, which may be displayed as "Personal Information". If you are using Linux, I prefer a program called Mat2. After installation with the following two commands within Terminal, you will be

able to right-click on any file and select "Remove Metadata". This will create a "clean" version of the file directly next to the original. Always send this new version, which eliminates any metadata exposure.

- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install mat2 -y

Encrypted Email Alternatives

ProtonMail is not the only encrypted email provider. Tutanota and CTemplar are very respectable choices with free tiers. They provide a similar service to ProtonMail and I believe you could replace ProtonMail with these services in most of the previous tutorials to produce a similar result. I choose ProtonMail due to high adoption within my circles. If you see your contacts mostly using Tutanota or CTemplar, it might be more appropriate for you to use these services. Currently, 75% of my email correspondence from within my ProtonMail account is to other ProtonMail users. Less than 5% is to Tutanota addresses and very few are sent to CTemplar accounts. Therefore, it simply makes most sense for me to stick within the ProtonMail ecosystem. Tutanota and CTemplar both offer a free tier, and I encourage you to create accounts to test their services. The following are some considerations for each.

Tutanota (tutanota.com) delivers end-to-end encrypted email, contacts, and calendar services. They are based in Germany and have a strong history of respect for privacy. However, they are based in a Fourteen Eyes country, which may make a few readers nervous. They provide mobile and desktop applications and have a nice web-based interface. I have found their web interface to work well, but the mobile app is quite slow. They offer shared encrypted calendars, which is quite unique. Two paid accounts can share a single calendar, and each user can modify any entries. I find this valuable for families and work colleagues. There is no option to connect an account to a traditional desktop email client, but their desktop application will eventually store email within the host computer for offline usage.

CTemplar (ctemplar.com) is headquartered in Iceland, which is not a 14-eyes country. Their web, mobile, and desktop applications are slick and responsive. The paid tiers seem overpriced to me, but I maintain a free account for use with anyone who relies on this service for secure communication.

ProtonMail, Tutanota, and CTemplar all offer the following:

- E2EE communications within network
- Options to send encrypted messages to emails outside of their network
- Open-source applications and technologies
- No third-party analytics services within login pages or applications
- No third-party metadata collection during usage
- Free tier
- Paid tier business model
- Custom domain email accounts
- Custom domain catchall accounts
- Two-factor authentication

Encrypted Calendar and Contacts

In 2020, ProtonMail began offering an encrypted calendar service. I believe that possessing an encrypted, zero-knowledge calendar is more vital than private email. Consider the amount of sensitive information stored in your calendar. Your doctor appointments, work schedule, job interviews, location information, and travel plans disclose a lot about you. The details entered within the notes of these entries can identify your home address, medical history, or desire to leave your current employer.

Do you want all of that data visible to Google or Microsoft? I know I do not. Therefore, my calendar is protected through ProtonMail and only visible to me. Currently, there is no option to export a ProtonMail calendar for offline storage. This is unfortunate, and will hopefully be resolved in the future. If it is, exporting an ICS file and importing that file into Thunderbird should provide a reliable backup.

ProtonMail has always supplied encrypted contacts as part of their email packages. These details are also extremely sensitive. I would never want to expose the cellular telephone numbers, home addresses, and employers of my clients, friends, and family. Storing this content within products provided by companies which make profits from data sharing, such as Google, is irresponsible.

Please note that ProtonMail encrypts only the fields after Name and Email. The names and addresses of your contacts cannot be fully encrypted due to overall function requirements. I believe this is acceptable to most low-threat readers. If you have all of your contacts stored within ProtonMail, consider keeping a copy locally-stored within Thunderbird. The following explains the process.

- Navigate to your ProtonMail contacts at https://contacts.protonmail.com.
- Click "Settings" > "Export" > "Export Contacts" > "Save".
- Launch Thunderbird and click "Address Book".
- Click "Tools" then "Import".
- Select "Address Book", click "Next", choose "vCard file" and click "Next".
- Select the VCF file downloaded from ProtonMail Contacts.

I stored all of my contacts within ProtonMail for a few months, but eventually moved on to a more secure option, which is explained next. Using ProtonMail for E2EE email, calendar, and contact details is the most appropriate and convenient option for most readers, and the privacy and security is strong. Most clients go this route, as explained at the end of the chapter, which is completely acceptable. Next, I provide my own preference, which is a bit extreme.

Locally-Stored Contacts

My contacts are extremely important to me. My clients trust me with personal cell numbers, private email addresses, and the locations of their homes which are not otherwise associated with their true names. My contacts are almost as sensitive as my passwords. Because of this, I go to great lengths protecting them. There are many scenarios which I now never allow, such as the following.

- I do not store them within my phone's stock contacts app because it is often prone to abuse by apps and synchronizes content to Apple or Google by default.
- I do not store them within services such as Apple, Google, or Fastmail because they could be abused by a rogue employee or a data breach.
- I no longer store them in ProtonMail because the name and email fields cannot be encrypted, but the phone, address, etc. are encrypted, visible only to me.
- I no longer store contacts within any online platform because I would not have access to the data in the event of an internet outage or contact service disruption.

I no longer want my contacts anywhere online, much like I never store my passwords online. While there are great options, such as ProtonMail, there are still weaknesses which must be monitored. I have decided that all of my contacts will ONLY be stored offline. This presents a dilemma since I need my contacts with me at home (Linux laptop), and on the road (mobile). This leaves me with two options. I can export my online contacts and import the file into offline contact applications or transfer all contacts to a password manager.

The first step with either method is to export any online contacts as a "VCF" or "vCard" file. Below are examples for three popular email providers. You should find specific instructions for other providers with an internet search.

- **ProtonMail**: contacts.protonmail.com > "Export" > "Export Contacts"
- **Fastmail**: fastmail.com/contacts > "All contacts" menu > "Export" > "vCard 3.0"
- **Gmail**: contacts.google.com > select contact > "Select All" > "More actions" > "Export"

You can delete your contacts within the previous online storage with the following.

- **ProtonMail**: contacts.protonmail.com > select all > "Delete"
- **Fastmail**: fastmail.com/contacts > select all > "More" > "Delete"
- **Gmail**: contacts.google.com > select contact > "Select All" > "More actions" > "Delete"

Now that you have a VCF file of your contacts, you can import them into a traditional contact manager, or wait for my preferred option as explained on the next page.

- **Linux**: When I made the full-time switch to Linux, I assumed there would be plenty of suitable contact management applications. I was wrong. Staples such as Thunderbird only import names and email addresses, and open-source options such as Mailspring require association with an online account through their servers. You could install an email client called Evolution (sudo apt-get install evolution) which can import contacts ("File" > "Import" > "Next" > "Import a single file" > "Next" > [select your VCF file] > "Next" > "Next" > "Apply"). You would then have easy access to the data.
- **GrapheneOS**: The stock "Contacts" app allows import of a VCF file ("Settings" > "Import"). If you only need your contacts on that device, this is a very safe and clean way to store data.
- **macOS**: As long as you have disabled iCloud and have not provided an Apple ID, there is likely no harm in using the default Apple Contacts software application. Clicking "File", "Import", and then selecting your exported file brings in all of the contacts.
- **iOS**: Since an Apple ID is required for any iPhone system, and iCloud is often enabled by default, I never store contacts within the default iOS application. I have been unable to find a suitable contacts replacement for iOS. Therefore, I typically recommend the KeePassXC strategy or ProtonMail Contacts option, both of which are discussed momentarily.
- **Windows**: I never recommend storing contacts within the native Windows Contacts application. If Windows is your primary host, consider the option within the following pages.

There is a problem here. The contacts within each application have no synchronization option. If you update or add a contact on your laptop, that change is not reflected within your mobile device. Using online sync options such as iCloud have their advantages, but also carry risk. Since I refuse to synchronize and store contacts via the internet, I am forced to use a manual update process. This is why I choose to store my contacts within KeePassXC, as explained within the following pages. Updating contacts is as easy as replacing the database file. I consider the copy on my laptop as the primary database to which I make any changes. The mobile versions are "read-only" and updated on occasion.

I realize we are going a bit far down the privacy rabbit hole. Choose the option best for your needs. I have many clients who do not object to storing their contacts within ProtonMail. They have easy access across web and mobile, and only the names and email address fields are not encrypted. I do not judge anyone going that route. I apply extra scrutiny toward myself solely due to the contact data being associated with high-risk clients. I have decided to use a password manager for my contacts, which securely stores any sensitive content. I have hundreds of contacts, even after pruning people with which I no longer communicate. Manual entry is out of the question. Since I had everything in ProtonMail, I used their export feature to create a VCF file. A typical partial entry looked like the following.

```
BEGIN:VCARD
VERSION:4.0
TEL;PREF=1;TYPE=voice:(202) 555-1212
TEL;PREF=2;TYPE=voice:303-555-1212
ADR;TYPE=x-adr:;;1234 Main;Houston;TX;77089;USA
ORG:Privacy Corp
NOTE:We met at Blackhat
FN:John Doe
item1.EMAIL;TYPE=x-email:jdoe@protonmail.com
END:VCARD
```

Note that I could have exported the same type of file via Fastmail and Gmail with a protocol of vCard 3.0 or higher. A typical CSV export would have been missing phone numbers if more than one entry for personal numbers was present. I always prefer VCF files over CSV. Now that I have a single file with hundreds of contacts, I need to clean it up. I cannot import this file into my password manager (KeePassXC) unless I have one clean entry per line. I also need a single field with the full name of my contact, followed by all of the remaining data colon delimited. The full name cannot possess a comma because we need everything to import correctly, and KeePassXC sees a comma as a delimiter.

First, I want to rename the downloaded VCF file to "contacts.vcf" and place it on my Desktop. Then, I want to remove the unnecessary lines with the following commands within Terminal on Linux. I focus on Linux since this is an advanced strategy. Either an Ubuntu host or virtual machine, as previously explained, will suffice for this task. All of the commands in this section are available on my website at **inteltechniques.com/EP** and can be copied and pasted in one action, which is highly recommended over manual entry.

```
sed -i '/^VERSION/d' contacts.vcf
sed -i '/^UID\:/d' contacts.vcf
sed -i '/^PRODID\:/d' contacts.vcf
sed -i '/^item1\.X/d' contacts.vcf
sed -i '/^END\:/d' contacts.vcf
sed -i '/^REV/d' contacts.vcf
```

I now have entries such as the following.

```
TEL;PREF=1;TYPE=voice:(202) 555-1212
TEL;PREF=2;TYPE=voice:303-555-1212
ADR;TYPE=x-adr:;;1234 Main;Houston;TX;77089;USA
ORG:Privacy Corp
NOTE:We met at Blackhat
FN:John Doe
EMAIL;TYPE=x-email:jdoe@protonmail.com
```

I need all of the data on one line per contact. The following two commands eliminate all line breaks and then separate each contact, and renames our working copy to contacts.txt.

```
tr -d "\n\r" < contacts.vcf > contacts.txt
sed -i 's/BEGIN\:VCARD/\n/g' contacts.txt
```

I want all of my telephone numbers to appear as ten digits without hyphens, periods, or parentheses. This is because some dialers need a pure number. The following cleans this, and I executed each of these a few times.

```
sed -i 's/(\([0-9]*\)) \([0-9]*\)-\([0-9]*\)/\1\2\3/' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/(\([0-9]*\)) \([0-9]*\)\([0-9]*\)/\1\2\3/' contacts.txt
```

```
sed -i 's/\([0-9]*\)-\([0-9]*\)-\([0-9]*\)/\1\2\3/' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\([0-9]*\)\.\([0-9]*\)\.\([0-9]*\)/\1\2\3/' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\([0-9]*\)-\([0-9]*\)/\1\2/' contacts.txt
```

My telephone numbers now appear much cleaner:

```
TEL;PREF=1;TYPE=voice:2025551212
TEL;PREF=2;TYPE=voice:3035551212
```

The following commands finish the cleanup using Terminal in Ubuntu.

```
sed -i 's/^[^FN:]*FN://g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/^[^:]*://g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\,/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\;/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/NICKNAME\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/ORG\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TITLE\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/NOTE\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/home\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/HOME\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/work\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/WORK\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/cell\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/CELL\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/INTERNET\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TEL\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/EMAIL\:TYPE\=//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/ADR\://g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/main\://g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/internet\:TYPE\=//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TEL\:TYPE\=//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TYPE\=pref//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TYPE\=voice//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/TYPE\=//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/ADR\:PREF\=[0-9]//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/BDAY\:00\-00\-00FN//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/PREF\=[0-9]//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/ITEM[0-9]\.EMAIL//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/CATEGORIES\:myContacts//g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/item[0-9]\.\://g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\:\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\:\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\:\:/\:/g' contacts.txt
sed -i 's/\:/\,/2' contacts.txt
```

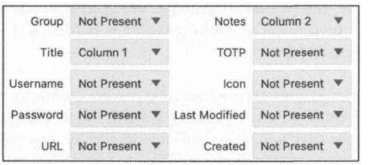
I now have everything in order on one line, without any unnecessary junk, ready for import. Each of my contact list entries appear as follows.

```
Doe:John,jdoe@protonmail.com:2025551212:3035551212:1234 Main:Houston:TX:77089:USA:
Privacy Corp:We met at Blackhat
```

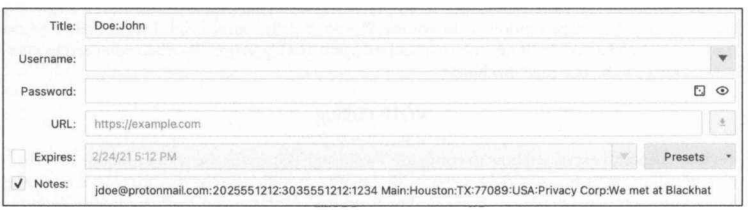
Next, I can import this list into KeePassXC with the following steps.

- Rename contacts.txt to contacts.csv
- KeePassXC > Database > Import > CSV File…
- Label as "Contacts" > Continue > Continue > Enter Password > Done
- Save as "Contacts.kbdx"

When prompted, apply the following configuration.



My contacts are clean and sorted by last name. An individual entry appears as follows.



I can now save this database and copy it to my mobile devices for use with Strongbox (iOS) or Keepass2Android Offline (Android). I can copy/paste any numbers or email addresses from KeePassXC into email or VOIP calling applications. It is offline and securely encrypted. If the database should get in the wrong hands, it is useless without the decryption password.

It may be easy to scoff at this technique as unnecessary paranoia. You might be right. However, consider two scenarios. I have many clients who have moved to anonymous homes; make calls with anonymous VOIP numbers; and send emails from private accounts. I know all of the true details because I set it all up and use this information to contact them. If I placed this all in a Gmail account, it is exposed to Google employees, criminal hackers, and unknown third parties. That is unacceptable. If you are still not convinced, consider your own details. Would you want me to place your home address, cellular number, email account, and other sensitive content within an online repository which may later share or sell your information? I know I do not want my details exposed, so I protect the integrity of my clients' information.

Account Summary

Hopefully you now have an email, calendar, and contacts solution which is private and secure. We should bring absolutely nothing from our past life into our new private life. Once you have new hardware and new accounts for communication, my preference is that you never access the old accounts from your new devices. The previous forwarding strategies are fine, and should work without logging in to your old accounts. This is especially important for mobile devices, and I insist that Google apps are never installed anywhere. This would immediately associate the new device with the old Gmail account, and ruin the isolation created.

I realize that the previous email strategies can seem overwhelming. As stated previously, privacy is a marathon, not a sprint. Each step you take makes you more private and secure. You can always upgrade your strategy once

you have an understanding of the basics. You may also tweak pieces of each option and create your own solution. My goal is to simply present numerous ideas to aid in your own execution. Privacy and security are never simply black or white. A single solution is never appropriate for everyone. Take the time to consider your best options for your own situation.

I encourage you to begin visually creating your own email strategy. I often draw diagrams, using pencil and paper, until I have created a workflow that makes most sense for a specific client. This may seem archaic, but the visual representation helps me. My overall strategy has changed considerably since I began this journey. I would anticipate changes to your own plans as your digital life is hardened. I know I will never be completely satisfied with my own methods due to paranoia.

Now that you have the basics covered, let's expand our new private computer. Most, if not all, of the following applications and techniques will work on any operating system, but I will always place emphasis on Ubuntu Linux. My goal is to demonstrate that you can replicate practically any task from your Windows or Mac environments within Linux. If you are a Mac user, I will assume you have already installed Brew as previously explained. I assume Linux users are now comfortable with the Terminal environment. Windows users can download most applications as standard installation files. However, I encourage you to research a package manager called **Chocolatey** (chocolatey.org). It simplifies most software installations into a single command entered in a Command Prompt window. I do not use Windows daily, but if I did, I would rely on Chocolatey for most software installations. It allows you to install software quickly, especially when you need to install many new programs into a host or virtual machine.

VOIP Calling

In the previous chapter, I explained how to configure Twilio and Telnyx for use with Linphone in order to make and receive telephone calls from VOIP numbers. My favorite modification of this strategy is to configure my laptop to act as my primary telephone. You can download the Linphone app from linphone.org and install as you would any other program. On Mac, I entered "brew install linphone" within Terminal. On my Ubuntu Linux machine, I conducted the following.

- Navigate to linphone.org/releases/linux/app/ and download the latest version.
- Right-click the file, select "Properties", "Permissions", and enable "Allow executing".
- Double-click the downloaded file to launch. Copy this file to the Desktop if desired.

You may need to reboot Linux before the application will launch. After opening the software, conduct the following for the appropriate service (or both).

Twilio:

- If prompted upon launch of Linphone, choose "Account Assistant".
- Click "Use a SIP Account".
- Enter a "Username" of your number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "Display Name" of your telephone number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "SIP Domain" of your full domain which was used in the previous chapter.
- Enter the "Password" you previously created for the credential account.
- Change the "Transport" to "TLS". If this ever fails, try "UDP" or "TCP".

Telnyx:

- If prompted upon launch of Linphone, choose "Account Assistant".
- Click "Use a SIP Account".
- Enter a "Username" of your number, such as "2025551212".

- Enter a "Display Name" of your telephone number, such as "2025551212".
- Enter a "SIP Domain" of sip.telnyx.com.
- Enter the "Password" you previously created for the credential account.
- Change the "Transport" to "TLS". If this ever fails, try "UDP" or "TCP".

Your Linphone laptop application can now make calls from the same VOIP numbers which were previously configured for your mobile device. Incoming Twilio and Telnyx calls will ring to whichever device is open.

Secure Communication Applications

In the previous chapter, I explained secure communication applications such as Signal and Wire. Another benefit of these services over traditional SMS text messaging is the ability to install them as desktop applications for use within a traditional computer. Both offer native Windows and Mac apps on their website. For Mac, you can enter "brew install signal" and "brew install wire" within Terminal. As expected, Linux requires some additional steps. The following commands are included at **inteltechniques.com/EP** for easy copy and paste.

- wget -O- https://updates.signal.org/desktop/apt/keys.asc | gpg --dearmor > signal-desktop-keyring.gpg
- sudo mv signal-desktop-keyring.gpg /usr/share/keyrings/
- echo 'deb [arch=amd64 signed-by=/usr/share/keyrings/signal-desktop-keyring.gpg] https://updates.signal.org/desktop/apt xenial main' |\ sudo tee -a /etc/apt/sources.list.d/signal-xenial.list
- sudo apt update && sudo apt install signal-desktop
- sudo apt install apt-transport-https
- echo "deb [arch=amd64] https://wire-app.wire.com/linux/debian stable main" | sudo tee /etc/apt/sources.list.d/wire-desktop.list
- sudo apt update && sudo apt install wire-desktop

After installation, you can log in to any Wire account through the Linux application. Launching Signal presents a QR code which will need scanned with your mobile device. Open Signal on mobile; open "Settings"; click "Linked Devices"; then "Link New Device". Your device will prompt you to scan the relevant code.

Notes

Applications such as Evernote, OneNote, and Apple's iCloud Notes are extremely convenient. They also store your sensitive content in an unencrypted state for employees, criminal hackers, and third-party companies to abuse. I never recommend any of these services to clients. Instead, I rely solely on **Standard Notes** (standardnotes.org) for all of my notes and task lists. This service, with free and paid tiers, provides an elegant application for all major platforms, including mobile devices. All notes are end-to-end encrypted with zero-knowledge from the provider. The free plans are sufficient for most users. Notes updated on one device synchronize securely to all other devices. Many of my clients share a single account with multiple family members as a way to keep track of upcoming events and tasks. My notes and outlines for this book were stored completely within Standard Notes at all times. Linux users can download the "app image" and apply the same methods as Linphone on the previous page for installation. Mac users can enter "brew install standard-notes" into Terminal.

Account Access Monitoring

You likely now possess multiple new online accounts associated with email, messaging, VOIP, and domain registration. Hopefully, you provided new usernames, randomly-generated passwords, and secure two-factor authentication. The chance of unauthorized access to these accounts is slim, but never impossible. You should consider occasional monitoring of various access logs. This could identify attempted or successful access into your accounts. Let's walk through a few of the options which have been previously presented.

ProtonMail: Navigate to "Settings" > "Manage Account" > "Security" from within a web browser. The "Session Management" section displays all apps which have accessed your ProtonMail account. This includes mobile apps, ProtonVPN sessions, and the bridge application. If you see anything suspicious, you can revoke the authentication for that instance. The "Authentication Logs" section displays every login attempt through the ProtonMail website. This includes unsuccessful attempts and the IP addresses of the connections. This can identify malicious login attempts from an adversary.

Messaging: If someone attempts to take over your Signal account, you will receive a text message or call to the VOIP number associated with the account. This is not a high risk. Wire sends you an email any time a new device (including web browser) accesses the account. If you ever want to confirm any connected device, navigate to "Settings" > "Devices" within the Wire application.

VOIP: If you use a Google Voice account with 2FA, you are probably secure from outside attacks. However, you can always see the connection logs at https://myaccount.google.com by clicking "Security" > "Review security activity". Unfortunately, neither Twilio or Telnyx offer a way to monitor account access. Be sure to enable 2FA on those accounts.

Domain/Host: This may be the most important monitoring option for those who own custom domains and web hosting. Navigate to your "cPanel" dashboard available within your account portal. Click "Contact Information" in the "Preferences" section. Confirm your desired email address and select every option in the "Notify me when..." area. This generates an email any time your account is accessed. This includes website logins, FTP connections, and any other feature which requires credentials. This can identify attempts to access your domain and hosting, which could be devastating.

Consider all of your online accounts and identify those which offer similar monitoring options. If you are targeted by a tech-savvy stalker, these logs can identify any attacks and may provide evidence for law enforcement.

Tor Browser

You may be wondering why I did not mention the Tor Browser (torproject.org) during the previous private web browsing section. This software has many valuable privacy-related uses, but also just as many hindrances. First, we should understand what the Tor Browser does. It is open-source software for enabling anonymous communication over the internet. It directs all internet traffic through a free volunteer network consisting of thousands of international "relays" to conceal a user's location and usage from anyone conducting network surveillance or traffic analysis. Similar to a VPN, the Tor network disguises your identity by moving your traffic across different servers, and encrypting that traffic so it is not traced back to you. The Tor Browser is free and can be downloaded on Windows, Mac, and Linux. It relies on a hardened version of Firefox and appears similar to a standard browser in many ways. I conducted the following within Terminal to install Tor within Ubuntu.

- sudo add-apt-repository ppa:micahflee/ppa
- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install torbrowser-launcher -y

Mac users can enter "brew install tor-browser" within Terminal.

The Tor Browser is present on every machine I use, but I do not use it every day. In fact, my hardened Firefox browser receives far more usage than the Tor Browser. This is due to many hurdles associated with web browsing over the Tor network. Any time you connect to a website while using the Tor Browser, that site absolutely knows you are on the "anonymous" Tor network. Unfortunately, there is a negative connotation associated with Tor. Many companies still believe it is mostly used by online drug dealers, credit card thieves, and criminal enterprises.

While crime is still very present within the Tor network, it is no longer the majority of traffic. Many traditional sites will scrutinize traffic from this network and present difficulties while attempting normal internet usage across standard websites. Many websites present multiple captchas from Google in order to load a page. Online marketplaces such as Amazon tend to block payments. Some web firewalls throttle traffic from Tor users making it difficult to load web pages. Many social networks suspend accounts after a Tor-enabled connection. Because of these reasons, I am hesitant to encourage clients to make the Tor Browser their primary internet connection. However, I stress the importance of possessing this option and relying on the Tor network in the following scenarios.

- International Travel: There are many countries which block access to VPN connections. Furthermore, many public Wi-Fi connections block VPN software from securing a private connection. In many of these instances, the Tor Browser will bypass these restrictions. You may need to reconnect many times until you find a connection which is allowed and not blacklisted within an internal database.
- Sensitive Content: My job requires me to investigate dark areas of the internet. If I expect to encounter criminal activity, stolen data, or counter-surveillance, I am always connected through the Tor Browser (on my VPN-protected machine). This extra layer of protection removes reliability on my VPN provider to protect my identity, and eliminates the risk of a malicious Tor node from discovering my true IP address. This is probably overkill, and only reserved for extreme scenarios.
- Tor Content: There are thousands of websites which can only be accessed within the Tor network. This browser can access these sites as well as all open internet sites. If you ever see a website address ending in ".onion", you will need the Tor Browser in order to access the site.
- Restricted Content: Some public networks filter internet traffic such as dating websites, social networks, and mature content. My library blocks Craigslist for some reason. Some countries block news or content which contradicts their own agendas. In 2019, Russia was blocking access to ProtonMail. Tor eliminates these roadblocks.

If you anticipate extensive travel to countries which block open internet access, I would configure a pluggable transport within the Tor Browser before travel. I use **Meek**. Meek is an obfuscation layer for Tor designed to evade internet censorship. Traffic is relayed through a third-party server which is difficult to detect and block. More details can be found on the official Tor website at trac.torproject.org/projects/tor/wiki/doc/meek.

File Sharing

Occasionally, you may need to send large files to someone remotely. Most email providers have a 25MB limit on attachments. If you need to transmit a 750MB video, large PowerPoint document, or any other file exceeding the email limits, consider the free version of **Tresorit** (send.tresorit.com). This service allows you to upload a file up to 5GB in size and generates a link to share with optional password. The recipient to whom you provide the link has only 7 days to download the file. It is permanently deleted after a week. The content you upload is protected with end-to-end encryption. This prevents Tresorit employees or anyone else with server access from the ability to see your content. You can provide an email address and receive immediate notification every time the data is downloaded. This system is not perfect, and I would never use it for extremely sensitive content, but it works well for daily sharing tasks. When I have content for which I will need consistent access, I place it in my **Proton Drive** account, which is included with premium subscriptions. I can also share data from this account with secure password-protected and encrypted links.

Traveling with Devices

When you travel, especially internationally, you increase your chances of an encounter with a government official who demands access to your data. This could be an extremely minimal risk during a traffic stop while being suspected of drug trafficking, or a much more likely scenario of being intercepted while entering another country. Regardless of your likelihood of being detained and questioned, you should be prepared for an unfortunate encounter. When I travel, I assume that I will be asked for access to my data at some point. Therefore, I prepare for this possibility in advance in order to avoid temptation to submit to a search of my data.

Some may fall back on the "I have nothing to hide" argument when being asked by an immigration official for full access to personal devices. I believe it is very inappropriate to hand over your data to any third party, especially a foreign government upon entry into a new territory. Many countries are embracing new technology such as Cellebrite forensic acquisition devices which suck up all data from a mobile device in minutes. This data is stored indefinitely, and likely insecurely. The country you entered may have little interest in the data they collected about you, but the intruder who later steals that data can abuse it without your knowledge. My preference is to avoid any data collection which may violate my privacy. We never know when collected data will be breached, leaked, sold, or stolen.

Domestic Travel (Vehicle): I have never encountered a situation while driving throughout America where my data was in jeopardy. I obey ~~all~~ most traffic laws and try to minimize any interest from law enforcement. I keep all of my data encrypted and backed-up, so theft is not a huge concern. Unless you are under arrest, or a search warrant has been issued, law enforcement has no right to take custody of any devices. If you are under arrest, a search warrant will be required to legally extract the data from any confiscated devices. Consent may be requested, which you can deny. If probable cause that you have committed a crime has been established, you begin to lose your rights to privacy. If a search warrant for your devices has been obtained, you have problems.

Currently, the Cellebrite I mentioned previously is suspected to have the ability to bypass the encryption of some Android and Apple devices. This is usually short-lived, as device manufacturers and forensic companies play cat-and-mouse with their abilities to protect data and defeat encryption. Some judges have ruled that fingerprints CAN be obtained by police in order to unlock a phone (U.S. Supreme Court Riley vs. California) while other magistrates declare that officials CANNOT force you to give up biometrics (U.S. Northern District of California Case # 4-19-70053). In other words, there is no clear answer. This is one reason I require a PIN to unlock my mobile device. I have the fingerprint and face identification options disabled while I travel.

Readers who are in law enforcement may scoff at my remarks here, but there is no ill-intent. As a retired law enforcement officer, I understand that people can get caught up in investigations surrounding illegal activity without committing any crimes. In 2016, I was in a vehicle driven by a ride-sharing contractor, hailed through the official mobile application for that company. After picking me up, the vehicle was stopped by under-cover police detectives and the driver was arrested. He was wanted on serious drug conspiracy charges and likely headed to prison. Understandably, the detectives questioned me sternly at the scene of the arrest. I was able to explain my presence, display visual proof of the hired ride on my device, and justify that I was not involved in their investigation.

However, a detective requested to connect my device to a Cellebrite in order to prove my innocence and later critique my story if needed. I declined consent to the data acquisition, which was met with great skepticism. I politely explained my former career and stance on privacy, and insisted I would not voluntarily grant access to my device. My retired badge and credentials likely aided this conversation, which is unfair to civilians in the same predicament. I completely understand the request for my data, and I would have probably acted similarly when I was investigating felony and federal crimes. On the surface, I appeared to be connected to a major felony drug trafficking investigation. Detectives must exhaust all investigation tactics, which includes a thorough look into anyone contacted during the arrest. I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

If I had allowed my device to be extracted, the data would have been stored at the police department; provided to the prosecutor and defense during the discovery process; and accessible to countless attorneys, clerks, interns, and the defendant. I lose all control, and my identity, messages, emails, contacts, and history could be exposed publicly. Realistically, no one would have paid much attention to me as I was cleared in the investigation. However, I simply refuse to expose my personal data.

This may all seem far-fetched, but scenarios such as this play out every day. This is why I enable the best possible encryption I can on any devices with me while I travel. This includes laptops. I will obey all legal demands, I will cooperate with law enforcement, but I will not unnecessarily associate my personal data with unrelated investigations. If you find yourself in a similar situation, I encourage you to be polite and helpful, but also to

understand your rights and know your boundaries for consent. You cannot call them later and ask them to delete all of your data.

Domestic Travel (Air): I fly a lot throughout America, and I pass through Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoints more than I desire. I remove my laptop and mobile device from my bag, place them in the worn grey containers, and hope I am not pulled aside for secondary inspection. Fortunately, I have never been asked to unlock my devices during domestic air travel, but I know others who have.

Prior to 2010, TSA agents were asking people to unlock their laptops and mobile devices as proof they functioned properly. This was due to a specific threat about explosives being stored within electronic devices. I have never heard of any data acquisition during this time, which was short-lived. The greater concern is the reported incidents where domestic travelers were required by TSA to unlock their phones and these devices were taken out of sight of the civilian for several minutes. There is speculation that TSA possesses mobile device forensic acquisition units, but I have no evidence of this.

TSA officials have responded to these allegations stating it "does not search electronic devices for electronic content that may be contained on the device, and does not extract data from passenger electronic devices" and that physically analyzing the devices "is solely intended to verify that there has been no physical tampering or hidden threat placed within the electronic device".

In my experience, your chances of being asked to unlock any type of device during domestic travel is extremely rare. I almost always travel with my primary laptop (full-disk encryption) and my travel mobile device (GrapheneOS with default encryption and 12+ digit PIN). The role of the TSA is to scan people and luggage for physical threats. Any interest in your data will likely be very targeted and searches would probably be conducted by another organization such as U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). That brings us to international travel.

International Travel (Vehicle): This is where things can get tricky. The moment you leave one country and enter another, you are at a higher risk of data interception and acquisition. When leaving America and entering Mexico via vehicle, your chances of any demands to access your devices is very minimal. This can change if you are on a "list" of suspicious individuals, but most people should have no issues. Canada is a different matter. I have found the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to be more scrutinous than most other countries.

In my experience, entering Canada by vehicle provides just as high of a likelihood of secondary screening as air travel. Many people refer to their "rights" prohibiting the search of their devices, but this is inappropriate thinking. You can absolutely refuse to allow a search of your data at the Canadian border. In return, Canada can refuse you entry into the country. If you are demanded to unlock a device and refuse, you will not likely be arrested. You will simply be shown the way back across the border into America.

For the record, I have never received a demand to unlock a device by the CBSA. I have received my share of secondary interrogation due to some questionable border crossings, and was once detained for several hours, but my devices were never compromised. However, the CBSA is fairly transparent about their rights to inspect the content on your devices. The CBSA can search any device entering the country without any specific suspicion. However, CBSA policy states that officers should only "take a quick look" at each document before moving on to the next. For example, they should only look at documents or photos "for long enough to determine that they do not contain contraband such as child pornography or hate literature". If the CBSA officer sees something that raises their suspicions, a more thorough search may be conducted.

CBSA agents can also demand a password or fingerprint to unlock a phone. The Canadian Customs Act states that travelers are required to "open or unpack any package or container that the officer wishes to examine". The CBSA points out that not handing over a password could create a variety of problems, including denial of entry into Canada.

Fortunately, CBSA agents cannot always download photos, text messages or emails from the device. According to the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCLA), "If the CBSA wants to search information on the phone that is only accessible once it is connected to the cloud, the agency must first obtain a warrant issued by a judge". However, this provides little protection. The CBSA's policy is that officers should set the device to airplane mode before searching to "reduce the possibility of triggering remote wiping software, inadvertently accessing the Internet or other data stored externally or changing number versions or dates", according to internal guides.

Officers are allowed to read emails which have been downloaded and opened, and they are supposed to assess this by seeing whether the emails have been marked as read. The BCCLA assumes this also applies to text messages. Agents can also copy the contents of the device or keep the phone for further inspection. The Customs Act gives the CBSA the "power to detain goods if the officer is not satisfied that the goods have been properly screened for admission into Canada, including the contents of electronic devices", according to the BCCLA guide. Because of these issues, I follow a strict personal set of rules when traveling to Canada, which will be explained after the next section.

International Travel (Air): You are at most risk of a demand to unlock and present your data when you are traveling via air to other countries. You basically have no rights. Some locations in the middle east or near China may be more demanding toward seeing your digital content than popular European countries which are targeted by tourists. Regardless of your destination, you are always at risk of being denied entry if you refuse to allow a border agent to inspect your unlocked devices. Therefore, I possess a very specific protocol for ALL travel outside of the United States.

Laptop: I almost always bring a laptop when I travel internationally. Whether for my own work or to be used during a presentation, I simply need a computer with me at all times. When leaving my country, I make an assumption that I will be forced to unlock the device at any border. First, I completely wipe out my Linux machine and install a fresh copy. I enable full-disk encryption and install any software necessary for my trip. I do NOT load any personal data.

While still at home, I identify all of the personal data I may need such as my password manager, client documents, PowerPoints, etc. I may also create a compressed archive of my Linux home directory backup. I encrypt these into a VeraCrypt container and store the container in my Proton Drive account, which is zero-knowledge with end-to-end encryption. If I am asked to unlock my laptop, I do. There is no personal data on it, and nothing sensitive to be exposed.

When I arrive at my final destination, I download the VeraCrypt container from Proton Drive and place it on my device. I then have access to all of my important data and system backup. Before I leave the country, I wipe the hard drive and re-install Linux from a USB drive containing the official ISO file. When I return home, I delete the container from the online account. Note that items within Proton Drive count against your overall storage limits. Always remove large files once no longer needed.

Mobile Devices: When traveling within North America outside of the U.S., I bring my GrapheneOS device. However, I do not bring the SIM card. The device basically has no internet connectivity. I then force close all of my apps and make sure I am logged out of everything. If I am forced to unlock the device, my email and communication apps will only load a login screen. Once in Canada or Mexico, I purchase a new SIM and log in as necessary. I repeat the process when leaving. When traveling outside of North America, I never bring a mobile device. I can use my laptop for almost all of my communication needs. If I need a mobile device, I can purchase an affordable "burner" with a new SIM card at my destination.

Some may believe that possessing a hidden partition on a laptop or a hidden VeraCrypt container would eliminate the need to upload and download the data. I disagree with this tactic as some border agents are trained to look for this data. If you are found to possess anything "secret", you are more likely to be denied entry or detained. I prefer to enter "clean" and simply not worry about anything. Some will argue that you appear more

suspicious if you enter a country without a mobile device. I have never received any resistance with this. My valid response is that I have no service in the country I am entering, so I did not bring my phone. Obviously, your mileage may vary.

The final consideration is the border crossing into the United States. If you are a U.S. citizen, you will likely be waived through with little hassle. If you are not a citizen, expect issues. The U.S. has some of the most invasive privacy practices when it comes to entry by foreigners. You may be asked about your social networks and email accounts, and be prone to the search of your devices. The lessons explained previously may be beneficial.

Virtual Machines

Virtual machines (VMs) conduct emulation of a particular computer system. They are computer operating systems on top of computer operating systems. Most commonly, a software program is executed within an operating system, and individual operating systems can launch within that program. Each virtual machine is independent from the other and the host operating system. The environment of one virtual machine has no impact on any others. Quite simply, it is a way to have numerous computers within your single computer. When finished with these instructions, you will have a "clean" environment with no contamination from other internet usage. You will be able to clone an original VM in minutes and will no longer need to worry about persistent viruses, tracking cookies, or other invasive tactics. We will use virtual machines in order to isolate our sensitive computer usage from the daily driver which gets bombarded with online tracking.

Before creating a virtual machine, you must possess virtual machine software. There are several free and paid programs which allow you to create and execute virtual machines. Premium options such as VMWare offer a free version, but it is extremely limited in function. However, **VirtualBox** (virtualbox.org) is completely free and easy to operate. Volumes could be written about the features and abilities of VirtualBox. I will first explain how to install the application and then ways to configure a virtual machine. At the time of this writing, the following Terminal commands installed VirtualBox to my Ubuntu Linux machine.

- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install virtualbox virtualbox-ext-pack -y

Mac users can enter "brew install virtualbox virtualbox-extension-pack" into Terminal. At the time of this writing, newer Mac machines with the Apple M1 processor could not install VM's through VirtualBox. The only requirement for VirtualBox to function is a computer that supports virtualization. Most modern Apple products made before 2021 will work without any modification. Most mid-range and high-end Windows computers made within the past five years should have no problem, but may require you to enable virtualization support in the BIOS (Basic Input / Output System) during startup. Netbooks, older machines, and cheap low-end computers will likely give you problems. If you are in doubt about meeting this requirement, search for your model of computer followed by "virtualization" and you should find the answers. The rest of this section will assume that your computer meets this requirement.

In Chapter One, I explained how I recommend Ubuntu Linux as a dedicated host for your desktop operating system. We can also use this same OS within a virtual machine. Either use the same ISO file previously downloaded or repeat the process to obtain the appropriate file. Next, open VirtualBox and click on the button labeled "New". The following steps should create a new VM appropriate for our needs.

- Provide a name of "Privacy Original".
- Choose your desired location to save the machine on your host (I chose Documents).
- Select "Linux" as type, "Ubuntu 64-bit" as version, and click "Continue" (or "Next").
- In the Memory size window, move the slider to select 50% of your system memory.
- Click "Continue" and then "Create".
- Leave the hard disk file type as "VDI" and click "Continue" (or "Next").

- Select the default option of "Dynamically allocated" and click "Continue" or "Next".
- Choose the desired size of your virtual hard drive. If you have a large internal drive, 20GB should be sufficient. If you are limited, you may need to decrease that number.
- Click "Create".

Your VM has been created, but it will do nothing upon launch. We need to tell it to boot from the ISO file which we previously downloaded. We should also increase the cores. Select your new machine in the menu to the left and complete the following steps.

- Click the "Settings" icon then the "Storage" icon.
- Click the CD icon which displays "Empty" in the left menu.
- Click the small blue circle to the far right in the "Optical Drive" option.
- Select "Choose Virtual Optical Disk File" and select the Ubuntu ISO downloaded.
- Click "System" in the menu then "Processor".
- Change the "Processor(s)" to half of those available.
- Click "OK" and then "Start" in the main menu.

Your Ubuntu installation process should now start within a new window. You should be booting to the ISO file previously downloaded, which is behaving as if you had placed an Ubuntu install CD into the virtual computer. This is your first virtual machine running on top of your host operating system. We can now finish the installation with the following steps within the VirtualBox window of your Ubuntu installation.

- On the Welcome screen, choose "Install Ubuntu" and select your language.
- Choose "Normal Installation" and check both download options under "Other".
- Choose "Erase disk and install Ubuntu".
- Click "Install Now", "Continue", choose a location, and click "Continue".
- Provide a generic name such as "Laptop", and enter a secure password.
- Confirm your selections, allow the installation to complete, and reboot.
- Provide your password(s), then click "Skip" on the Welcome screen.
- Select "No, don't send system info", "Next", "Next", and "Done".
- If you receive a notice about updates, click "Install Now" and allow to reboot.

You now have a functioning virtual machine which contains the basic programs we need to use the internet. By default, it is using your host computer's internet connection, and taking advantage of your host's VPN if you have it connected. Technically, we could start using this machine right away, but the experience would get frustrating. We need to take some additional steps to configure the device for optimum usage. The first step should be to install VirtualBox's Guest Additions software. This will allow us to take advantage of better screen resolution and other conveniences. Conduct the following steps.

- In the VirtualBox Menu, select "Devices" > "Insert Guest Additions CD Image".
- Click "Run" when the dialogue box pops up and provide your password.
- Allow the process to complete and restart the VM.

You should now have VirtualBox Guest Additions installed. You can test this by resizing the screen. If you make the Ubuntu VM full screen, you should see the overall screen resolution change with it. If this appears to be functioning, you can right-click the CD icon on the desktop and choose "Eject". If not, double-click the CD icon and choose "Run Software" in the upper right corner to repeat the process. I have occasionally experienced an inability to resize VM windows within VirtualBox with the "Auto-resize Guest Display" greyed out. The following commands within Terminal of the Linux VM should repair. There is no harm running these if you are unsure.

- sudo apt update
- sudo apt install -y build-essential dkms gcc make perl
- sudo rcvboxadd setup
- reboot

Next, we should make some modifications within the VirtualBox program in order to experience better functionality. Shut down the Ubuntu VM by clicking on the down arrow in the upper right and choosing the power button, followed by "Shut down". In VirtualBox, select your Ubuntu VM and click the "Settings" icon. Next, conduct the following steps.

- In the "General" icon, click on the "Advanced" tab.
- Change "Shared clipboard" and "Drag n' Drop" to "Bidirectional".
- In the "Display" icon, change the Video Memory to the maximum.
- Click "OK" to close the settings window and restart your Ubuntu VM.

You should now have a more robust display and copy and paste capabilities. This has improved a lot of function, and now it is time to personalize the machine. I conducted the following on my new VM.

- Click the "nine dots" in the lower left to launch the Applications menu.
- Open Terminal and enter the following commands.
- gsettings set org.gnome.desktop.background picture-uri "
- gsettings set org.gnome.desktop.background primary-color 'rgb(66, 81, 100)'
- sudo apt purge -y apport
- sudo apt remove -y popularity-contest
- sudo apt autoremove -y
- Close Terminal and open "Settings" from the Applications menu.
- In the "Settings" menu, click "Notifications" and disable both options.
- Click the "Privacy" option, click "Screen Lock", and disable all options.
- Click "File History & Trash" then disable the option.
- Click "Diagnostics" then change to "Never".
- Click the back arrow, click "Power", and change "Blank Screen" to "Never".
- Click "Automatic Suspend" and disable the feature, then close all Settings windows.

These changes should create a more private and pleasing environment. It is important to keep the software on this original VM updated. There are different ways to do this, but I will focus on the easiest way within the operating system applications. While we do this, it may be a good time to add some commonly used applications to our Dock. Conduct the following steps.

- Click the "nine dots" to launch the Applications Menu.
- Type "Terminal" into the search field.
- Right-click on the application and select "Add to Favorites".
- Type "Software" into the search field.
- Right-click on "Software Updater".
- Select "Add to Favorites".
- Press escape until all windows are gone.
- Launch the Software Updater icon from the Dock.
- Click "Install Now" and allow the updates to complete.

You now have Terminal and Software Updater in your Dock for easy access. You can also right-click on any undesired icons within the dock and easily remove them. Check for updates weekly and keep your original copy ready for usage. This brings us to a conversation about the term "Original". Ideally, you will keep a copy of this VM clean and free of any internet usage or contamination. There are two ways to achieve this, and both have unique benefits. First, let's discuss Snapshots.

Virtual Machine Snapshots

A great feature of virtual machines is the use of Snapshots. These "frozen" moments in time allow you to revert to an original configuration or preserve an optimal setup. Most users install the virtual machine as previously detailed, and then immediately create a snapshot of the unused environment. When your virtual machine eventually becomes contaminated with remnants of other investigations, or you accidentally remove or break a feature, you can simply revert to the previously created snapshot and eliminate the need to ever reinstall. Consider how you might use snapshots, as detailed in the following pages.

Upon creation of a new Ubuntu virtual machine, apply all updates as previously mentioned. Completely shut down the machine and open the Snapshots option within your virtual machine software. Create a new snapshot and title it "Original". Use this machine for a single investigation, and export all evidence to an external USB device, such as a flash drive. You can then "restore" the Original snapshot, and it overwrites any changes made during the previous investigation. Upon reboot, all history and evidence is eliminated. This ensures that you never contaminate one virtual machine with another. When there are substantial updates available for Ubuntu, you can load the default configuration, and apply all updates. You can then shut the machine down completely and delete the Original snapshot, without saving it, and create a new snapshot titled Original. This new snapshot possesses all of the updates. If using this technique, I usually delete and create a new snapshot weekly. Conduct the following.

- Completely shut down the Virtual Machine.
- In the VirtualBox Menu, click on the Snapshots button in the upper right.
- Click on the blue camera icon to "take a snapshot".
- Create a name for the snapshot, such as "New Install", and click OK.

You can now use your virtual machine as normal. If you ever want to revert to the exact state of the machine that existed at the time of the snapshot, follow these instructions.

- Completely shut down the Virtual Machine.
- In the VirtualBox Menu, click on the Snapshots button in the upper right.
- Select the desired snapshot to apply.
- Click on the blue camera icon with arrow to "restore snapshot".
- Deny the option to save the current data, and click Restore.

If you want to remove a snapshot, click the icon with a red X. This will remove data files to eliminate wasted space, but you cannot restore to that image once removed. It will not impact the current machine state. Many users remove old, redundant snapshots after creating newer clean machines. Today, I rarely use snapshots and rely on cloned machines, as explained next.

Virtual Machine Clones and Exports

If you ever want to preserve a specific state of Ubuntu, you can clone an entire session. As stated previously, I prefer clones over snapshots. I create an exact replica of my Original VM for every scenario, and never use Snapshots within these unique VMs. For clarity, consider my routine for sensitive investigations, which takes advantage of the "Clone" option within VirtualBox.

- Launch the Original virtual machine weekly to apply updates or global changes, then close the VM.
- In the VirtualBox menu, right-click on the Original VM and select "Clone".
- Create a new name such as "Investigation".
- Click "Continue" (or "Next") then "Clone".

This creates an identical copy of the VM ready for my online investigation. I have no worries of contaminating my Original VM or any other copies. I now have a second virtual machine which I can launch when I want a secure operating system which can be used for the next investigation. Since I never use the Original machine to surf the web, conduct searches on Google, or buy products on Amazon, there are virtually no trackers other than those issued by the sites visited during my investigation. Each clone is clean and unused. If desired, I can preserve an exact copy of my cloned machine's environment for future use with an export. The following steps generate a single file which represents the current state of a VM.

- Shut down the active VM.
- In the VirtualBox menu, select "File" then "Export Appliance".
- Select the desired machine and click "Continue".
- Choose your storage location and file name, click "Continue", then "Export".

This creates a single large file which can be archived for future use. Choosing the "Import Appliance" menu option allows you to recreate the virtual machine exactly as it existed when the export was created. I find this useful when I want to preserve a machine but do not need it immediately available within my VirtualBox menu. I archive exported copies of prior investigations in order to return to them if necessary. In 2020, I was involved in a civil suit on behalf of a client. The other party insisted on their own copy of my investigative computer in order to conduct their own forensics on my process. I was able to issue the exported file without being required to hand over any hardware. I know online investigations exceed the scope of this book, but preparation for these types of scenarios makes us all more private and secure.

Virtual Machine Troubleshooting

I wish I could say that every reader will be able to easily build virtual machines on any computer. This is simply not the case. While most computers are capable of virtual machine usage, many demand slight modifications in order to allow virtualization. Let's take a look at the most common errors presented by VirtualBox upon launch of a VM.

VT-x is disabled: Any version of this error is the most common reason your VMs will not start. This indicates that the processor of your computer either does not support virtualization or the feature is not enabled. The fix for this varies by brand of machine and processor. Immediately after the computer is turned on, before the operating system starts, enter the BIOS of the machine. This is usually accomplished by pressing delete, F2, F10, or another designated key right away until a BIOS menu appears.

Once in the BIOS, you can navigate through the menu via keyboard. With many Intel processors, you can open the "Advanced" tab and set the "Virtualization (VT-x)" to "Enable". For AMD processors, open the "M.I.T." tab, "Advanced Frequency" settings, "Advanced Core" settings, and then set the "SVM Mode" to "Enable". If none of these options appear, conduct an online search of the model of your computer followed by "virtualization" for instructions.

VT-x is not available: This is usually isolated to Windows 10 machines. Navigate to the Windows Control Panel and open "Programs and Features". Click "Turn Windows features on or off" and uncheck all "Hyper-V" features. Click "OK" and reboot. If the Hyper-V option is not enabled, enable Hyper-V, restart the computer, disable Hyper-V, and reboot again. Attempt to start your VM with these new settings.

This may seem backwards, but it makes sense. Previous versions of VirtualBox cannot run if you are using "Hyper-V" in Windows. Basically, both systems try to get exclusive access to the virtualization capabilities of the processor. Hyper-V within Windows receives the access first and impedes VirtualBox from the capabilities. The latest version of VirtualBox attempts to correct this. If the previous setting did not help, try to re-enable all of the Hyper-V options within Windows, reboot, and try to boot your VM again.

If you are still experiencing problems, read the troubleshooting chapter of the VirtualBox manual at virtualbox.org/manual/ch12.html. Expand any errors received and search the provided error codes to identify further solutions.

Virtual Machine Usage

Your Original VM should only be used to install new software and apply updates. It should never be used for online browsing or research. I launch my Original once a week, apply all updates, and close it. I can then use this Original to create a clean and updated virtual machine within minutes. Next, I outline some of my uses for virtual machines. **If you are using a Linux host, this is all likely overkill.** If you are using Windows with a stock browser, VMs offer a lot of protection.

Banking: You can keep a VM designated for anything associated with financial transactions. This includes online bill pay, employee payroll, and investment accounts. This way, you know that the VM is free of any viruses or malicious applications. Since it is never used outside of banking, online tracking is minimal.

Shopping: You might rely on Amazon for many things. You could boot into a VM designated for online shopping. This VM is never used with any email, social networks, or banking accounts. Furthermore, the entire VM is never associated to your true name. It is only used for ordering items with an alias. This way, you know that Amazon never learns your name or identifies any online browsing history.

Research: You might conduct a lot of investigations. In my book Open Source Intelligence Techniques, I explain how I rely on numerous VMs. Every time I need to research something or someone, I clone my Original VM and open the clone. When finished, I either destroy the clone or export it for archiving. This way, each investigation possesses no contamination from other research.

Sensitive Consultations: When a client needs extreme privacy, I always communicate through a Linux VM which has never been used anywhere else. This is likely overkill, but I justify the paranoia. When communicating through Wire via text through this VM, I know there are no malicious programs, cookies, or other invasive software compromising the communication.

If you want to go the extra mile in achieving extreme privacy, I encourage you to understand virtual machine usage, and build VMs ready for cloning. At any given time, I have no fewer than five VMs ready for action. While most of my VMs are based on Linux, you can replicate these steps with a Windows machine. You will need installation media, such as a Microsoft Windows ISO file, and a valid license. Alternatively, you can download pre-built Windows VMs provided by Microsoft from https://developer.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-edge/tools/vms/. These machines can only be used for 90 days, but re-importing the downloaded file resets the clock. Expect annoying licensing notices throughout usage, but these machines are completely legal. **Again, readers using Linux as a host operating system have little need for daily virtual machines.**

Live USB Operating Systems

A live USB operating system allows you to boot most computers directly from a USB flash drive containing a full operating system which does not rely on any other software from the installed hard drive. They can either be "persistent" with capabilities of writing and storing changes or "static" which do not allow modifications between uses. For our purposes, we want an operating system which does not store any changes and boots without leaving any traces on the USB drive or the computer being used. TAILS is the perfect product for this.

TAILS, an acronym for The Amnesic Incognito Live System, is a security-focused Debian-based Linux distribution aimed at preserving privacy and anonymity. When booted, all incoming and outgoing connections are forced through the Tor network, which was explained earlier. The system is designed to leave no digital footprint.

In a perfect scenario, a USB drive is inserted into a computer which is turned off. When booted, the USB device is chosen and only software from the removable device is presented. You should see an entire operating system which "forgets" all of your activity when shut down. A VPN is not required since your traffic is going through Tor. It includes a web browser and productivity tools by default. Before explaining how to create your own TAILS USB device, consider some reasons why it could be vital to your own situation.

- **Contaminated Machines**: If you only have access to a single community computer, you have no way of knowing the history of viruses, spyware, and malware which has infected it. TAILS bypasses the hard drive and prevents unnecessary risk.
- **Network Monitoring**: TAILS allows people to use the Internet anonymously and circumvent censorship. This includes networks which block specific websites. Journalists abroad often rely on this product when safely reporting issues back to their home countries.
- **Tech-Savvy Snooping**: This is the main reason I send TAILS USB drives to potential clients. Many victims being held against their will only have access to computers and devices which possess software allowing their captors to see everything they do. I have met victims who had remote monitoring apps on their phones and keyloggers on their laptops. TAILS eliminates threats from any invasive software installed in order to eavesdrop on someone. I never want a potential client to communicate with me about an abusive situation if there is a chance the abuser can see the conversation.

Now that you have an idea of the benefits of TAILS, let's create a bootable USB device. The following steps download the required software and "flash" it to a USB drive.

- Navigate to tails.boum.org/install/download.
- Click the "Download" option.
- Save the "img" file on your computer.
- If desired, verify the authenticity of the download with the optional extension.
- Navigate to https://www.balena.io/etcher.
- Download and install the program version appropriate for your OS.
- Insert a USB 3.0 or higher flash drive into your computer.
- Launch BalenaEtcher.
- Click "Select image".
- Select the TAILS img file previously downloaded.
- In BalenaEtcher, click "Select target".
- Carefully select the USB drive inserted (contents will be erased) and click "Continue".
- Click "Flash" to begin the process.

When complete, you now possess a TAILS live USB. Insert it into a computer and turn it on. If the computer boots to the internal operating system, such as Windows or Mac, the machine's BIOS needs to be told to boot from the USB. The moment you turn on the device, look for any text such as "Setup" or "Boot" options. Press the key which is displayed for this option, such as CMD, F1, F2, F10, F12, or Del. This should present a minimal menu which allows you to choose the USB device instead of the internal hard drive. TAILS should detect any ethernet or Wi-Fi hardware and allow you to connect to the internet through Tor. If you experience any issues, navigate to tails.boum.org/doc.

These steps could be replicated with other operating systems such as Ubuntu, Mint, and even Windows 10. While I encourage you to explore other Linux options, I never recommend Windows bootable drives. You

simply cannot stop Microsoft from collecting data about your usage every time you boot the machine. If you have a need for a secondary Windows installation, I encourage you to create one as a virtual machine, as previously explained.

If desired, you could create a Linux boot USB with persistent storage. This would allow you to save data during usage instead of wiping out all changes during shutdown. I never recommend this unless you have a specific need for it. A big advantage of TAILS is the ability to remove all evidence when finished. Adding persistence is a slippery slope toward possessing sensitive data in an insecure format. If you desire an alternative Linux operating system which stores changes, consider a dual-boot laptop. This would allow you to choose from two or more operating systems upon boot. There are ample tutorials online which explain this process for various models of computers.

RSS Feeds

I rely on Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds for the majority of my internet research. RSS allows us to fetch data from our favorite blogs and services without opening a browser; navigating through pages; allowing numerous tracking scripts to jeopardize our privacy; and being bombarded with ads. While I prefer **Vienna** (vienna-rss.com) for Mac and **FeedReeder** (jangernert.github.io/FeedReader) for Linux, I will provide the demonstration here using **Thunderbird** (thunderbird.net) due to compatibility across all operating systems. I encourage you to find a client which works best for you. All three of these are free and open-source.

First, assume you have found the blog at krebsonsecurity.com. You could bookmark this page and return on occasion to see if the author has added a new blog post. Instead, I recommend adding the RSS feed URL of https://krebsonsecurity.com/feed to your RSS reader. It will then notify you when a new blog post has been added. In Thunderbird, conduct the following.

- On the welcome screen, click the "Feeds" option and provide a name for your feeds.
- Right-click the new folder in the left menu and select "Subscribe".
- Paste the blog URL into the "Feed URL" field.
- Enable the "Show the article summary instead of loading the web page" option.
- Click "Add", enter any additional links of interest, and click "Close".

Thunderbird now displays the most recent blog posts from this site and will fetch any new posts as they become available. If you were to visit the site at krebsonsecurity.com every day, it would load Google Analytics by default which would track your internet activity. It would also download ads to your browser cache. If you view the RSS feed content without fetching each entire page, any JavaScript from the target site is not executed. You also receive the content of various posts without any advertisements, auto-play videos, and other nuisances. This is only the beginning of the capabilities of RSS feeds.

The previous example provided a link to the RSS feed (https://krebsonsecurity.com/feed) at the top of the home page. Other sites may not have an obvious URL present and you will need to identify the most appropriate address. Some clients, such as Vienna, attempt to identify the correct RSS URL when you submit a website home page. Others, such as Thunderbird, require a precise feed address. Because of this, and the outdated appearance, I typically do not recommend Thunderbird for RSS use. When I submit my blog at https://inteltechniques.com/blog/ to Vienna, it knows to translate it to a specific RSS address of https://inteltechniques.com/blog/feed/. When I submit the blog address to Thunderbird, it presents an error and does not try to translate to an RSS feed.

This brings us to the necessity to locate RSS feeds when they are not provided within the website. The following should assist.

- Most WordPress sites store the RSS feed in a subfolder titled "feed" at the root of the blog. If you had found the ProtonMail blog at https://protonmail.com/blog, you would only need to add "/feed/" to the end of the URL in order to possess the full RSS link (https://protonmail.com/blog/feed/).
- While on any website, press cmd-f (Mac) or ctrl-f (Windows/Linux) and search for "rss". This may present a link to the RSS feed for the site. If this fails, right-click on the page, select "View Source", and conduct a search through the source code.
- Most news websites provide an RSS feed of their articles, but few advertise this on their home page. If I want to subscribe to feeds at the Los Angeles Times newspaper, I must conduct an online search of "LA Times RSS", which displays their RSS page as the first result (https://www.latimes.com/feeds). This page contains all RSS feeds available. Replicate this for any online news source of interest to you.
- Many podcasts do not provide a direct RSS feed and insist on subscription through Apple or Spotify. I prefer to load these feeds through my RSS reader in order to avoid listener tracking. When I cannot locate a pure RSS feed, I navigate to **Get RSS Feed** (getrssfeed.com). Copy any podcast link from https://podcasts.apple.com and paste it into this service. It presents the podcast RSS feed ready for import into your client.
- Identify third-party RSS services which assist with creation of feed URLs for the topics of interest to you. Services such as **Show RSS** (showrss.info) generates feeds which notify you when your favorite television shows have been released. There are many free services waiting to assist you based on your own interests.

In my RSS client, I have hundreds of feeds from blogs and news websites. I spend more time in my RSS reader than my browser. I quickly digest my interests every morning similar to a newspaper. It may take some time and research in order to identify the RSS feed URLs from your favorite sites, but this only needs to be completed once. My favorite way to use RSS is with Reddit. I do not like going to the Reddit website due to the overall negative and toxic environment, plus dozens of trackers being forced to my browser, but I want to stay updated on the content. The following RSS feeds should help explain my usage.

New posts from /r/Privacy: https://www.reddit.com/r/privacy/.rss
Top daily posts from /r/Technology: https://www.reddit.com/r/technology/top.rss?t=day
New posts containing "bazzell": https://www.reddit.com/search.rss?q=bazzell&sort=new

You can create your own feeds from these examples. My reader currently has 214 feeds. The posts arrive in a format similar to email messages. I find this presentation better for my sanity, as it stops me from clicking links all day throwing me into various internet rabbit holes. If you have an interest in this tactic, please listen to episode 172 of my podcast which explains more. Figure 3.05 displays the folders, feeds, and content within my RSS client.

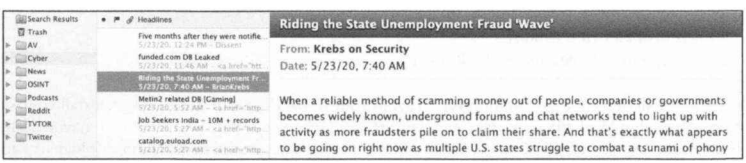


Figure 3.05: An RSS reader application with folders and feeds.

After you have your RSS client configured as desired, be sure to export your settings. Most clients have an option to export an Outline Processor Markup Language (OPML) file. This archive includes every RSS feed which you have added into your software. If you ever need to reconfigure your RSS client due to a hard drive crash, new operating system installation, or computer upgrade, this single file restores all of your hard work. I store mine within my VeraCrypt container, as previously explained.

Some readers may question the need for software clients when online RSS services, such as Feedly, simplify the entire process. While it is much easier to allow an online service to configure your subscriptions and host your settings, you sacrifice privacy. As an example, Feedly openly admits it collects your name, email, and any billing information upon registration. From there, it associates your interests, IP address, browser type, ISP, access times, crash data, browser cache, pixel tags, and various analytics to your profile. Use of their service allows them to share all of this data with third-party companies and social network sites. When using a trusted RSS client, your data is not shared with any online services, aside from the feeds to which you subscribe. A name, email address, and billing information is not needed with the clients mentioned here.

RSS feeds may not be considered "advanced" to most people, but I struggle to convince my clients to give them a try. While it may seem awkward at first, digesting your online content in this way can be very beneficial. It allows me to quickly identify posts of interest while skipping items I wish to avoid. Please note that all sites will still obtain your IP address, so be sure to always use a VPN.

Linux Configuration Backup

Once you have a Linux machine configured exactly as you like it, you should make a backup. This was already briefly discussed in Chapter One, but I believe we need to dive deeper into this important action now. If you ever need to rebuild the operating system due to a hard drive crash, interrupted update, or corrupt data, you do not want to reconfigure all of your settings. Creating an occasional backup of your Home folder ensures you have everything you need for a quick restoration. The following is my protocol, but you may want to tweak things.

- Open the Ubuntu Applications menu and search for "backups".
- Launch the Backups application and click "Create My First backup".
- Click "Forward" and select "Local Folder" under "Storage Location".
- Click "Choose Folder" and select an external drive or flash drive.
- Click "Forward" and password-protect your backup.
- Click "Forward" and allow the process to complete.

If disaster strikes, you may need to reinstall Linux someday. If this happens, be sure to replicate the same username during installation. Conduct the following after installation.

- Open the Backups application and select the "Restore" tab.
- Click the upper menu and select "Preferences".
- Click "Location" then "Choose Folder".
- Browse to the backup files present on your external drive.
- Close the open menu windows.
- Drag and select all files and click "Restore".

This should place all of your configuration files back in your home directory. When you reinstall your software applications, they should identify the files and import any custom configurations. This is never perfect, but should save many headaches. Note that I do not store my documents within the Home folder of Linux. As explained previously, I create a VeraCrypt volume for all important data. This way, my Linux system backups are minimal and fast. I only need the various configuration files which store all of my settings.

If you have the perfect Linux installation with all programs configured as you like them, you might consider a clone of the system. This creates a series of files which can be used to restore your entire system, including all files and structure, exactly as it appeared at the time of cloning. I recommend **Clonezilla** (clonezilla.org) for this purpose. Usage of this tool requires a basic understanding of bootable USB devices and secondary storage drives. Full details are available on their website and do not need repeated here. Use extreme caution with cloning, as it is easy to select the wrong drive and wipe out all contents.

Mac & Windows Configuration Backup

Regardless of your chosen host operating system, you should possess good backups. The previous process copied a Linux Home folder for archival of vital configurations and files. We can replicate a similar process for Mac and Windows users.

In previous editions of this book, I had recommended Carbon Copy Cloner (CCC) for full Mac backups. I no longer use this service for several reasons. First, the ability to boot a Mac computer from an external hard drive backup is no longer reliable. Next, CCC now requires you to re-purchase the software every time Apple releases a substantial update. The version you purchase today may be no longer usable after a few months. However, they will gladly sell you a new version every time there is a change. This can become quite costly. Next, CCC now requires a "helper" application to be installed and running in the background with system permissions in order to use their app, regardless of whether these permissions are necessary. That process coupled with their need to send metadata back to their servers makes me uncomfortable. Finally, and most important, we can use free open-source solutions which replicate everything we need from overpriced options. I now rely only on **FreeFileSync** (freefilesync.org) for all my backup needs. This option was previously explained for backing up secured containers, but we can also use it for the entire computer or Home folder.

The Linux, Mac, and Windows versions of this application are easily available on their website. After installation, the program should appear almost identical within each operating system. The left column is the "source" while the right is the "target". You have two options here. You can clone the entire computer to an external hard drive or focus only on the Home folder (similar to the previous steps with Linux). For most clients, I prefer the Home folder option. This prevents constant copying of unnecessary data and prevents confusion when a Mac computer wants to copy the external hard drive volume onto itself in a never-ending loop.

- In the left column, click "Browse" select your Home folder.
- In the right column, click "Browse" select your external hard drive.
- In the top far-right upper menu, click the right-arrow and select "Mirror".
- Click the "Compare" button and allow the scan to complete.
- Click the "Synchronize" button if you would like the displayed backup to begin.

This should copy all publicly visible and hidden data within your entire Home folder. This will include any documents, downloads, and customization data which would be crucial if you needed to reformat or rebuild your computer. You could not clone this backup onto your primary drive and boot your operating system, but you would have the essential data needed after you had to reinstall your operating system. Repeating this process conducts an incremental backup. This only copies files which have been modified and ignores those which have not changed. This reduces time and wear on the drives.

What do I do? On my primary Linux computer, I allow the native Backups program to copy essential data within my Home folder onto an encrypted external drive. I update this process monthly. On my Mac computer, I cloned the entire drive onto an encrypted external drive once, but only update the Home folder monthly. These encrypted external drives contain all of my customizations, configurations, virtual machines, and personal data which is not stored within a VeraCrypt container. I keep one set of Linux and Mac backups in a safe in my home. An identical set is stored offsite at a trusted location. I swap these sets every few months. If my devices are ever stolen, and my local backups are destroyed when my home burns down, I can contact a close relative and have them mail the offsite backup to a new address. The more likely scenario is that I accidently delete something vital; then unknowingly delete the backup copy during backup synchronization; and rely on the offsite copy to fix the situation. Be prepared for anything.

Account Intrusion Detection

I offer one final consideration in regard to your overall digital life. People will try to access your online accounts. Whether it be your email, contacts, calendar, storage, voicemail, password managers, or 2FA, criminals are hoping that you mistakenly let them in. This could be via a phishing attack, password recycling, or other malicious vectors. Always be on your guard. In 2022, I had two clients get scammed out of large amounts of money. One was the victim of wire fraud when a criminal broke into their email; forwarded all messages to another account; monitored any email for valuable details; and eventually intercepted a wire transfer with a new payable account. Another client called a known number to transfer $50,000. The problem was that a criminal had broken into his Gmail; changed the "Bank" contact to a different number; and intercepted the call to redirect the funds. This all sounds like a fantasy until it happens to you. Consider the following.

Check your email rules on occasion to make sure nothing is set to copy incoming messages to an unauthorized address. If your email provider allows for auto-forwarding of messages, make sure that is not enabled (unless desired). Check your account access logs for any suspicious connections. If calling a bank to transfer money, make sure it is the correct number from a reliable source (and not your contacts). Never place full details of sensitive events or appointments within any online calendar. Be alert, proactive, and prepared.

Typical Client Configuration

I realize that most readers of this book will not apply all of the strategies presented here. It can be quite overwhelming to tackle all of this at once. I hope you return to this chapter as you progress through your privacy journey. Whenever you have a thirst to add something new to your arsenal, these topics may scratch that itch. The following is the most common actions I take on behalf of a new client seeking extreme privacy.

- Issue a new Ubuntu Linux laptop.
- Install KeePassXC and explain password manager usage.
- Install Authy and explain Two-Factor Authentication (2FA).
- Issue a YubiKey hardware 2FA USB device.
- Install and configure VeraCrypt and containers.
- Establish a backup protocol and storage solution.
- Harden Firefox for secure and private web browsing.
- Apply DNS settings within Ubuntu.
- Install and configure ProtonVPN on the laptop.
- Create and configure a ProtonMail account with alias addresses and folders.
- Forward email from previous providers to ProtonMail.
- Create and configure SimpleLogin email masking.
- Create and configure a custom domain name.
- Attach new domain name to ProtonMail account.
- Create an offline email archiving solution then delete email from insecure providers.
- Install Linphone and configure home VOIP telephone numbers.
- Install and configure Signal and Wire on the laptop.
- Install and configure Standard Notes on the laptop.
- Install and configure VirtualBox and multiple VMs on the laptop.
- Create a Linux system backup strategy and storage solution.

You can never have privacy unless you possess secure digital devices and connections. This chapter is the backbone for all of the upcoming work you will complete in order to become invisible. As a final note, please remember that technology changes quickly and often. The exact digital tutorials explained in this book will become inaccurate over time. If you encounter differences during your replication of the steps, online research of the topic should quickly identify new solutions. Later in the book, I present the next level of digital strategies.

CHAPTER FOUR
HOME NETWORK

You are likely no stranger to the importance of virtual private network (VPN) applications on your computers and mobile devices in order to protect the identification of your true IP address. This numeric value associates you and your internet browsing behaviors to a unique identifier. It can be used to document your location and track you through every website you visit. Hopefully, you have already included a VPN as part of your privacy strategy. This secures your internet connection and anonymizes your activity online from any device which you have properly configured the VPN application. What happens if the VPN app crashes? What about network connections which cannot take advantage of a standard VPN application?

Think for a moment about the additional devices that are networked within your home. The wireless router that contains proprietary software, manufactured by a huge corporation, has unlimited access to your internet connection and can "call home" whenever desired. How about that mobile tablet which your children use to play free games? Those also likely collect your internet connection information and store it indefinitely. Do you have any appliances, such as a television, thermostat, or lighting system, which connect to your Wi-Fi in order to stream video, remotely control the temperature, or dim house lights from your phone? Not only do all of these connections announce your true IP address to the companies that made them, but traditional VPNs cannot be installed on the devices. Furthermore, we rarely update the software on this specialty hardware, and many devices possess security vulnerabilities waiting to be compromised.

Every time we add an internet-enabled device to our homes, we present another attack surface to our security and privacy. This is why I believe that every home should possess a digital firewall between the primary internet connection and every other device. I can use this for two specific protection techniques. First, this firewall will prevent any outside intruder from "seeing" or connecting to the devices in my home. This will likely prohibit the remote features of these products, which I believe is a good thing. Second, and most importantly, I can create a virtual private network connection for the entire house. Every device will be protected, regardless of its ability to possess and utilize VPN software.

I strongly advise reading this entire chapter before taking any action within your own home network. Throughout this chapter, I will be demonstrating ProtonVPN as my chosen VPN for the configurations. I have found this to be the most private and stable VPN for router-based installs with automatic reconnections and great speed. This will be explained in more detail later. However, practically any reputable VPN provider could be used within these tutorials. I later offer PIA tutorials as an alternative to ProtonVPN. I also present an option to use PIA dedicated IP addresses to bypass website blocks which may prevent you from accessing some sites.

The goal of this chapter is to create an instance of a single pfSense firewall, which will be the only device in your home which connects to the internet directly through your internet service provider (ISP). If you have a cable modem, it will connect to this new firewall. Every other device in your home will connect to the firewall, and be protected with an IP address provided by your VPN provider. No device in your home will ever know the IP address from your ISP. Please note that this chapter has appeared in my other books on privacy and security. However, there are many modifications to this tutorial, and they should replace any previous writings. I firmly insist that every client of mine who is living anonymously possesses this setup. The following are a few examples of how this technique can protect your anonymity.

- Mobile devices: If you connect your iPhone to your home Wi-Fi, Apple receives and stores the IP address attached to your home. Without a firewall containing a VPN, Apple knows your true IP address, the area where you reside, and your ISP. This quickly associates your Apple account with your home address. A home firewall prevents Apple from ever knowing your true details.

- Laptops: Whether you use Apple or Microsoft products, they both send numerous details about your connection to their data collection centers, including your IP addresses. Again, a home firewall prevents them from ever knowing your true details.
- Media Centers: If you connect to Netflix, Hulu, or Apple TV through your home internet Wi-Fi, you are constantly sending out your true IP address of your home. Since you pay for these services, your payment method, home IP address, and billing details are merged and stored forever. By connecting these streaming services through a firewall with a VPN, you stop providing your home's unique IP address to the providers. Instead, you provide a VPN address which is shared with thousands of people all over the world. Some of these providers block VPN addresses, but I will tackle this later in the chapter.
- Appliances: We hear about how most new refrigerators, smart televisions, and video-monitoring doorbells connect to the internet to "assist" your daily life. A home firewall prevents accidental true IP address exposure.

Before discussing the software, I should mention hardware. In order to take full advantage of the bandwidth available through your VPN within a router, your hardware device needs to have a powerful processor, ample RAM, and fast storage access. This firewall is basically an entire computer. You could repurpose a desktop into a pfSense build, but this will consume a lot of power for a single task. You could also rely on a virtual machine, but this requires a stable host. Instead, I recommend a custom **Protectli Vault**, which was created for this purpose.

The unit which I provide to most clients is the $400 4-port FW4B (amzn.to/31jMzlk). The $300 2-port FW2B (amzn.to/2NR1fpA) and $600 6-port FW6B (amzn.to/3rygKm8) versions would also work great, but I place focus on the most generally applicable model available. Always consider your internet speed before deciding. If you have gigabit internet, a VPN which supports such high speeds, and three kids downloading videos all day, you will want a 6-port Vault which offers faster VPN performance. The 2-port and 4-port models can only handle VPN speeds up to 200-250 mbps, which is typically sufficient for most clients. I have internet speeds less than 200 mbps, so I also use the 4-port FW4B. Whatever you choose, always ensure that your device has a CPU that supports AES-NI. These Protectli devices are very compact and act as their own cooling device. There are no fans or any moving parts; they are silent; and they require much less power than desktops. The model that I chose for testing contained 4GB of RAM and a 32GB MSATA solid-state drive. I have had a Protectli box running almost non-stop for five years.

The following instructions walk you through the entire installation and configuration of a pfSense firewall with a VPN in kill switch mode on this specific device. This means that if the VPN fails, the internet stops working on any of your devices. This ensures that you never expose your true IP address. These instructions were replicated on the currently available latest stable version of pfSense, 2.6.0. Later versions may display minor differences, but the principles of this setup should apply to future releases. For those readers who have already read my writings on this topic in previous books, you will see some identical information. However, there are substantial changes in this version which should be considered.

Regardless of whether you have adopted the privacy and security strategies throughout this book, I recommend that you seriously consider the tutorials in this chapter. We all use the internet, and we all have numerous devices. The absolute easiest way to track your online behaviors is through your home IP address. A cheap VPN application is not sufficient. We need stable protection and a backup plan if a VPN connection should fail. This chapter solves these issues.

The content here is presented in several phases. I recommend practicing on your device as you go through these, without connecting it to the internet. When you feel confident you understand the techniques, reinstall the software and start over. This will ensure that you have made deliberate changes which you understand, and provide a deeper understanding about the software. **Many readers skip this chapter until they are ready to dive into the technical world of configuring a home firewall.** At the end of the tutorial, I present several pre-made custom pfSense configuration files which should simplify the entire process. Let's begin.

Phase One: Installation

The following steps download and configure pfSense onto a USB device.

- Navigate to www.pfsense.org/download.
- Choose "Architecture: AMD64", "Installer: USB Memstick Installer", and "Console: VGA".
- Download the ".gz" file and decompress it (typically by double-clicking it).
- If your OS cannot decompress the file, download and install 7-zip from 7-zip.org.
- Ensure you have a file with an .img extension, such as pfSense-CE-2.6.0-amd64.img.
- Download and install **Etcher** from https://www.balena.io/etcher/.
- Launch the program; select "Flash from file"; select the .img file; select the target USB drive; and execute the "Flash" option. Remove the USB device when finished.

Next, the following steps install pfSense to the Protectli Vault.

- Verify that the new hardware is powered down.
- Verify that a monitor and USB keyboard are connected directly to the Vault.
- Insert the USB install drive into another USB port on the firewall.
- Power the device and verify that it boots and begins the installation process.

If your Vault does not recognize the USB device and cannot boot into the pfSense installation, insert it into a different USB port. It may need priority over the USB keyboard. If that does not help, you must enter the BIOS of the device and configure it to boot from USB. The procedure for this is different on any machine, but the Protectli Vault is fairly straight-forward.

- Turn on the device and immediately press F11 on the keyboard repeatedly.
- If the USB device is visible on the monitor attached to the Vault, select it (press the number for it).
- If the USB device is not visible, enter the setup menu and use the right keyboard arrow to highlight "Boot", use the down arrow to highlight "Hard drive priorities" change Boot Option # 1 to the USB drive, and strike "F4" to save and exit.

Allow all default installation options, which should require you to strike the enter key several times. During the default "ZFS Configuration" screen, you may need to select the device's drive (often represented as SSD or ada). Highlight the appropriate drive for your installation and press the space bar to select it. Strike enter to continue and select "Yes" to confirm you want to proceed. This should allow you to finish the remaining installation steps. Choose "No" if prompted to open a shell and "Reboot" when complete.

After the device has completely rebooted (when you hear the startup tone), press the power button on the Protectli once to begin the shutdown process. This will take several seconds. Then, remove the USB flash drive, monitor, and keyboard connections. Once the power light is off, connect an ethernet cable from your computer to the LAN port of the Protectli. Connect an ethernet cable from your internet provider, such as your cable modem, to the Wan port of the Protectli device. This is a new requirement from previous editions. This is because pfSense now needs to see both the local computer and the internet connection in order to complete the following configurations.

Make sure your computer has no internet access via any other cables or Wi-Fi. Navigate to 192.168.1.1 within a web browser and log in with the default username of "admin" and password of "pfsense". Ignore any warnings about a certificate and click "Advanced" to allow the page to load. Accept all defaults within the setup process with "Next". Create a secure password when prompted. Click the various demands for "Next", "Close", "Reload" and "Finish" until you are at the home screen. **Ignore any recommendations to update to pfSense Plus**. This is unnecessary and inappropriate for our needs.

Phase Two: Activate Ports (Optional)

If you purchased a 4-port or 6-port option, you can activate these ports at this time by configuring the following changes. If you purchased the 2-port FW2B, skip this section.

- Navigate to "Interfaces" then "Assignments".
- Click the "Add" option next to each empty port, which will add one port at a time.
- Repeat until all ports have been added and "Add" is no longer available.
- Save your changes.
- Click through each new option ("Interfaces" > "Opt1"/"Opt2"/etc.).
- Enable each port by checking the first box, and saving your changes each time.
- Navigate to "Interfaces" then "Assignments" to continue to each "Opt" option.
- When finished with all of them, apply the changes in the upper right.
- Navigate to "Interfaces", "Assignments", then select "Bridges" in the upper menu.
- Click "Add" to create a new bridge.
- Select the LAN option as well as each port that was added with ctrl-click or cmd-click.
- Provide a description, such as "bridge", and click "Save".
- Navigate to "Firewall" then "Rules".
- Click each port (Opt1, Opt2, etc.) and click the "Add" button (up arrow) for each.
- Change the "Protocol" to "Any".
- Click "Save" after each port is modified.
- Apply changes in upper-right after all ports have been added.
- Navigate to "Interfaces" then "Assignments".
- Click "Add" next to "BRIDGE0" and click "Save".
- Click on the bridge, which may be labeled as "Opt3" or "Opt5".
- Enable the interface and change the description to "bridge".
- Click "Save" and then "Apply Changes".
- Navigate to "Firewall" then "Rules".
- Click on "Bridge" then click the "Add" button (up arrow).
- Change the "Protocol" to "Any" and click "Save".
- Apply changes in upper-right.

Please note that enabling these ports allows you to attach additional devices to your firewall. However, you still need to have an active ethernet device plugged into the LAN port of the firewall in order for the additional ports to function. At this point, you should still have your primary computer plugged into the LAN port of the firewall. Once Wi-Fi is enabled, as explained later, you will remove this cable and replace it with the cable to your Wi-Fi access point. **Overall, the LAN port is the primary connection and should always be in use.** If you plug a device into one of the OPT ports without the LAN port being active, the device will not receive a connection to the bridge. This is because the OPT ports are bridged to the LAN port. **Again, always keep the LAN port active to avoid issues.**

During this process, and throughout the remaining tutorial, you must allow pfSense to complete each step. This is especially important any time you need to "Apply Changes". Clicking this button forces pfSense to make several configuration changes. You must wait for these changes to complete before moving on to the next step. Otherwise, you will have failures. Make sure the pfSense tab within your browser has confirmed any change and it is not "reloading" before proceeding to the next step. While updating this chapter for this edition, I ran into several problems within the following pages. It was all due to my desire to rush through the configurations. I had interrupted the process after the "Apply Changes" button was pressed which prevented various menu options from appearing. Do not repeat my mistake.

Phase Three: Configure VPN Settings

Overall, pfSense is already a powerful firewall by default. It blocks some undesired incoming traffic through your internet provider and protects the devices within your home. My priority from there is to create a constant VPN on the device which possesses a "kill switch". This configuration ensures that I never expose my true IP address to any services or sites from any device in my home. Before proceeding, please note that pfSense configures your settings based on the hardware present. Each install can be unique, and your software version may appear slightly different than my tutorials. Please only consider this a general guide for configurations within your pfSense installation. I hope these examples are received as concepts rather than specific instructions which can be applied globally. However, many people have followed these exact steps in order to produce their own home firewall.

I present an option for ProtonVPN during this phase, but you could replicate these steps with most VPN providers. It is vital to choose a stable VPN provider with good speed and reputable privacy policies. ProtonVPN offers a higher level of privacy and security (in my opinion), but costs a bit more than other popular providers. It also requires a few extra steps during configuration. ProtonVPN has less users than most popular VPNs, which means less people associated with each IP address. This could lead to less restrictions on sites which block VPNs and fewer captchas when visiting websites with DDOS protections. Most users will see no difference in the usage of one provider versus the other. Please check **inteltechniques.com/vpn.html** for the latest information about suggested VPN providers. **Most clients' firewalls use ProtonVPN as the VPN service**. These instructions assume you now possess VPN service through ProtonVPN. First, we need to download their certificate, which involves a few extra steps. First, log in to your ProtonVPN account and navigate to https://account.protonvpn.com/downloads. Conduct the following.

- Under "OpenVPN Configuration Files", select "Router".
- Under Protocol, select "UDP".
- Under Connection, select "Standard Server Configs".
- Choose your desired country of VPN.
- Click the "Download" button next to any server near you and save the file.

The number of servers is a bit overwhelming, but our choice for this phase does not matter. Select any server in your country and "Download" the certificate. Free users can take advantage of some servers, but expect slow speeds. After you confirm you can access the content of the downloaded file within a text editor, conduct the following steps within the pfSense dashboard through your web browser.

- Navigate to "System" > "Cert Manager" > "CAs" and click "Add".
- Change "Descriptive name" to "VPN".
- Change "Method" to "Import an existing Certificate Authority".
- Select and copy all text from "----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----" through "-----END CERTIFICATE----" within the previously downloaded ProtonVPN certificate.
- Paste this text into the "Certificate Data" box within pfSense and click "Save".
- Navigate to "VPN" > "OpenVPN" > "Clients" and click "Add" in the lower-right.
- Enter a "Description" of "ProtonVPN".
- Confirm "Server Mode" is "Peer to Peer (SSL/TLS)"; "Protocol" is "UDP on IPv4 Only"; "Device Mode" is "Tun - Layer 3 Tunnel Mode"; and "Interface" is "WAN".
- Enter a "Server Host or Address" of "us.protonvpn.net" (for U.S. users).
- Confirm a "Server port" of "1194".
- Within "User Authentication Settings", provide your ProtonVPN "OpenVPN/IKEv2 username" credentials which are available in the "Account" section of your ProtonVPN online dashboard. These will be different than your credentials to log in to the ProtonVPN application.
- Enable "TLS Configuration: Use a TLS key".

- Disable "Automatically generate a TLS Key".
- Copy the text from "-----BEGIN OpenVPN Static key V1----" through "-----END OpenVPN Static key V1-----" inside the downloaded ProtonVPN certificate.
- Paste this text into the "TLS Key" box within pfSense.
- Confirm "TLS Key Usage Mode" is "TLS Authentication".
- Confirm "Peer Certificate Authority" is the "VPN" option created earlier.
- Confirm "Client Certificate" is "None (Username and/or Password required)".
- Enable "Data Encryption Negotiation".
- Within "Data Encryption Algorithms", add "AES-256-GCM (256 bit key, 128 bit block)" by clicking it, then remove (click) any others inside the box to the right.
- Change "Fallback Data Encryption Algorithm" to "AES-256-CBC (256 bit key, 128 bit block)".
- Change "Auth digest algorithm" to "SHA512 (512-bit)".
- Change "Topology" to "Subnet - One IP address per client in a common subnet".
- Under "Advanced Configuration", enter the following within "Custom Options":

  tun-mtu 1500;
  tun-mtu-extra 32;
  mssfix 1450;
  reneg-sec 0;
  remote-cert-tls server;
  pull;
- Change "Gateway Creation" to "IPv4 only".
- Change "Verbosity level" to "3 (recommended)" and click "Save".
- Select "Interfaces" and click "Assignments".
- Next to "ovpnc" at the bottom, click "Add" then "Save".

Notice the name assigned, as it may be similar to Opt1, Opt4, or Opt6. Click on this new name, which should present the configuration for this interface. Modify the following.

- Enable "Enable Interface".
- Provide a "Description" of "OVPNC".
- Enable "Block Bogon Networks".
- Click "Save", then "Apply changes".
- Navigate to "Firewall" > "NAT".
- Click on "Outbound" at the top.
- For "Outbound NAT Mode", select "Manual Outbound NAT rule generation".
- Click "Save" then "Apply Changes".
- In the lower portion of the screen, click the pencil icon (edit) next to the option with a description similar to "Auto created rule - LAN to WAN".
- Change the "Interface" option of "WAN" to "OVPNC" and click "Save".
- In the lower portion of the screen, click the pencil icon (edit) next to the option with a description similar to "Auto created rule for ISAKMP - LAN to WAN".
- Change the "Interface" option of "WAN" to "OVPNC".
- Click "Save" then "Apply Changes".

This phase tells your firewall to route the internet traffic from your various devices through the VPN which you configured on the firewall. This ensures that all of your devices ONLY connect through a VPN, and eliminates the need to possess a VPN connection on a specific device itself. This is vital for hardware which cannot host a VPN connection, such as streaming devices, IoT units, and e-book readers. However, if your VPN fails, you will be exposed. Because of this, we will execute the next phase in order to kill your entire internet connection if the VPN is not protecting your network.

Your firewall should now automatically connect to ProtonVPN upon boot. This means all of your internet traffic from any device within your home is now protected. However, VPN connections are known to fail, reset, or otherwise leave the user exposed. I believe that no website or online service should ever know your real IP address, and I cannot take the chance of exposure. Therefore, we should make the following changes in order to protect from leakage. Some of this may appear redundant on your installation, but let's ensure your device is properly protected.

- Navigate to "Firewall" > "Rules" > "LAN".
- Click the pencil icon (edit) next to "Default allow LAN to any rule".
- Click the "Display Advanced" option near the bottom.
- Change the "Gateway" to "OVPNC_VPNV4".
- Click "Save" then "Apply Changes".
- Click the "Disable" icon next to "Default allow LAN IPv6 to any rule".
- Click "Apply Changes".
- Navigate to "System" > "Advanced" > "Miscellaneous".
- Enable "State Killing on Gateway Failure" and "Skip rules when gateway is down".
- Click "Save".

Reboot pfSense by clicking "Diagnostics" then "Reboot". This should lock all of these settings into place and boot with proper VPN protection. This configuration should harden your network and protect you if your VPN should ever fail. It is vital to test this, which will be explained soon. Remember this whenever your internet "goes out". If your firewall is on at all times, I suspect you will experience rare outages when the VPN disconnects. Since I turn my firewall and internet connection off every night, I rarely experience outages during the day and evening when it is active.

If your internet connection is ever unavailable because of a VPN disconnection, you can still open your browser and connect to the firewall at 192.168.1.1. From within the pfSense menu, you can select "Status" > "OpenVPN". Clicking the circle with a square inside, on the far right, stops the VPN server. Clicking the triangle in this same location starts the service. In my experience, this repairs any outage due to a failed VPN connection. I highly recommend becoming familiar with this process, as you will not have an internet connection to research issues if there is a problem.

If desperate, shutting down the device and turning it back on often resolves issues with a failed VPN connection. **Pressing the power button (quick press) on a running Protectli Vault shuts the pfSense process down properly within 20 seconds.** Pressing it while powered off boots the device. **Never hold the power button down longer than a second unless your device is locked-up or not responsive.** This action could perform a hard reset which erases all configurations. Additionally, never remove the power cord from a device which is powered on. This can corrupt the operating system.

It is time to test our connections. Make sure your internet access (cable modem, DSL, etc.) is connected to the WAN port of the pfSense device and a personal device (Wi-Fi router, laptop, etc.) is connected to the LAN port. Open the pfSense portal within your browser. Click the pfSense logo in the upper-left to return to the home page of the dashboard at any time. It should now display a WAN IP address in the Interfaces section. Once you have internet access connected to your firewall, navigate to "Status" > "OpenVPN". If Status does not show as "up", click the circular arrow icon under "Actions" to restart the service. If it still does not come up, navigate to "Diagnostics" > "Reboot" to restart the device. Ensure that Status shows as "up" before continuing. This means that your router is connected to your internet connection and is protected by your VPN provider. You should now have ProtonVPN masking your IP address from any sites you visit. We will test this later. If you ever want to start over, navigate to "Diagnostics" > "Factory Defaults" to reload the firewall without any modifications.

Optional: Choose a Different ProtonVPN Server

Note that I chose "us.protonvpn.net" as my server host. This will automatically connect to a random stable U.S. server with good speed. If you are not in the United States, you must choose your desired country's server at **protonvpn.com/vpn-servers**, such as "ca.protonvpn.net" (Canada) or "ch.protonvpn.net" (Switzerland). If you want to only connect to local servers within a state or country, you must identify the IP address associated with each server. Assume you are in Texas and want to use only Texas servers. Log into your ProtonVPN account through a web browser and click "Downloads" in the left menu. Choose "OpenVPN configuration files", then select "Router", "UDP", and "Standard server configs". Select your location, such as "United States", then select an appropriate server, such as US-TX#9 (Texas). Click the "Download" link to the right and obtain a configuration file for that server. Open this file within a text editor to identify the IP address, which was 89.187.175.141 at the time of this writing. The IP addresses for US-TX#18 and US-TX#21 were 89.187.175.129 and 89.187.164.242.

I could place the first server IP address (89.187.175.141) in the previously explained "Server Host" field and my firewall would connect to that Texas server each time by default. If desired, you can add any other servers under the "Advanced Configuration" option previously explained. This will issue a random server from specific options upon boot and skip any server which does not respond. This prevents our firewall from broken connections if one server is down. This is how I configure my firewall at home. I apply three servers within two states for redundancy. If a state's servers all fail, I have coverage. **Conduct the following ONLY if you do not want to use a general country-based server and have a need for specific servers based on location.**

- Identify the desired servers using the previous instruction.
- Navigate to "VPN" > "OpenVPN" > "Clients".
- Click the pencil icon next to your configuration to edit.
- Replace "us.protonvpn.net" with the first server address from your desired servers.
- In the "Advanced Configuration" section, scroll to the "Custom Options" until you see "pull;".
- Add remaining desired server IP addresses on the line immediately after "pull;" and click "Save".

Example:
```
tun-mtu 1500;
tun-mtu-extra 32;
mssfix 1450;
reneg-sec 0;
remote-cert-tls server;
pull;
remote 89.187.175.129 1194;
remote 89.187.164.242 1194;
remote-random;
```

If you have no preference of a specific location, and you are in the U.S., "us.protonvpn.net" is the easiest setting, and is already supplied within the configuration files on my website. It will always connect. The optional configuration presented here allows you to only use local servers which may present better speeds. My firewall has a primary server within my state and a secondary server in the same state within the "Advanced Configuration" area. I then add an additional third server from a nearby state in case all of the chosen servers from my state are down for maintenance at any given time.

At least once annually, I confirm that my chosen server IP addresses are still applicable to my configuration. I navigate to the full server list as previously explained on this page and consider all options. I then identify the IP addresses for each desired server. I create and store pfSense configuration files for various states for easy access. While all of this may sound difficult, it only needs done once. If these steps should change, I will post any new information at **https://inteltechniques.com/firewall**.

Phase Four: Prevent DNS leakage

The previous steps force the firewall to use your VPN interface as the default gateway. This means only the VPN can serve web pages, and not the raw internet connection delivering internet access to the device. However, your ISP's DNS servers are possibly still being used. DNS is the technology explained in the previous chapter which translates domain names into the IP addresses needed to complete the connection. Using the default DNS servers from your ISP would tell your ISP every website that you visit, but they could not see the content. It is possible that your VPN provider is acting as a DNS server, which may be acceptable. I always prefer a separate service for DNS queries.

Personally, I choose to use a third-party DNS provider in order to have another layer of privacy. My VPN provider is delivering my internet access and content, but a third-party DNS can look up the requests to provide the content to the VPN. This takes away a bit of knowledge about my internet browsing from the VPN company, but not much. Since we are seeking extreme privacy, I believe this extra step is justified. Choosing an alternative DNS provider will also allow us to encrypt our DNS traffic.

Many DNS providers do not allow encrypted connections, so I will use one that does. I chose to make Cloudflare my firewall DNS provider, as previously mentioned. They are not perfect, and have financial motives for their huge company, but they are better than most of the alternatives, such as Google. I chose Cloudflare because they are one of the few DNS providers which provide encrypted DNS, promise to destroy connection logs after 24 hours, and has been independently audited by KPMG. They also allow us to appear somewhat "normal" while relying on their protections. Using other niche privacy-themed DNS providers can make us stick out as unique. Using Cloudflare as our backbone DNS allows us to blend in with the crowd.

Navigate back to the pfSense Dashboard and conduct the following to change the DNS servers to Cloudflare or any other desired service.

- Navigate to "System" > "General Setup".
- Add 1.1.1.1 as DNS server, cloudflare-dns.com as DNS Hostname and select "WAN_DHCP-wan".
- Click "Add DNS Server".
- Add 1.0.0.1 as DNS server, cloudflare-dns.com as DNS Hostname and select "WAN_DHCP-wan".
- Disable "DNS server override".
- Change "DNS Resolution Behavior" to "Use remote DNS server, ignore local DNS".
- Click "Save".

You may notice that your VPN provider is still acting as your DNS server. This is common and is likely a service to protect you from your own ISP eavesdropping on your traffic. However, I insist on the third-party option. In order to truly force pfSense to use the third-party DNS provider while never relying on the VPN provider, and ensure our connections are encrypted, we can conduct the following.

- Navigate to "Services" > "DNS Resolver" > "General Settings".
- Enable "Enable DNS Resolver".
- Within "Outgoing Network Interfaces", select "OVPNC".
- Enable "DNS Query Forwarding".
- Enable "Use SSL/TLS for outgoing DNS Queries to Forwarding Servers".
- Within "Custom Options", add the following text.

```
server:
forward-zone:
name: "."
forward-tls-upstream: yes
forward-addr: 1.1.1.1@853
forward-addr: 1.0.0.1@853
```

- Click "Save" and "Apply Changes".
- Reboot the firewall through "Diagnostics" and "Reboot".

Return to the Dashboard and ensure that the only DNS servers listed are those desired. Navigate to https://whatismyipaddress.com and ensure that your VPN IP address is shown. Conduct an Extended Test at https://dnsleaktest.com and ensure that only the chosen DNS provider details are shown. Why is this important? If you have configured your firewall correctly, all DNS requests from your devices will be handled by Cloudflare. By enabling DNS over TLS, the requests are encrypted and your ISP will only see that you are connecting to a DNS provider without being able to see the requests themselves. In other words, your ISP will not know which websites you visit, only the amount of data used to generate the content.

In the previous chapter, I explained my preference of NextDNS as my DNS provider for personal devices. This service filters most ads, malware, and other undesired connections while conducting the necessary DNS queries. However, I never recommend any filtered DNS service on a home firewall. You will eventually encounter sites and services which will be blocked across your entire network. It would be substantially difficult to reverse this change from a mobile device or video streaming hardware. Your privacy requirements might cause problems for the other members of your household.

This is why I focused the DNS requirements in the previous chapters on device-level DNS settings. You can choose any DNS provider for each device in the home, and that setting will override the firewall's DNS. Remember, the Cloudflare DNS on the firewall is the "backup" option which only gets triggered if DNS has not been configured within the device connected to the firewall. This also covers any guests on your network which do not care about privacy. If a relative is connecting to suspicious websites while on your Wi-Fi, they are connecting through a VPN and the DNS queries are mixed with the others being served by Cloudflare without any user account.

If you absolutely do not want to use Cloudflare, you can apply NextDNS's public servers without an account toward your firewall. This will query their servers for DNS, but will not provide any filtering. Conduct the following.

- Navigate to "System" > "General Setup" and delete any DNS servers.
- Add 45.90.28.207 as a DNS server and choose the "WAN_DHCP-wan" interface.
- Click "Add DNS Server".
- Add 45.90.30.207 as a DNS server and choose the "WAN_DHCP-wan" interface.
- Click "Save".
- Navigate to "Services" > "DNS Resolver" > "General Settings".
- Within "Custom Options", modify the following lines.
  forward-addr: 1.1.1.1@853 -to- forward-addr: 45.90.28.207.dns1.nextdns.io
  forward-addr: 1.0.0.1@853 -to- forward-addr: 45.90.30.207.dns1.nextdns.io
- Click "Save" and "Apply Changes".
- Reboot the firewall through "Diagnostics" and "Reboot".

There are many DNS server options. While I chose to use Cloudflare, you could easily pick another option such as NextDNS. Please revisit my DNS considerations within the previous chapter. I chose Cloudflare in order to take advantage of the encrypted option and eliminate any extra potential data leaks. The most vital concern here is to occasionally test for DNS leaks at https://dnsleaktest.com. Overall, I do not like placing all of my eggs (visited websites) in one basket (VPN provider). Isolating these tasks provides another layer of privacy and security. If you would like more information about DNS as it relates to privacy, please listen to my podcast on this topic titled "124-Does DNS Matter?" on my website at **inteltechniques.com/podcast.html**. Do not take the choice of VPN and DNS providers lightly. Do your homework and make the best decision for your needs.

Phase Five: Enable AES-NI CPU Crypto & PowerD

Prior to late 2019, pfSense insisted that version 2.5 of the firewall software would absolutely require an AES-NI cryptographic accelerator module. The company has since stated that it will not be mandated (for now). However, we should always future-proof our devices whenever possible. The Protectli Vault firewall supports this feature, which is disabled by default on any pfSense installation. Before I explain the process to activate this setting, we should first understand the technology.

A cryptographic accelerator module uses hardware support to speed up some cryptographic functions on systems which have the chip. AES-NI (AES New Instructions) is a new encryption instruction set, available in the firewall processor, which speeds up cryptography tasks such as encryption/decryption for services such as OpenVPN. In other words, it might make your firewall traffic faster. In my experiences, it did not change much. However, I believe you should consider activating the feature now in order to be prepared whenever it is mandated. The following steps enable AES-NI within the pfSense firewall.

- From the pfSense portal, click on "System" then "Advanced".
- Click the "Miscellaneous" tab.
- Scroll to the "Cryptographic & Thermal Hardware" section.
- Select "AES-NI CPU-based Acceleration" in the first drop-down menu.

Next, consider enabling "PowerD". This utility monitors the system state and sets various power control options accordingly. In other words, it can lower the power requirements whenever the firewall is in a state which does not demand high power. Navigate to the following to activate this setting.

- Scroll to the "Power Savings" section.
- Enable "PowerD".
- Ensure "Hiadaptive" is chosen for each option.
- Click "Save".

Please note that the configuration files hosted on my site, which are explained in a moment, already include the activation of AES-NI and PowerD, as well as all previous standard configurations. Overall, manually configuring everything in this chapter whenever possible is best. However, backup scripts may save you time when you need immediate access to the internet and your installation has become corrupt. Know all of your options, and understand the technology which makes everything function.

I also highly recommend plugging the firewall directly into an Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS). If you lose power, this small battery provides power to the unit without risking an improper shutdown. This can prevent corruption of the operating system and can keep your internet connection alive during power outages. Mine has saved me from many rebuilds. I have my home internet connection (cable modem), open-source Wi-Fi router (explained in a moment), and pfSense firewall all plugged into an APC UPS 425 unit (amzn.to/3gyjZDC). When my power goes out, my laptop runs on its battery while these three devices rely on power from the UPS. This allows me to keep working and shut down everything properly if the power does not return quickly. I cannot understate the need for a UPS in your home.

On the home screen of your portal, considering removing the upper-right window announcing the features of pfSense. Also consider adding the OpenVPN interface for easy identification of a proper connection. Both of these have been completed on the custom configuration files explained in a moment.

Your firewall is almost finished. We now have some minor tweaking to complete before we test all of our connections. I promise, you are almost there.

Phase Six: Disable Annoyances and Test Device

You may have a hardware device with an internal speaker. If so, you may choose to disable the audible alerts presented at boot and shutdown. Conduct the following to eliminate these noises.

- Navigate to "System" > "Advanced" > "Notifications".
- In the "E-mail" section, disable "SMTP Notifications".
- In the "Sounds" section, check the "Disable startup/shutdown beep" option and click "Save".

You should now test your new "kill switch". Navigate to "Status" > "OpenVPN" and click the small square "Stop OpenVPN Service" button to the right of the interface. Once it is stopped, try to connect to any website within your browser. You should receive a notification that you cannot connect. This means that without the VPN properly running, you have no internet access. Reboot your device to return to a protected state or simply restart the VPN service. Conduct a final test on the following websites and make sure your IP address and DNS server addresses match with what you chose during the setup.

https://www.dnsleaktest.com https://browserleaks.com/ip https://www.deviceinfo.me

Let's pause now and reflect on what we have achieved. The pfSense firewall is providing protection between your internet connection and your laptop, which is likely still connected to the LAN port of the firewall. The VPN within the firewall makes sure that your laptop never sends data from your true IP address. If you never plan to connect other devices, such as a wireless router, tablet, or streaming service, then your setup may be finished. This would be a rare scenario. In a moment, I explain how to introduce Wi-Fi to this configuration. The DNS servers that translate domain names into IP addresses are only those associated with a third-party DNS provider with a strong privacy policy. Overall, this means you will never expose your internet history to your internet service provider.

Many readers may be questioning the need to do all of this when we could simply use a VPN application on each of our devices. Consider one more example. You are at home and your wireless router is connected directly to your home internet connection without a firewall. The router is using your real IP address assigned by your provider. You boot your Windows or Mac laptop, and a connection to the router is made. Within milliseconds, your computer now has full internet access using your real IP address. Windows computers will start to send data to Microsoft while Mac computers will begin synching with Apple. This will all happen in the few seconds in between establishing internet access and your software-based VPN application on your computer connecting to the secure tunnel. In that brief moment, you have told either Microsoft or Apple who you really are and where you live. Both store these IP addresses for a long time, possibly forever. With a firewall solution, this does not happen.

Once you have your device exactly as you like it, navigate to "Diagnostics" > "Backup & Restore". Click the "Download configuration as XML" button and save the generated file. Rename it to something more descriptive such as "4-Port-ProtonVPN-US-Netflix.xml". This helps you remember which settings are present within the file. This file contains every configuration present within your device and should be stored in a safe place. If your system should ever become corrupt, or you make a change you cannot reverse, you can use this file to restore your settings. Conduct the following.

- Navigate to "Diagnostics" > "Backup & Restore".
- Click the "Browse" button and select the backup file.
- Confirm the restore option and allow the device to reboot.

If you ever make a mistake and simply want to start the entire process over, which I have needed to do several times, navigate to "Diagnostics" > "Factory Defaults" and reset everything by clicking the "Factory Reset" button. Be sure to check your dashboard home page on occasion and apply any updates from pfSense. Click the small arrows under "Version" to check for updates. Click the link provided there to begin the update process.

Optional: The "Netflix" Port

This tutorial assumes that you have a 4-port or 6-port Vault, you have already completed the previous instructions including adding the additional ports, and you want to assign one of those ports to connect directly to your internet service provider without any VPN protection. This can be beneficial when you want to stream video from services such as Netflix, but the service is preventing the stream because they are blocking your VPN connection. The following steps reassign the last port on your device to remove the VPN, while still protecting the remaining ports including your Wi-Fi network on the LAN port.

- Within pfSense, navigate to "Interfaces" > "Assignments" > "Bridges".
- Click the pencil icon to edit the bridge.
- Hold the ctrl (or cmd) key and click to deselect the last "Opt" port (similar to "Opt2" or "Opt4").
- Click "Save" and navigate to "Interfaces" > "Assignments".
- Click on the port which you just removed and configure the following:
  IPv4 Configuration Type: Static IPv4
  IPv4 Address: 192.168.2.1 (change "/" to "24")
- Click "Save" then "Apply Changes".
- Navigate to "Services" > "DHCP Server", then click the same port as previously mentioned.
- Select (check) the "Enable DHCP Server on ..." option.
- Enter the range as "From: 192.168.2.100 To: 192.168.2.150".
- Click "Save" and navigate to "Firewall" > "NAT" > "Outbound".
- Click the first "Add" button and change "Address Family" to "IPv4".
- Add a "Source Network" address of "192.168.2.0".
- Click "Save" and "Apply Changes".
- Navigate to "Firewall" > "Rules".
- Select the same target port as in the previous instructions.
- Click the pencil icon to edit the rule.
- Click "Display Advanced".
- Change the "Gateway" to "Wan_DHCP...".
- Click "Save" then "Apply Changes".
- Click "System" > "Routing", then click the edit (pencil) icon next to "WAN_DHCP".
- Enable the "Disable Gateway Monitoring" option, click "Save", and "Apply Changes".

The last port of the firewall should now connect directly through your ISP. This may be labeled Opt2 on a 4-port box or Opt4 on a 6-port box. Typically, it is the port to the far left when looking directly at the ethernet ports on the back of a Protectli Vault. Be careful with this! Anything plugged into that port has no VPN protection. If you have a wired streaming device, you could plug it directly into this port in order to allow services such as Netflix to function. You lose a great layer of privacy here, as Netflix now knows your true home IP address. However, it also allows you to use their service and bypass their VPN restrictions. The remaining ports, including any Wi-Fi access point connected to your LAN port, still rely on a VPN. Anything connected to those ports are protected.

If desired, you could connect a Wi-Fi router to this newly configured port and allow streaming devices to connect wirelessly. You could replicate the same instructions presented in a moment with the Slate/Beryl router and create a Wi-Fi network just for streaming. You would place the router into access point mode, connect an ethernet cable from the LAN port of the Wi-Fi router to the last port on the firewall, and change the SSID to something similar to "Netflix". Any device which connects wirelessly to this new network will not be protected by a VPN, but will allow access to all streaming services. Any time you encounter vital services which block VPNs, you would have an option which would allow the connection. Again, this increases your risk by exposing your true IP address to your ISP and the website or service used. If this strategy is executed, it should be used minimally.

If you have family members who demand to have unlimited access to services which commonly block VPNs, this can be a great technique. You can protect all of your personal online usage via a wired or Wi-Fi network through the LAN port of the firewall while being protected by a VPN. They can run their traffic through the second Wi-Fi network and bypass all of our privacy nonsense. Again, be very careful and deliberate here. Test everything twice before sharing with other household members. In a few pages, I present a diagram of how this might look within your home.

I would feel irresponsible if I closed this section without identifying my personal usage of this technique. Quite simply, I do not enable this feature. I believe exposing my true IP address to any service is too risky for my threat model. However, I also do not subscribe to services such as Netflix, Prime, or Hulu. All of these products monitor your viewing history, location, and schedule. The data is often shared with business partners and affiliates. When adding payment details, home address, and contact details, these services possess a powerful dossier about you. The absence of streaming video within private homes can be a topic of heated debate between family members. If you lose this battle, know that you have an option which offers a compromise. Remember, privacy is best played as a long-game.

Optional: Install pfBlockerNG

Prior to 2020, I included a "Pi-hole" within my home network. This small device is a Linux network-level advertisement and internet tracker blocking application, intended for use on a private network. Basically, it is a small box placed between my internet connection and my firewall in order to prevent undesired advertising content from being delivered to my devices. While I believe that Pi-holes are still great for home networks, I have transitioned some clients to pfBlockerNG. This software can be installed directly within your pfSense installation, which eliminates the need for another piece of hardware within your network. The following steps configure this option within your current pfSense build.

- From the pfSense portal, click on "System" then "Package Manager".
- Click "Available Packages" and search for "pfBlockerNG".
- Click "Install" next to the "pfBlockerNG-devel" option, then "Confirm" to complete the process.
- When finished, click "Firewall" then "pfBlockerNG".
- Click "Next" until you are presented with "IP Component Configuration".
- Choose "WAN" for "Inbound", "LAN" for "Outbound", and click "Next".
- Accept the default webserver configuration.
- Click "Next", then "Finish", and allow the next page to complete the script download process.

You now possess basic pfBlockerNG protection from invasive ads and tracking. Combined with uBlock Origin, as previously explained, you have a great layer of privacy in both your network and your browser. There are numerous additional feeds which can be enabled, but I typically avoid these. The default protection is sufficient for most. When finished with the pfBlockerNG installation process, conduct the following to fetch any updates.

- Click "Update", select "Reload" then click "Run".

The home page of the pfSense portal should now display a new section in the lower right. This window presents statistics regarding the number of intrusions blocked. Navigate to a website such as cnn.com. You should see several white boxes in the place of advertisements. This confirms that your configuration is working.

I currently have a love/hate relationship with pfBlockerNG. In 2020, I witnessed conflicts between the default installation options and my protocols for a VPN router. pfBlockerNG stopped working after an update. Furthermore, there are occasions when I want to see a full web page as intended, such as during an online investigation. It is easy to disable uBlock Origin whenever needed, but not as easy to disable pfBlockerNG. **I currently do NOT implement pfBlockerNG on my home network.** I rely on NextDNS for device content filtering as previously explained. You may have a stronger need for this protection.

Optional: Choose a Different Provider

While I prefer ProtonVPN within my home firewall, you might want a different option. In previous editions of this book, I recommended PIA as an affordable VPN with great speeds. Some readers have moved away from PIA due to their acquisition by Kape Technologies, which also owns several other large VPN companies. I think most of the drama about this is overblown, but I always respect caution when providing our network traffic to VPN conglomerates. I believe PIA is a good choice for speed, stability, ease of use, and price. If purchased anonymously, I see little harm with using their service. However, I believe ProtonVPN is a better choice for privacy purists (at a slightly higher cost with more difficult configuration). I share more details about my current VPN opinions and affiliate purchase links at **inteltechniques.com/vpn.html**. One benefit to PIA is that you can easily select a location-based server without the need to identify IP addresses or rely on a random country-based server every time. I will also use PIA in a moment to bypass many VPN-restricted websites. If using PIA on your firewall, replace the entire "Phase Three" tutorial with the following abbreviated steps.

- Download the file at www.privateinternetaccess.com/openvpn/openvpn-strong.zip and unzip it.
- Open any file, such as "us_texas.ovpn", within a text editor.
- In pfSense, navigate to "System" > "Cert Manager" > "CAs" and click "Add".
- Change "Descriptive name" to "VPN".
- Change "Method" to "Import an existing Certificate Authority".
- Copy all text from "----BEGIN CERTIFICATE-----" through "-----END CERTIFICATE-----" within the previously opened PIA file, such as "us_texas.ovpn". All files should have the same "ca" data.
- Paste this text into the "Certificate Data" box within pfSense and click "Save".
- Navigate to "VPN" > "OpenVPN" > "Clients" and click "Add" in the lower-right.
- Enter a "Description" of "PIAVPN"; confirm "Server Mode" is "Peer to Peer (SSL/TLS)"; "Protocol" is "UDP on IPv4 Only"; "Device Mode" is "Tun - Layer 3 Tunnel Mode"; and "Interface" is "WAN".
- Enter a "Server Host or Address" of "us-texas.privacy.network" (for U.S. users).
- Confirm a "Server port" of "1197".
- Within "User Authentication Settings", provide your PIA account credentials.
- Confirm "Peer Certificate Authority" is the "VPN" option created earlier.
- Confirm "Client Certificate" is "None (Username and/or Password required)".
- Enable "Data Encryption Negotiation".
- Within "Data Encryption Algorithms", add "AES-256-GCM (256 bit key, 128 bit block)" by clicking it, then remove (click) any others inside the box to the right.
- Change "Fallback Data Encryption Algorithm" to "AES-256-CBC (256 bit key, 128 bit block)".
- Change "Auth digest algorithm" to "SHA256 (256-bit)".
- Change "Topology" to "Subnet - One IP address per client in a common subnet".
- Under "Advanced Configuration", enter the following within "Custom Options":

```
persist-key
persist-tun
remote-cert-tls server
reneg-sec 0
auth-retry interact
```

- Change "Gateway Creation" to "IPv4 only".
- Change "Verbosity level" to "3 (recommended)" and click "Save".
- Select "Interfaces" and click "Assignments".
- Next to "ovpnc" at the bottom, click "Add" then "Save".
- Complete the remaining steps within the second half of page 158 and all of page 159.

Consider changing "us-texas.privacy.network" to a server closer to you from the files downloaded from PIA in the first step. You can also use my custom configuration explained next.

Custom Configuration Files and Purchase Options

When I was updating this chapter, I reached out to numerous members of my online video training to test my settings and tell me where I was wrong. During our conversations, we discussed the concerns about offering highly technical tutorials to a mass audience. I have heard from frustrated readers when a required step did not function as intended and served as a roadblock to the remaining instructions. I have also been bombarded with questions about the appropriate models and hardware configurations. I decided it would be best to offer some solutions to all readers in order to eliminate some of the pain.

I have made several custom configuration files which can be imported into your own pfSense installation. These files contain the exact ProtonVPN and PIA configurations presented in this chapter without much manual effort. Each script contains the appropriate VPN settings for ProtonVPN and PIA U.S. servers. Options for the "Netflix" port are provided as separate configuration files. Full details, including download links and complete import tutorials, can be found at **inteltechniques.com/firewall**. Below is a summary of the steps.

- Download the appropriate configuration file for your device.
- Log in to your pfSense portal and click on "Diagnostics" then "Backup & Restore".
- Click "Browse" in the "Restore" section and select the file previously downloaded.
- Click "Restore Configuration" and allow the device to reboot.
- Upon reboot, log in to pfSense with a username of "admin" and password of "admin1234".
- Click on "System" then "User Manager".
- Click the pencil icon to the right of the admin user.
- Change the password to a secure option and save the changes.
- Reboot the router and verify login.
- **ProtonVPN**: Locate your OpenVPN credentials in the ProtonVPN Dashboard on their website.
- **PIA**: Locate your account credentials.
- In pfSense, click "VPN" then "OpenVPN".
- Click the "Clients" menu option and click the pencil icon to edit the setting.
- Replace "changeme" with your ProtonVPN or PIA username and password.
- Plug your home internet connection into the WAN port.
- Plug your Wi-Fi router into the LAN port.
- Any other devices can plug into the OPT ports (if present).

This page also offers all configuration files created during previous editions of this book, but these are no longer updated or maintained. Those may be a good starting point for your build, but expect issues. Only the latest versions are updated for the current version of pfSense. My recommendation is that readers understand the tutorials presented here and apply the modifications manually themselves. This helps you understand the process. However, I do not want to exclude readers who are not tech-savvy from this privacy strategy. Possessing a firewall within your home network, even without understanding the details, is better than no protection at all.

These files could be modified to work with practically any VPN provider. You would only need to modify the certificate (System > Cert. Manager) and the OpenVPN configuration (VPN > OpenVPN > Clients > Edit) with the settings provided by your VPN service. Many readers have made slight modifications to my online configurations to make them perform well with VPN providers other than ProtonVPN.

Personally, I issue and recommend the 4-port device (amzn.to/31jMzlk) to most clients. It is robust enough for daily usage. I only issue the 6-port option to clients with internet speeds over 250 Mbps and numerous users on the network. The 2-port devices should only be considered if internet speeds are below 200 Mbps and less than five devices need to access the device simultaneously. Affiliate purchase links can also be found on the firewall page at **inteltechniques.com/firewall**.

VPN Blocking

At some point, you will experience a blocked connection due to your use of a VPN. This could be your bank preventing login because they completely block VPNs or a website which displays infinite "prove you are human" dialogues which prevents access. It is becoming much more common to encounter websites which simply do not allow connections from a VPN. For me, it is my business bank account. When I need to log in to their site, I am forced to either change servers, tweak my connection, or use public Wi-Fi. Let's discuss each.

Some sites might block VPNs by known IP addresses. Switching your connection to another state or country might bypass the restriction. You can easily do this within any standard VPN application, but most sites will still detect the VPN usage since you are using the same VPN provider.

Many sites which block VPNs are not refusing connections from specific IP addresses associated with VPN providers. Instead, they are usually blocking traffic signatures which are common to VPN connections. This is much easier than trying to constantly blacklist new VPN IP address ranges. Since our pfSense configuration relies on an OpenVPN UDP connection, that alone could trigger a website to block our traffic. One solution is to use the TCP protocol on port 443 during the VPN registration. The details of this exceed the scope of this book, but this modification might cause some websites to allow your connection while other traffic results in blocked access. In other words, TCP may allow us to sneak by some VPN blocks.

You could identify your VPN provider's TCP certificate; apply that to pfSense; change the connection and port details within OpenVPN; and hope everything works. I do not recommend this. You would be creating a much less stable firewall connection which will experience speed issues. Furthermore, the slightest change in your VPN provider's certificate or connection requirements could disable your firewall completely. If you want to test this technique, I recommend installing the VPN application from your provider and modifying the settings.

With practically any reputable VPN app, you can select the connection protocol within the settings menu. When blocked by a website, look for an option labeled "TCP" within the VPN application. If available, change the "Port" option to 443. The app will then make necessary modifications and establish the connection. This is never fool-proof, but it will often bypass generic VPN blocks commonly seen within online banking security. By modifying the app instead of the firewall, you can easily reverse the changes. Currently, the ProtonVPN app does not allow port specification, but you can force TCP connections (which use "443" by default) within the "Settings" > "Connection" menu after disabling "Smart" as the protocol. PIA allows you to specify "TCP" and change both the "Remote" and "Local" ports to "443". These modifications will bypass some blocks.

The previous options will only work with websites which are not aggressively blocking VPNs. Many sites will block your access based on IP address alone. As I was writing this section, Amazon began blocking all of my purchases. Any time I would try to "check out", I would receive an error about my items being out of stock. This made no sense, and I immediately assumed they were blocking my VPN. Switching to the TCP protocol within my VPN app worked for a while, but Amazon again began blocking my purchases. The best solution for this was to use a dedicated VPN IP address.

I believe the best service for DEDICATED IP addresses is PIA. This is an optional purchase at $51 annually. However, I believe it is worth the price when needed. When you purchase a PIA subscription, there is an optional add-on for a dedicated IP address. If you already have a PIA membership, it can be added at any time. However, I prefer to always match the full membership and dedicated IP expiration to be the same. After purchase, you will be asked to choose a desired location. This should be wherever you want to appear to be located when this is needed. Most people choose a server close to them. The site will generate a token which you should document immediately. Within the PIA application, navigate to the settings menu and select "Dedicated IP". Paste your token into this menu and you will now have the option to choose this new IP address within the application. This token system prevents PIA from associating the dedicated IP address with your account. Internally, an employee could not identify the individual user of a dedicated IP if presented with a court order. This feature alone made me choose PIA for this option since ProtonVPN does not offer exclusive dedicated IPs.

In my Amazon example, I launched the PIA application within my computer, selected the dedicated IP address server option, and initiated the connection. I was then using an IP address which no one else can use. This address was not blacklisted as a VPN by Amazon and I was allowed to make my purchase. To date, this method has bypassed all Amazon restrictions. Since this IP address is never assigned to anyone else, I have exclusive use of it. I can use it to bypass many other VPN restricted sites such as people search sites and opt-out pages. This is vital to my work.

If you have purchased a PIA membership with dedicated IP address, you could also use that account for your pfSense firewall. You could configure pfSense to always connect to a standard VPN server, such as "us-texas.privacy.network", and have network-wide VPN protection. You could then use that same account within their software application to connect to the dedicated IP address whenever needed.

The use of a dedicated IP sounds great, but it also carries privacy risks. Since you are the only person with access to that IP, you can be tracked more easily. With a standard VPN server, you may be one of hundreds of people with the same IP address at any given time. This is why I only use the dedicated IP option whenever absolutely necessary. If you purchased the PIA account anonymously with Bitcoin and provided alias information, the risk is decreased. However, any site which knows your dedicated IP address now knows it is yours. As an example, I may have to use the dedicated IP address in order to access my bank. The bank now knows this IP is associated with my real identity. I would never want to then use that IP address to browse the web or log in to a shady website. We are getting into the weeds here, but you should know the risks.

What do I do? I rely on my ProtonVPN firewall to protect my internet traffic across all devices within my home at all times. When I encounter a website which is blocking my connection or preventing login, I launch the ProtonVPN app; change the protocol to TCP; initiate the connection; and try the site again. With this option, I am allowed access to VPN-restricted sites over 40% of the time. When that specific online transaction is complete, I disable the app-based connection and close it completely. This puts me back within the ProtonVPN firewall connection. If I am still blocked, I launch the PIA application and choose the dedicated IP address server. Over 90% of the time, I am able to access the previously restricted content. I always disconnect the dedicated IP option as soon as I am finished with it. **I never use it whenever it is not absolutely required.**

The other benefit of two VPN service providers is redundancy. If one provider should fail, I can quickly import a pfSense configuration for the other provider. I have needed this on many occasions for failures with both ProtonVPN and PIA. I have never experienced a scenario when both were unavailable.

As a last resort, I will consider public Wi-Fi whenever I cannot access a VPN-restricted website. Open Wi-Fi sounds dangerous, and it was in the past. However, connecting to a secure SSL (HTTPS) website via public Wi-Fi is not as risky as it was in previous years. I always choose an unpopular coffee shop with few users on the network. I conduct my business and move along. The IP address of that shop is forever stored within my login history, but it is fairly far away from my home. This is a rare occurrence. Whenever possible, I call the bank and ask them to take care of whatever business I need completed. When they appear annoyed, I remind them that their site blocks VPNs, so I cannot do this myself. You may see online companies offering "residential proxies" which bypass these blocks, but I encourage you to avoid them. Many of these IP addresses are used without authorization and a malicious provider could intercept your traffic.

Popular streaming services such as Netflix will likely continue to block your connection through TCP. They use known VPN IP address block-lists to supplement their network traffic inspection in order to prevent VPNs from allowing access to geo-restricted content. If your entire home is behind a VPN firewall, expect occasional blockage of desired content. This is why the "Netflix" port option previously presented can be quite valuable.

What will you do? Will you have two VPN services available at all times? Is that overkill for your needs? Will you ever need a dedicated IP address? Is PIA alone sufficient for your needs? There are many considerations. The most important consideration is to take your time, evaluate your needs, and be prepared for future issues. Always be comfortable with the services you choose. Your VPN is an important piece of your privacy puzzle.

I have tested these configurations on numerous devices from various operating systems. I have found the following issues occasionally present within some installations.

ISP-provided router IP conflict: If your internet provider supplies you with a combination modem and router, you may have IP address conflicts. The provided router will likely be using the IP scheme of 192.168.1.x which will cause a conflict from the beginning on your installation. The options to correct this situation are to either change the IP scheme in your provided router to something different (such as 192.168.9.x), or provide this new IP range to the pfSense installation. My preference is to change the IP address on your ISP provided router so that your pfSense device can be the primary network supplier. In this situation, you should also disable DHCP on the ISP provided router, and never plug any devices into that router. You would be unprotected by the VPN on pfSense.

ISP-provided router Wi-Fi conflict: If your ISP provides a combination modem and Wi-Fi router, consider disabling the Wi-Fi feature completely on that device. Connect the modem to the pfSense box, and then connect a wireless access point to the pfSense unit as previously discussed. Review your ISP-provided documentation for further details. Consider contacting your ISP and requesting a modem without embedded Wi-Fi. If this is not available, many third-party modems may function with your ISP provider. Overall, a modem without Wi-Fi is always preferred for privacy and security. Modems without any type of router are even better.

Updates: Minor updates to pfSense, such as 2.6.1 and 2.6.2 should not have much impact on your settings. However, major updates such as the eventual 2.7.0 could have a large impact to your configuration. Therefore, be sure to back up all configuration settings before every major upgrade. If necessary, you can always downgrade the software by rebuilding from the original installation file and importing your configuration file. You can identify your current version, and apply any updates, on the Dashboard page of your pfSense device.

Stream Blocking: Many video streaming services, such as Netflix, block all known VPN IP addresses in order to meet various location-based licensing restrictions. If you cannot access these services while behind your firewall, you will need to create a direct connection to your internet provider by using the optional "Netflix" port configuration. This action eliminates a big layer of privacy, but may prevent your family members from kicking you out of the house.

Hardware Crypto: The "Hardware Crypto" option at "VPN" > "OpenVPN" > "Clients" > "Edit" was not configured within this tutorial due to occasional hardware conflicts. If you have the 6-port Vault and extremely high internet speeds, you may benefit from this feature. Navigate to the page and select the available hardware. Mine was displayed as "Intel RDRand engine - RAND", and I have it enabled. However, I see no speed increase.

VPN Disconnections: VPN servers sometimes disconnect. I find this to be rare if you reboot your router once daily (I shut mine down completely at night).

Internet Disconnections: If you lose internet completely within your firewall or connected devices, try rebooting the firewall first. If this does not solve the issue, make sure you have a functioning device plugged in to the LAN port (a LAN device is required for the bridge to function). If you have a 4-port or 6-port model, the LAN port must be active at all times.

ZFS vs. UFS: If you installed pfSense prior to version 6.0.0, you might possess a file system called UFS. This was the default option present within my previous books. The latest version installs a file system called ZFS. It is much more stable, especially during power failures. The "Disks" section of your pfSense dashboard identifies which version you have in parentheses. I highly recommend ZFS. If you have UFS, please use this chapter to export your configuration; reinstall pfSense; and import your config file.

Wireless Routers

This pfSense setup is missing one major feature. There is no Wi-Fi. After you have built your home firewall, you can associate it with any wireless router by connecting an ethernet cable from the LAN port of the firewall to a port on the wireless router. Be sure to disable DHCP, DNS, and any firewall settings within the wireless router's options as to avoid conflicts. Be sure that you are only running a VPN on the pfSense device as to not suffer performance issues. In a moment, I offer a simpler Wi-Fi solution for pfSense users. First, you should question whether you need wireless access at all.

The majority of my work is conducted on a laptop with an ethernet connection directly to my firewall. Wireless access is not required for this. I leave my Wi-Fi device off most of the time when I am working. However, I often need Wi-Fi for my home mobile device, especially since I do not allow a cellular connection from my home. It is also unrealistic to think that the other occupants of your home will go without Wi-Fi.

By possessing separate devices for your internet connection (cable modem), firewall (pfSense), and Wi-Fi (wireless router), you can control the ability to disable them as needed. As an example, my ISP provided modem is always on. The firewall is on during the day, but I shut it down at night when it is not needed. The Wi-Fi is only on when needed, but not necessary for internet connection to my laptop. This may seem all overboard, but the ability to disable my Wi-Fi is important to me. The following may help explain why.

Most homes have wireless internet access. This involves at least one wireless router which is connected to your internet access provider via a modem. If you purchased your own wireless router, it mandated some type of setup upon installation. This likely included a default name of the router which you may have customized. If the default was accepted, your router may have a name such as Netgear or Linksys (the brand of the router). While this is not best practice for security reasons, it does not violate much in the way of privacy. If you customized the name of the router, which is extremely common, it may be broadcasting sensitive details such as your family name. You can see the wireless network name on any device which you have connected such as a phone or laptop. If the network broadcasts a name that jeopardizes your privacy, change it to something generic according to the steps in the instruction manual.

Regardless of your current scenario, you should consider hiding your wireless network name, officially known as the SSID. Entering your setup utility on the wireless router from a computer connected to the device will allow you to change the broadcast setting to a hidden network. Again, seek the specific instructions for your router online or within the manual. **Note that this does not make you or your Wi-Fi network invisible.** There are plenty of tools which will identify hidden networks. However, this is not common activity conducted by your average neighbor. This will require you to know the specifics of your router when configuring new wireless devices to access your network. The security and privacy benefits of a hidden network outweigh these rare configuration annoyances. I confess I do not hide my SSID.

The biggest risk with a unique Wi-Fi network name is the collection of that information from services such as Google and Wigle. That bright Google street view car that takes photos of your home and then posts them to the internet for the world to view is also collecting your wireless network name for cataloging. Please pause a moment to consider the significance of this activity. If your home router is named "Bazzell Family", and Google or Wigle has collected this data, you are a search away from disclosing your true identity as associated with your home address.

There is a way to opt-out of this collection behavior, but it is not perfect. Some people have reported that the following technique is often successful, but not always. The premise is that you can add specific characters to your Wi-Fi network name which will prevent various collection services from acquiring your router's information. Google mandates that "_nomap" appear at the end of your network name while Microsoft requires "_optout" to appear anywhere within the network name. Therefore, a router name of "wifi_optout_nomap" would tell both services to ignore this router and not to display it within router location databases. Wigle accepts both of these options; therefore, this network name would be sufficient.

Ideally, you will possess a wireless router which supports open source firmware. Before jumping into options, we should consider the reasons this is important. When you purchase a typical Linksys, Netgear, Asus, or other popular router, it is pre-configured with proprietary software made by the manufacturer. Most people rarely access this firmware, and simply accept the default options. The router just "works" right out of the box. We should be concerned with the software which controls our devices. Most wireless routers possess two threats within this software.

The first is privacy. Most popular routers send usage metrics back to the manufacturer. These do not identify you by name, but may include enough details to identify your interests, general location, and internet service. Since your router has full internet access, it can send and receive as much data to and from the manufacturer as requested. At the very least, the manufacturer receives your IP address whenever it is queried.

Next is security. Manufacturers want to present a smooth experience without technical complications. In order to achieve this, routers commonly have many unnecessary features enabled, including open ports which may present vulnerabilities. Furthermore, many manufacturers are slow to provide security patches once an issue is identified. Even if an update is available, few people apply any patches.

One solution to both of these issues is to "flash" your router with open-source software. This was explained briefly in my previous privacy books, but it can quickly exceed the scope of this book. Overall, I recommend either DD-WRT or OpenWRT. Let's dissect each.

DD-WRT (dd-wrt.com): For many years, I configured Wi-Fi routers with DD-WRT as the operating system. I first identified a router which is supported by DD-WRT. These included most versions of the Netgear Nighthawk R7000 AC1900, Linksys WRT3200ACM AC3200, and Asus RT-AC68U AC1900. These can still be found online and in stores. The DD-WRT website explains the process of replacing the stock firmware with this custom open-source software for each router. However, I no longer choose this route.

OpenWRT (openwrt.org): This option is very similar to DD-WRT with a few important differences. Most importantly, there are fewer routers which support this operating system. While OpenWRT allows more granular control than DD-WRT, this can cause unnecessary confusion. This can be beneficial to some while a headache to others. I only recommend flashing your own router with OpenWRT if you have a deep understanding of networking and routers. Instead, I offer a pre-configured option in just a moment.

Tomato: In my previous privacy books, I had high praise for Tomato as the operating system for wireless routers. The specific builds I suggested are no longer updated. While there is still one Tomato project being maintained, I no longer endorse it. The previous two options are superior in my opinion.

Whatever device you choose for your Wi-Fi needs, whether stock software or these custom options, remember to disable DHCP (assigns IP addresses) and place your Wi-Fi router into "Access Point" mode if available. If your Wi-Fi router is behind a pfSense firewall, the threat of privacy and security vulnerabilities is much less than if you did not have the firewall protection. Even stock routers without modification are fairly safe as long as they are behind the firewall. Choose the level of privacy and security most appropriate for your situation. The summary at the end of this chapter may help digest all of this information.

There are online providers which will sell you a router pre-configured with your choice of open-source firmware. However, the markup for this relatively easy service is high. I have seen router prices double when they include this free software. I do not trust any internet stranger to put software on a device which will see everything I am doing online. I strongly encourage you to research DD-WRT and OpenWRT, identify a supported router, and jump in. Learning the configuration process will help you maintain the device. Alternatively, you could consider a pre-configured "portable" router, such as the device mentioned in the next section. It should simplify all of this for you.

A pfSense firewall is essential for a private and secure home, but can be overkill while on the road. However, blindly relying on public Wi-Fi is dangerous. You expose your current IP address (and location) at all times and could be vulnerable to malicious attacks from other devices on the network. This is where a travel router can be a vital piece of hardware for those commonly away from home. I currently provide either a **Slate** (amzn.to/2FYo8i7) or **Beryl** (amzn.to/3bm42xc) portable device to all of my clients who travel frequently, and some use it in their homes at all times as an access point. I explain two specific configurations within the following pages for these scenarios.

The Slate and Beryl portable Wi-Fi routers are mighty for their size. The software on each is based on OpenWRT and possesses a menu system which is easy to navigate. There are many configurations, but I will focus on the most applicable to this book. First, let's assume that you want to use this as a Wi-Fi access point with a pfSense firewall. In this scenario, you created a pfSense unit which is connected directly to your home internet connection. You need Wi-Fi but do not want to self-install custom open-source software on a device. Since this is technically a travel router, the range will be less than a traditional unit. The following steps configure the Slate or Beryl to be used as an access point with a pfSense firewall in your home.

- Power on the device.
- Connect an ethernet cable from the router WAN port to the pfSense LAN port.
- Connect a computer or mobile device to the router via ethernet or Wi-Fi.
- Attempt to navigate to 192.168.8.1 within your browser.
- If the connection is allowed, skip to "Provide a new secure password" below.
- If the connection is refused, connect to the pfSense portal within your browser.
- Navigate to "Status" > "DHCP Leases" and identify the IP address of the router.
- Navigate to that IP address within your browser.
- Provide a new secure password.
- Under "Wireless" > "2.4G WiFi", click "Modify".
- Rename this SSID to something more private.
- Change the security password to something more secure and click "Apply".
- Repeat the process to rename and secure the "5G WiFi" option.
- Connect your computer's Wi-Fi to either SSID on the router.
- In the router portal, click on "Upgrade".
- If an upgrade exists, click "Download", then "Install".
- Click on "More Settings" > "Network Mode" > "Access Point" > "Apply".
- Reboot the router, reconnect, test login, and ensure your VPN is active.

This is not the typical use for this router, but this scenario may help readers new to the idea of a firewall and router combination. The previous instructions place the router into "Access Point" mode which instructs it to provide Wi-Fi connections without controlling services such as assignment of IP addresses. It relies on the pfSense box to assign IP addresses, which is desired while at home. Basically, the device is acting as Wi-Fi only and passing the connections through to pfSense. Although it is not the most powerful or robust router out there, it has been the easiest for my clients to configure for use with pfSense in a short amount of time. Next, let's focus on the true intention of a portable router.

Assume you are at a hotel and need to access the public Wi-Fi. When you connect your laptop or mobile device, your VPN must be disabled in order to gain authorization through the hotel's login portal. Once you have internet connectivity, your device will begin to send numerous packets of data exposing your true IP address from the hotel. This traffic will also occur through the hotel's hostile network.

Personally, I never connect any laptops or personal mobile devices directly through the hotel's Wi-Fi. Instead, I connect my travel router to the hotel network, and then connect all of my devices through the travel router. This allows me to possess unlimited devices on the network and all of them will be protected at all times by a single VPN connection. The following steps were conducted using a router before and during travel, but could be replicated on practically any portable router using OpenWRT.

Before Travel:

- Power on the device.
- Reset the device by holding the reset button for ten seconds and allowing reboot.
- Connect a computer or mobile device to the router via Wi-Fi.
- Navigate to 192.168.8.1 within your browser.
- Provide a new secure password.
- Under "Wireless" > "2.4G WiFi", click "Modify".
- Rename this SSID to something more private.
- Change the security password to something more secure.
- Click "Apply".
- Repeat the process to rename and secure the "5G WiFi" option.
- Connect your computer's Wi-Fi to either new SSID of the router.
- In the router portal, click on "Upgrade" > "Download" > "Install".
- Navigate to https://docs.gl-inet.com/en/3/tutorials/openvpn_client/.
- Apply the appropriate VPN settings for your provider to the router.
- In the router portal, navigate to "VPN" then "VPN Policies".
- Click the "Enable VPN Policy" toggle and enable the remaining two toggles.
- In the router portal, navigate to "VPN" then "Internet Kill Switch".
- Enable the toggle option.
- Connect an ethernet cable from an internet connection to the WAN port.
- Test internet and VPN connectivity through your browser.

During Travel at Hotels with Ethernet Connections (Preferred):

- Connect a computer or mobile device to the router via ethernet or Wi-Fi.
- Connect hotel ethernet to the WAN port of router.
- Attempt connection to internet through a web browser.
- If presented a hotel login page, proceed through the process.
- Test internet and VPN connectivity through your browser.

If your devices have VPN-protected Wi-Fi internet connectivity through the router, you are done. The portable router is providing the VPN service to anything connected. The hotel only sees one device (the router) and all data is traveling securely through the VPN. The ethernet connection is typically more stable than Wi-Fi, and I leave the device on for the duration of my stay. Unfortunately, hotel rooms with dedicated ethernet access are becoming rare. If your lodging only provides Wi-Fi, you can still make this strategy work for you.

During Travel at Hotels with Wi-Fi Connections:

- Connect a computer or mobile device to the router via ethernet or Wi-Fi.
- Navigate to 192.168.8.1 within your browser and log in to the portal.
- Navigate to "Internet" and click "Scan" under "Repeater".
- Under "SSID" select the hotel's Wi-Fi network.

- If required, enter the password for the network.
- Click "Join".
- Attempt connection to internet through a web browser.
- If presented a hotel login page, proceed through the process.
- Test internet and VPN connectivity through a browser.

If your devices have Wi-Fi internet connectivity through the router, you are done. I highly recommend leaving the router connected at all times in order to experience as few "dropouts" as possible. With both the ethernet and Wi-Fi options, you may be required to log in to the hotel portal daily during your stay.

Hotel Travel Router Troubleshooting

Since the router is trying to force usage of a VPN, the hotel's network may initially block the connection attempt. Many hotels demand that you first sign in to their own portal to verify that you are an active customer. The portal may refuse internet access to the router until this connection is authorized, which also prevents the VPN connection. Without the VPN connection, the router blocks all internet traffic. This can create a loop of failed requests. During a typical authorization process, the MAC address of a device is whitelisted in the hotel's network for the duration of your stay, and internet access is granted whenever requested. Since the router's MAC address is not authorized, we must "fake" it. During at least 50% of my hotel stays, the previous connection methods fail.

The following steps register a device with the hotel's network and clone that device's MAC address to the router. I usually use my travel "burner" Android device for this process (which possesses the surveillance app Haven as explained later), as I do not like to connect personal devices to hotel networks under any circumstance. Previously, I explained how to create an Android mobile device which never sends data to Google.

- Connect to hotel Wi-Fi directly from a secondary (non-personal) mobile device.
- Authorize the connection through the hotel's Wi-Fi portal.
- Disconnect from hotel Wi-Fi and connect to the travel router via Wi-Fi.
- Open the router portal (192.168.8.1) from a browser and log in.
- Navigate to "More Settings" then "MAC Clone".
- Identify the "Client" MAC address which represents your connected mobile device.
- Under "Your Router", select the MAC address of the mobile device.
- Click "Apply" and test internet and VPN connectivity through a browser.

Let's pause a moment and digest these actions. The hotel's network is blocking the hardware MAC address of the router because it has not been registered. The hotel's network has allowed the MAC address of the mobile device since it was registered. Since we cloned the MAC address of the mobile device to the router, the connection from the router to the hotel should be allowed. If required, you may need to repeat this process every 24 hours.

Some may read the previous section and question my trust of a third party (Slate/Beryl) to modify open source software (OpenWRT) on a router. I understand this concern. After "sniffing" the router's packets of data, I found that it only made calls to time servers and an update server. This is very common for any open-source router. For those hardcore security readers, you could consider re-flashing the router to a pure version of OpenWRT. However, I do not recommend this unless you understand the risks and accept the security responsibilities. I believe the stock open-source software of the Slate/Beryl is sufficient.

Optional: Embedded pfSense Wi-Fi

Protectli sells an optional Wi-Fi kit which is installed within the device before shipment. It presents an all-in-one firewall and Wi-Fi solution. However, the speeds are typically quite slow. The following steps configure pfSense if you possess an internal Wi-Fi device.

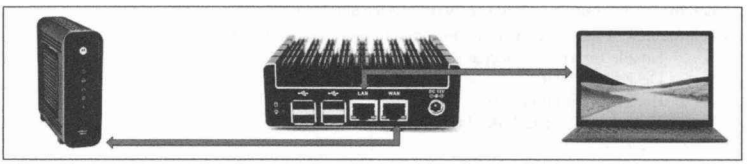
- Within pfSense, navigate to "Interfaces" > "Assignments" > "Wireless".
- Click the "Add" button and make the following modifications:
  Mode: Access Point
  Description: wifi
- Click "Save" and then click "Interface Assignments".
- Click the "Add" button to add the "wifi" device and click "Save".
- Click the new "Opt" option at the bottom and make the following modifications:
  Enable Interface: Selected (checked)
  Description: wifi
  IPv4 Configuration Type: Static IPv4
  IPv4 Address: 192.168.3.1
  /: 24
  Channel: 1
  SSID: pfsense
  WPA: Enable WPA
  WPA Pre-shared key: desired Wi-Fi password
- Click "Save", "Apply Changes", then navigate to "Firewall" > "NAT" > "Outbound".
- Click the first "Add" button and make the following modifications:
  Interface: OVPNC
  Address Family: IPv4
  Source: Network: 192.168.3.0
- Click "Save", "Apply Changes", then navigate to "Services" > "DHCP Server".
- Click "wifi" and make the following modifications:
  Enable DHCP: Selected (checked)
  Range: "From: 192.168.3.100 To: 192.168.3.150"
- Click "Save" and navigate to "Firewall" > "Rules" > "wifi".
- Click the first "Add" button and change the "Protocol" to "any".
- Click "Display Advanced" and choose a Gateway of "OVPNC".
- Click "Save", "Apply Changes", and reboot the firewall.

During my tests of this configuration, my internet speeds were capped at under 10Mbps. When connected through the Slate wireless router, my speed was 100Mbps. If you possess a slow internet connection and want a simple solution, this may work for you. I do not rely on this strategy due to the low speeds, and I have no clients with this setup.

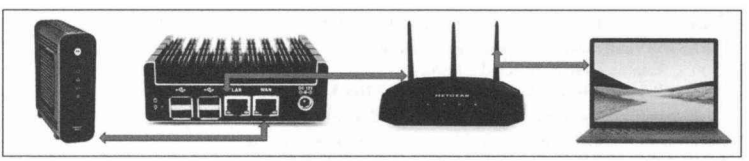
Firewall Summary

This is a heavy chapter. Let's break it down into six categories, starting with the most private and secure, ending with the least private and secure. I present diagrams in order to help explain the concepts after each summary. The modem on the left of each image represents the incoming internet connection provided by your ISP.

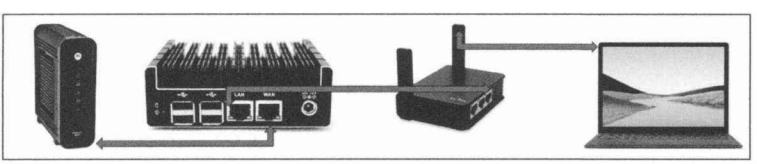
Internet Connection > pfSense Firewall > Wired Devices: This solution provides no Wi-Fi, and should only be considered by those with extreme privacy needs. Your firewall protects all of your internet traffic and you can only connect devices via ethernet wired connections. You will need at least two ports present on your firewall (one for incoming internet and one for your device, such as a laptop). This represents my home most of the time, unless I specifically need Wi-Fi on a mobile device.



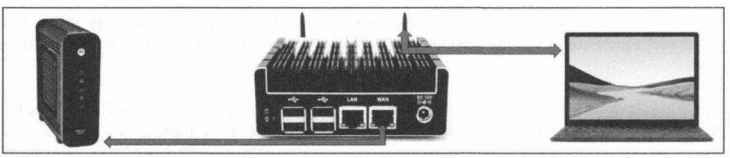
Internet Connection > pfSense Firewall > Open-source wireless router > All devices: This is more realistic for those with other people in the household, and this is the most common execution of this chapter for my clients. The firewall protects all of the traffic in the home with a constant VPN. The open-source wireless router has no proprietary software and all devices connect directly through it. It has a strong range and can support numerous devices. You will be responsible for identifying the appropriate tutorials for installing open-source software such as OpenWRT or DD-WRT in order to replace the stock manufacturer's invasive configuration.



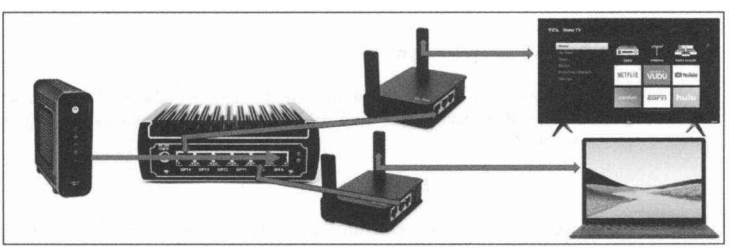
Internet Connection > pfSense Firewall > Portable wireless router > All devices: This is very similar to the previous option, but removes some of the headaches of configuring and maintaining an open-source router. It is the most common scenario for my clients who need a firewall with a static VPN and Wi-Fi which needs minimal configuration. Routers such as the Slate and Beryl previously mentioned are easier to configure and update. They are ready to use right out of the box. Remember that these devices have a shorter range than traditional home Wi-Fi routers and are not suitable for extremely large homes. However, I have installed these within three-story homes without much issue. One benefit of a less-powerful wireless router is that it cannot broadcast signal too far outside the home. Recently, I installed a Slate within a client's home. I could not see the network from the road, but I received a strong signal everywhere within the interior of the home. This is likely an unintended feature, but it gives me more control of my signal.



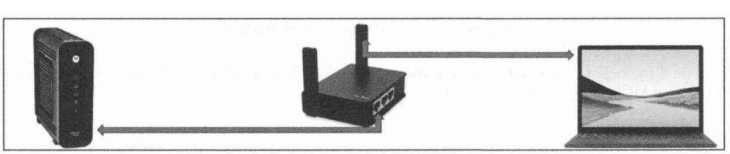
Internet Connection > pfSense Firewall > Internal Wi-Fi > All devices: This option provides a complete network solution within one box. However, the speeds may be slow. All of the Wi-Fi connections are routed through pfSense without the need for an external Wi-Fi access point. I only recommend this for slower internet connections which only require a handful of connected devices. I have also found the range to be less than that of a traditional access point. If your home has a high-speed internet connection which is shared with multiple devices, this is not for you. If you heavily stream high-definition video from various online providers, you and your family will not be happy with this setup. However, this configuration could be used as a standalone travel router. It would provide a stable (slow) firewall with static VPN protection while extending your stay at a hotel.



Internet Connection > pfSense Firewall > "Netflix" port > Wi-Fi > All devices: This option typically results in two Wi-Fi access points which requires two routers. One broadcasts through a VPN-protected network while the other uses a true IP address from a specific port on the firewall in order to facilitate online streaming services. This will be required if you demand privacy and security for your daily internet usage, but your family insists on streaming video services. Pick your battles wisely.



Internet Connection > Portable Router with VPN > All devices: This option relies on the VPN connection as provided within the portable router, such as the Slate or Beryl. This is not nearly as secure or stable as a pfSense firewall, but would provide your entire home the benefits of a network VPN. Ultimately, this should only be chosen due to financial constraints or temporary needs. This is the most common scenario I present while transitioning clients to extended-stay lodging. You may notice your high-speed internet connection slow down when multiple devices attempt to connect simultaneously.



Finally, a departing note. I firmly believe that every "private" home should have a pfSense firewall in between the internet connection and any devices including a wireless router. The choice of wireless access point (router) is not as important when you have a firewall in place, but I encourage open-source options versus standard stock firmware. **Your internet connection may be the most vulnerable and revealing service you ever use. Protect it at all costs.** All configuration scripts can be downloaded at **inteltechniques.com/firewall**.

VPN Wi-Fi Routers

Valid criticism from previous editions was that I did not include alternative options which were easier to implement but also offered VPN protection throughout an entire home network. While pfSense is more robust and stable, I have tested numerous Wi-Fi routers which possess embedded VPN abilities without the need for additional hardware. Of those tested, I found the **Invizbox 2** devices to perform the best.

This small hockey puck-shaped device connects directly to your home internet connection, such as a cable modem, and shares that connection via Wi-Fi. You provide your VPN credentials during the initial configuration and the device takes care of the rest. The device provides a Wi-Fi network throughout the home and all connected devices route internet traffic through the VPN by default. Sounds easy right? Well, it is, but there are some caveats.

This device is low-powered with less robust resources. This does not impact the ability for it to preform basic VPN or Wi-Fi tasks, but speed may be an issue. If you have gigabit internet coming into your home with twelve devices connected at all times, you will experience an obvious bottleneck with internet speeds. You may see between 30 and 65 Mbps under normal usage. If you have home internet speeds less than 50 Mbps, this may not matter.

Also, you must order a device specifically configured for your VPN provider. This makes installation very easy, but restricts you if you change providers. For most casual users, I believe there is more benefit with this plan than risk. I tested a unit configured for ProtonVPN and experienced no issues. That specific device is located at the following address.

https://www.invizbox.com/invizbox-2-protonvpn/?l=53

In 2021, I issued three of these devices to clients who did not want to fuss with pfSense. They have performed well and served a valuable purpose. Personally, I rely on pfSense for my own home, but I respect some scenarios where a simpler device is warranted.

MAC Addresses

Finally, one last thing to consider. If you are connecting any new hardware device to a modem provided by your ISP, the MAC address of the WAN port has never been used. This unique address will be shared with your internet service provider, which is not a big deal at this point. However, if you were to move to a new home, and take this device with you, the next internet service provider will see this same address. If you have the same provider, it would immediately know that you are the same customer, regardless of the name you provided for this new account. The solution is to either buy new hardware when you move, or "spoof" the MAC address. The following steps apply to pfSense.

- Navigate to "Interfaces" > "WAN".
- Provide a random set of numbers matching the pattern provided.

This should be done before connecting the internet connection. This may be overkill for most, if not all readers, but I want you to know your options and risks.

CHAPTER FIVE
GHOST ADDRESSES

Most privacy enthusiasts already have a United States Postal Service (USPS) Post Office (PO) box. This is a great layer of privacy for mailings in a real name that you do not want associated with your home. I have possessed many PO Boxes over the past two decades, but I will never use one again. The requirements for obtaining a PO Box have not changed much, but the residential enforcement has increased substantially.

Postal Service form 1093 is required in order to obtain a PO Box. This form explains that valid government identification must be provided, which seems acceptable in my view. Section four of this form is where I begin to get frustrated. This section requires your current home address, and this information must be verified by a postal worker. The verification is usually made via a delivery person who can confirm the applicant receives mail in that name at the residence. In other words, you must receive mail in your real name at your real address in order to obtain a PO Box to receive mail. If you cannot obtain verification of this, you will not receive your box. This means that a homeless person cannot obtain a PO Box, which seems to be an ideal need for the service.

Over the past year, I have seen enforcement of a confirmed home address at an all-time high. In 2018, I was assisting a client with the purchase of a new home in a city with which she was unfamiliar. She needed a PO Box in order to receive important documents and payments, and had not yet found a home she liked. The hotel where she was staying did not allow daily mail to guests. I entered the local post office and asked for an application to rent a PO Box. The employee immediately asked if I had a local address. I advised I did not and that I was house shopping and will be here a few months while I decide. I was shot down right away and told I could not have a PO Box unless I had a local address. I caved a bit and said that my local address is currently a hotel. No dice. This seems ridiculous, and is becoming a common result when I enter a post office. I have quit trying. Instead, I rely heavily on Commercial Mail Receiving Agencies (CMRA).

A CMRA may be better known as a UPS store or a mom and pop style shipping store that provides mail boxes. These services will usually charge a higher fee than the post office, but the verification requirements are almost always less demanding. Additionally, the service is usually superior and there are less restrictions on deliveries from UPS, FedEx, and other services. You will still need to complete a USPS form within the UPS system, but the address verification is usually waived. You must provide the names of all people who might receive mail at this box. In my experience, UPS stores are not as strict about this as USPS PO Boxes. I have never had a piece of mail in a random name refused at a UPS store, but this has happened often at the post office. If you obtain a UPS box, I highly recommend adding the name of a generic LLC to the list of potential recipients. LLCs will be explained later. This will give you an option to have packages delivered to your UPS box in the name of the LLC, or variation of it.

In 2018, I opened over a dozen UPS store boxes on behalf of clients. In every situation, the only identification shown of my client was a passport and utility bill. The passport does not possess a home address, and the utility bill displays a former address which will no longer be accurate after a new home is purchased. In every scenario, the address provided was not local to the area. I received no resistance from the staff, and walked out with a key to a new box that day.

In 2020, I began moving away from UPS boxes whenever possible. I have witnessed the postal service block incoming mail whenever the name did not match the form 1093 filed by the UPS store. This seems extremely aggressive but is not surprising. I am amazed that the USPS can monitor and remove incoming mail in an alias name, but somehow cannot reliably deliver mail and packages in my true name. Whenever feasible, I now avoid USPS PO boxes and UPS stores. Instead, I scour the target area for independent shipping stores.

Prior to writing this update, I established an anonymous home for a client. She needed to receive mail and packages in her true name and knew that these should not forward to her actual home. She wanted a mail

receiving option within 30 minutes of her home, but did not want to file form 1093 with the USPS. She was a high-risk client and was cautious to avoid any government record of her whereabouts due to data leaks and breaches.

I found my solution within a local shipping outfit. This small building offered services such as UPS drop-off, eBay packaging, and shipping supplies. I walked into the shop and explained my situation. I told them that my sister was in the process of building a home nearby and needed to receive an occasional small package before the home was finished. I asked if I could pay them to receive the package. They happily obliged and told me that they had a handful of rural customers who have their mail sent to the store. The fee was $3.00 per package and I was required to deposit $20 on the account. They entered the names I provided into their own internal system and never required any official government forms.

I tested the service by mailing an empty envelope to this new option. I placed my client's true name and the address of the business. Two days later, she received an email from the store announcing receipt of a new package. She responded to the store, picked up the envelope, and noticed a receipt displaying a new balance of $17 for future packages. This seemed too good to be true. It was more affordable than UPS monthly fees and much more private. However, there is a catch. Every time she shows up to obtain a package, she is never asked to display identification. Anyone could probably pick up a package without her consent. Because of this, I encourage her to retrieve packages as soon as she received email notification. Otherwise, I think this service is wonderful. I now always seek independently owned shipping services to serve as my mail receiving agency.

USPS PO Boxes, UPS boxes, and independent mail receivers are not true ghost addresses. They are all very obvious commercial mailing addresses which will not pass for a true residential address within systems which scrutinize this type of data. While most UPS stores advertise that they provide a residential address, this is mostly marketing. At a post office, they demand that you use "PO Box" within the mailing address, and a UPS store allows you to use your box number as "suite", "unit", or other possibilities. However, this does not fool the government or financial institutions.

If you try to open a new bank account and provide a PO Box or CMRA box, you will likely be denied. If you try to use the UPS box on your driver's license, expect failure. Practically every CMRA address has been identified within a database that is used by most financial, government, and related institutions. The moment you place a CMRA address within a credit card application, it is flagged for review. Therefore, a simple PO Box or UPS box is not sufficient for all of our needs. We need a true ghost address that appears like a residential location; allows us to receive mail sent to that address; and never requires us to physically be present at the location. We need a PMB.

A Personal Mail Box (PMB) is much more than a simple PO Box address. It provides you a mailing address which is often accepted by institutions that otherwise block CMRA and PO Box addresses. It also allows the collection of mail and distribution to a second address of your choosing. It is basically your new permanent personal address for any mail delivered in your real name. A PMB is a staple for every client. It is also a vital step toward advanced privacy techniques such as obtaining proper vehicle registrations, driver's licenses, passports, and other identification documents. All of this will be explained in upcoming chapters.

Most states have companies which provide PMB services, but I currently recommend South Dakota for most clients. I had previously considered Texas and Florida as candidates for PMBs, but I no longer endorse these options (unless you will be a physical resident of either state as explained later). Obtaining a PMB is a small part of a larger privacy strategy which is presented throughout the next several chapters, and I have encountered an increasing number of complications with Texas and Florida. However, these states may be considered when we approach nomad residency in the next chapter. For now, I will focus on the only state where I have continued success.

South Dakota is very friendly to full-time travelers such as those who live in an RV or nomadic people who explore the world year-round. This has spawned a business opportunity for companies wishing to cash in on

the needs of these travelers, such as mail service. This chapter will only discuss your mailing needs, while future pages will explain how you can take this to the next level. I encourage you to finish the entire book before committing to a specific state or provider.

I now rely exclusively on a service called **Americas Mailbox** (americasmailbox.com). All of the PMB services I have tested possess awful security protocols, and Americas Mailbox is no exception. On one occasion, they marked the wrong box on a vehicle registration and entered a lien for a car paid with cash. It took several months to get that straightened out, and Americas Mailbox insisted they did nothing wrong, refusing to apologize or pay the fees. However, it is now the lesser of all evils when it comes to digital protection of our "home" address. The following will walk you through the steps I take on behalf of a client to establish a new residential PMB. **These steps may change. Always contact the PMB provider to obtain the most applicable documents.** It is their job to assist you through this process.

First, download the Mail Service Agreement from their website at americasmailbox.com. At the time of this writing, this form was at the following address.

https://americasmailbox.com/source/Mail_Service_Agreement_1-3-21.pdf

I encourage my clients to choose the Titanium Plus SuperScan Plan. This allows Americas Mailbox to provide you with a unique PMB address which can collect and store any incoming mail, and be shipped to you practically any way desired. You can schedule mailings of all collected mail to any address, such as a UPS box or hotel. The scanning feature provides an email address with a digital scan of the envelope of all incoming mail. This allows you to be informed when anything important arrives which you want forwarded.

You must provide your true name and driver's license number on this form. I know this sounds counterintuitive, but we want to associate our true identity with this address. We will never visit this location, and we want governments, online services, and companies to think this is our permanent "home" address. Providing a credit card for payment is acceptable. Again, this is our ghost address. We do not want to hide our actions. We want to openly associate ourselves with this new address. After completing this form and payment, Americas Mailbox will issue you a PMB number and full receiving address.

Part of this application process includes a completed U.S. Postal Form 1583, which allows Americas Mailbox to accept and forward your mail. They will provide you additional instructions upon submission of your service agreement. A form 1583 is currently available online at the following address.

https://about.usps.com/forms/ps1583.pdf

Most of this is self-explanatory, but I want to highlight a few important areas.

Box 2 must include your true name which may receive mail. This is not the time to be vague. You should include your full name. Within box 5, you can enter nicknames and maiden names. You should also include the names of at least one trust. Later, I will explain how to use trusts as a layer of privacy within ownership of assets. If you have no trusts listed, mail sent to those trusts might be returned. In my experience, if you have at least one generic trust title listed here, even if it has not been established yet and is different than the trust name you will later use, it increases the likelihood that you will receive mail addressed to any trust at that PMB.

Boxes 7a through 7e requires a current home address. This can be any mailing address that you currently possess, and I have never witnessed any verification process. Since I assume that you will be moving in the near future in order to obtain true privacy, this can be your current home address or PO Box.

The process through Americas Mailbox requires you to submit a copy of at least one government photo ID. I encourage you to submit a copy of your passport or passport card, as these do not contain a home address on them. The second required ID does not need a photo, but must display your name. I have provided utility bills

without resistance. Some forms must be signed in front of a notary. The application could be rejected without this. Once the form is complete, and you have included some form of payment, it takes about a week to receive your welcome packet (to your current address) including your new PMB address and number. Your new address will appear similar to 514 Americas Way, PMB 143, Box Elder, SD 57719.

You can now begin changing your mailing address for anything important to you. This includes your banks, brokerage firms, credit cards, and anything else that does not care that you reside in a new state. At this point, you are not a resident of South Dakota, you simply possess a mail forwarding service. As you update your mailing address with various institutions, they will begin to report this change to the major credit bureaus and data mining companies. Consider filing an Official USPS Change of Address form at your local office. Choose the "Permanent" option and list all of your household members. This allows the USPS to intercept mail coming to your current home and forward it to your PMB. Please note this cannot be reversed, so consider your options carefully.

Within a month, your credit report will likely show this new address, as will premium services such as LexisNexis and CLEAR. This is desired. We want your name associated with this new ghost address. We want your trail to start directing people toward a mail receiving company instead of a physical location where you reside. This is just the first step, but a big one.

From this point forward, you should give out your new PMB address in situations when you would have otherwise given a PO Box or home address. Exceptions to this include your current driver's license, vehicle registration, and insurance. We are not there yet, but this will be explained later. Think of your new PMB as a PO Box that happens to be far away from you. When you receive a notification of new mail, and want to have it sent to you, it is time to consider your mail forwarding strategy.

Most people who use this type of service are not privacy-minded. They simply have the mail from their PMB sent to their home, a friend's house, or another address with associations to them. I urge you to consider a more private option. I never have my PMB mail forwarded to any address where I actually reside. This may be overkill and paranoid, but for good reason.

In 2017, a client notified me that her stalker had contacted her recently, identifying her current home address. This seemed impossible to me. I had taken every precaution. There was no reference to her address online, and her name was never associated with her residence. It was only after he was arrested and interviewed for other stalking-related activities that I found out the mistake that was made. She was having her PMB mail sent directly to her house. He called the PMB provider, requested to schedule a mail delivery on her behalf as her husband, and politely asked where the previous shipment was delivered. The employee read the address back to him with no hesitation. This is a reminder that all PMB companies carelessly give out sensitive details if anyone asks.

This was an extreme privacy violation and should have never happened. Almost all PMB companies have policies prohibiting this, but we are all human. We make mistakes, and are prone to social engineering attacks. I took responsibility in this case, as I did not make it clear enough to never have your PMB mail sent to your home. You should have a plan for the final destination of your forwarded mail, and this will vary for different scenarios.

If you travel constantly like I do, sending your PMB mail to a hotel is ideal. It is a temporary location that will not be applicable to you long term. This can get tricky if you stay in hotels under an alias (as discussed later). If you use your real name, this is fairly simple.

Earlier, I explained a CMRA option, such as a UPS store or independent shipping business. These are great for receiving your PMB mail. If you choose this route, I encourage you to find a store located a town or two away from your residence. Getting too close could reveal more information about your home than you desire. This provides a safe local storage area for your mail.

Let's recap our current situation. You have a box at a UPS store or independent shipping business under your real name. This is located fairly close to you and is a place you can have any mail sent. You also have a PMB that collects important mail in your real name and forwards to your UPS box. This can be used for situations that typically block CMRA services, such as banks and credit cards. These are the only two addresses where any mail should be delivered in your true name.

While these may not seem like the traditional ghost addresses used in previous decades, they are much more powerful. In 2012, I possessed a ghost address in the southwest portion of the United States. It was a physical structure, somewhat abandoned, but could be used for official purposes. Eventually, the building was sold and I no longer have access to it or any mail sent there. Any shared building services disappeared, leaving me stranded. There are niche communities that have much more intense options such as mail drops in storage closets or back rooms with dedicated street addresses. However, these are quite expensive and only best used short-term.

A PMB is a permanent solution which includes benefits unavailable within other privacy-tailored services. Later, I explain how to use this address on your vehicle registration and driver's license. It can become your confirmed physical address, yet you will never step foot at the location.

A PMB address cannot be changed or forwarded via the USPS. This is a great feature. A malicious person can spend $1.10 through the USPS website and permanently change your home address. This will forward all of your mail to an untrusted location. Your mail can also be placed on hold or temporarily be forwarded without your consent. These services only apply to residential addresses. You cannot suspend, forward, or change the address of a PMB. This prevents unauthorized changes, but also prevents you from requesting the change yourself. I believe this is great mail security.

There may be scenarios where a South Dakota PMB is not optimal. If you physically reside in Texas or Florida, it may make more sense to choose a provider in these states. Many clients possess PMB service through a company called **Escapees** (escapees.com). In the second edition, this was my recommended service. However, I witnessed severe price increases from 2020 to 2021 and demands to join their "RV Club" with further additional fees. This has encouraged me to rely on Americas Mailbox for most clients. However, Escapees has other benefits.

Escapees has a presence in Florida, South Dakota, and Texas. This allows you to possess a unique PMB address in each state through one individual account. There are additional fees to forward mail from Florida and South Dakota to a primary PMB in Texas, but this may be justified for extreme scenarios. I have a few clients who have configured PMBs in all three states, but they rarely take advantage of this option. It is overkill for most, and may double your mail forwarding budget. If you plan to execute the nomad residency option presented in the next chapter, these addresses could be vital. I explain more about this soon.

Please remember that a PMB is still technically a CMRA. Practically every business possesses a database which confirms your new PMB is not a real home. You are not fooling anyone. However, PMBs are less securitized than UPS stores or PO Boxes. Since so many travelers use them as their permanent addresses, banks and other institutions are less likely to completely block the address from their systems. Again, you cannot OPEN new financial accounts with this address, but you can CHANGE the address on file with your current accounts to this new PMB. The more places which report this new address to consumer agencies and credit brokers, the more it becomes your "confirmed" address. After several years of using a PMB for everything in my life, including my driver's license, I can now open new credit cards and medical-related accounts with the PMB address. The only restriction I have experienced was when I attempted to open online-based checking accounts through Square and other providers. They absolutely refused the PMB address for any new accounts.

International Considerations: Most countries possess some sort of postal box delivery option. UPS stores can be found abundantly within the United States and Canada. Most European post offices provide various levels of rented boxes. I encourage you to investigate all options within your country of residence.

CHAPTER SIX
NOMAD RESIDENCY

I originally hesitated placing this chapter so early in the book. It is extreme to say the least. However, the strategies defined in this chapter can play a strong role throughout the remainder of this book. If the information you are about to read seems too complicated or inappropriate to your life, I completely understand. It is not for everyone. However, I ask that you stick with the book, as many techniques discussed later do not require you to become a "nomad".

Traditionally, a nomad is a person without fixed habitation. It is a person who is always on the move and wandering from place to place. Throughout history, food sources and weather were reasons to be nomadic. Today, it may just be the most private option you have. If you are homeless, have no assets, and can fit all of your belongings on your back, the nomadic life can be very easy to implement. I doubt that is your scenario. Fortunately, you can become an official nomad and continue your normal life with assets, credit, government identification, and a traditional lifestyle.

Think about retirees that adopt the recreational vehicle (RV) lifestyle. They head south in the winter and back north in the summers. They are always on the move and do not often possess a traditional physical residence. What state do they live in? Who issues their driver's licenses? How do they get their mail? The nomad life is easier than ever, and you can establish a great level of privacy by executing your personal nomad strategy.

A nomadic life may sound like a drastic change, but selling your home to buy an RV is not required. Before I proceed, I should take a moment to acknowledge situations where this strategy is not appropriate. If you are a government employee living in California, but plan to become a legal nomad in South Dakota, it just will not work. If you own a home in your name in Illinois, are employed full-time in Illinois, and have children in a public school in Illinois, you will face problems. In each scenario, your South Dakota driver's license or state identification will not suffice. If you are in a similar situation, do not worry. There are many more privacy strategies in the coming chapters. I want to start here because it is by far the most powerful option.

A previous chapter explained the use of a PMB as a "ghost address". These are basically mail drops that will forward any items to you at any other address you provide. These allow you to give out an address that is not actually associated with your home. I specifically recommended the service Americas Mailbox with a presence in South Dakota. Previously, I only focused on the mail receiving aspect of a PMB. This option can also be used to obtain a driver's license, register to vote, or renew a passport. You can use these addresses for official government documents or official government identification. There are many steps we need to take, and it will not always be easy. However, the final outcome will provide a lifetime of privacy.

Think about the number of times you are asked for identification. Every time you check into a hotel or rent a vehicle, the name and address on your identification must match what was provided during the registration. The moment this address is entered into any computer system, you take a chance of it leaking into other databases. Often, this leak is intentional and the company that provided the data is financially paid for the information. Your name and home address then appear in data mining company databases and eventually on people search websites on the internet. Becoming a nomad eliminates much of this risk.

In almost every state, you are not allowed to display a PO Box as your address on your driver's license. States which do allow this demand to know your true physical address and share that information with other entities. If you become a legal nomad in South Dakota, your PMB address is what appears on your driver's license and practically every other document associated with your name. This PMB address is a physical location which you will never visit, but it will be your official residence. This may be the first task that you scoff at, but I assure you

it is completely legal. Thousands of people have already caught on to the nomad bandwagon. I have spent seven years trying to identify the best methods of accomplishing this, and I believe I have a solution.

First, you must be in a situation where a specific state other than South Dakota does not have rights to you as a resident. In the spirit of extreme privacy, I will assume that you are ready to relocate, leave your current residence behind, and embrace the idea of extensive travel. The most common type of client in this situation is escaping an abuser and unsure where they will make a permanent home. This person knows that leaving behind the current state of residence is mandatory. Nomad residency can be a temporary or permanent solution. I have had clients who use this as a transition toward permanent residency in a desired state. I also have many clients that are still nomads today.

As you will read, there are many considerations before committing to South Dakota and its rules. Every situation is unique, and your best option may not be my desired solution. Please read this entire chapter twice before making up your own mind. While you can reverse any actions you take, it will be inconvenient, expensive, and unnecessary. Let's discuss some key financial details of being a South Dakota nomad.

License Fees: A new driver's license costs $28 and only needs to be renewed every five years. The renewal fee is $20. You must physically respond to the DMV to renew after your first online renewal. A South Dakota driver's license can be renewed once by mail without physically being present in the state.

Jury duty: If you register to vote, you have the potential of being called for jury duty. South Dakota is very understanding of full-time travelers and usually offers an exemption from jury duty.

Vehicle Tax: South Dakota has a 4% vehicle excise tax, but no other sales tax to pay when purchasing a vehicle.

Vehicle Registration: South Dakota vehicle registration fees are based on the year of your vehicle. The renewal month is based on the first initial of your last name.

Vehicle Inspection: South Dakota does not require vehicles to be inspected for safety or emissions.

Vehicle Insurance: Liability and full coverage vehicle insurance is fairly low, but not the lowest in the country. South Dakota is traditionally lower than most states.

State Income Tax: None

I have assisted many clients with nomad registration through South Dakota. It is traditionally easier than other states, but still requires you to visit the state on occasion. The first step is to gather all of your documentation from your PMB provider. If you chose Americas Mailbox, collect your receipt for your PMB and the documentation acknowledging your PMB address. Hopefully, you have already changed your address with your bank, and you have a monthly statement (either digital or mailed) that displays this new address. Have a copy of this statement. Overall, you want at least two pieces of documentation that confirm your name and PMB address.

Next is the biggest step. It is time to go to South Dakota. Make sure you spend the night upon arrival at a hotel in Pennington County, the county of your PMB address. When you check out of the hotel, be sure to obtain a receipt from your stay, and ensure that your name and PMB address appear on the receipt. If your spouse, partner, or family member is also becoming a nomad, make sure they each have their own separate receipt with this same information. I have found most hotels will edit the name and address on the receipt any way you wish. They are very familiar with this process.

Next, visit the department of motor vehicles (DMV) in Rapid City. You can make an appointment online which may prevent long waits. In my experience, there is rarely much of a crowd. Explain that you are there to obtain a driver's license as a nomad. They will know what this means and the scrutiny will begin.

Have your hotel receipt, previous unexpired driver's license, and second form of identification ready. This can be a passport or certified birth certificate (I would bring both). Also, have either your original Social Security card or a 1099 tax form stating your name and SSN. Have a Residency Affidavit printed and completed. At the time of this writing, a copy can be found at the following address.

https://dps.sd.gov/application/files/2815/1085/4078/ResidencyAffidavit.pdf

The following displays this document. The content in brackets, ([ ) and ( ]), displays explanations about each section. I have assisted numerous people with this entire process. In each scenario, we walked out of the DMV with a new South Dakota Driver's License less than 20 minutes after entering. The only issue I have had was with a newly married couple. The wife possessed a birth certificate and passport in her maiden name and a license in her married name. This is acceptable, but you must provide a marriage certificate along with the other documents. Fortunately, we were able to obtain the document later that afternoon.

RESIDENCY AFFIDAVIT
FOR SOUTH DAKOTA RESIDENTS WHO TRAVEL
AND DO NOT HAVE A RESIDENCE IN ANOTHER STATE

The purpose of the following questions is to determine if you meet the qualifications for an exception of the proof of residency requirements for obtaining a South Dakota Driver License or non-driver ID card.

This form must be signed by a notary of the public or a South Dakota driver license examiner.
[This can be notarized at the DMV.]

1. Is South Dakota your state of residence? _____Yes _____No

[You must select Yes in order to qualify. Since you possess a PMB, that is the technical requirement to declare residency, along with surrendering your previous license.]

2. Is South Dakota the state you intend to return to after being absent? _____ Yes _____No

[Again, you must select Yes to qualify. This assumes you will be traveling, will not be physically present within the state, but will return at some point.]

This form must be accompanied by a valid one-night stay receipt (no more than one year old) from a local RV Park, Campground, or Motel for proof of the temporary address where you are residing. In addition, you must submit a document (no more than one year old) proving your personal mailbox (PMB) service address (receipt from the PMB business or a piece of mail with your PMB address on it).

PLEASE NOTE: South Dakota Driver Licensing records are used as a supplemental list for jury duty selection. Obtaining a South Dakota driver license or non-driver ID card will result in you being required to report for jury duty in South Dakota if selected.

[In my experience, your chances of being called for jury duty are minimal. If you do get the call, contacting the court and explaining that you do not physically live in South Dakota will dismiss your obligation.]

I declare and affirm under the penalties of perjury (2 years imprisonment and $4000 fine) that this claim (petition, application, information) has been examined by me and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is in all things true and correct. Any false statement or concealment of any material facts subjects any license or ID issued to immediate cancellation.

This is a major accomplishment. You now have a new license in a state in which you do not live permanently. The address on the license is a mail drop that you have never visited. Within months, this address will be listed as your official residence at the credit bureaus, data mining companies, and other entities that monitor all of us. Surprisingly, this is still legal. By declaring yourself a nomad, and the generosity of South Dakota in becoming your domicile, you are now officially a resident of the state. You have given up the residency provided by your previous state. Do not take that lightly, and consider these actions before executing.

Residency and domicile are two distinct terms, but often used interchangeably. This adds to the confusion when trying to decide if you are legally a "resident" of a state. A person may be a resident of multiple states, but is usually only domiciled in one state. A person may own homes in several states and spend time in each of those homes during the year, but only one state will be their domicile. As a general rule, the state where you are domiciled will be the state where you live (at least part of the year), work, receive mail, conduct banking, and register and insure your vehicles.

You establish domicile when you are a resident of a state and intend to make that state your home. While you may not have a mortgage or lease in the state that you choose as a domicile, you can connect your life to that state. In other words, the more of a connection that you have with a particular state, and the less of a connection you maintain with any other state, the more likely it is that your claims to be domiciled there will hold up if ever called into question.

Overall, if your driver's license, mailing address, and other official documentation are in the state of your chosen domicile, you are a resident of that state. Once your license is obtained, you should identify all other official accounts and services in your name and update the physical address on file. This was mentioned in a previous chapter, but it is worth repeating. Your bank accounts, investment services, credit cards, passport, and anything else you can think of can now possess your new PMB address. If any service gives you grief, you have a government identification card to show them that matches your new information. There are a few additional considerations with South Dakota.

- The South Dakota driver's license qualifies under the Real ID Act. This means your license will have the "gold star" which is accepted as identification by the TSA at airports.
- While you are at the DMV, request a standard identification card. This is similar to a license, but can only be used as traditional identification. Store this in a safe place. It can be helpful if you lose your license, and must wait for a new duplicate copy.
- South Dakota allows you to renew your license online after your initial five years has expired. However, you are still required to be present within the state for at least one night within a year prior to the renewal date.

Driver's License Renewals

South Dakota allows one remote renewal every ten years. This means that your first renewal, after five years in South Dakota, can be completed online. However, the official instructions on the state website are not complete. The following explains the exact process.

Approximately six months before your license expires, you should receive a postcard from the state notifying you that your expiration date is coming soon. It will include the URL to the state DMV website, which was https://dps.sd.gov/driver-licensing/renew-and-duplicate at the time of this writing. From there, you can choose the "Am I Eligible" button and enter your driver's license number. Most nomads should qualify for online renewal. You will be asked a series of questions, which are likely identical to the questions answered during your original application. You must pay the processing fee during this renewal process via credit card, which should be under $30. Be sure to provide a valid email address. Once you complete the process, you wait.

Approximately one week after submission, you should receive an email from the DMV stating that your application is incomplete. Since you are a nomad, you are required to sign a new Nomad Affidavit form and

submit proof of one night's stay in South Dakota within the previous year. The form will be included, and must be notarized, the same as before. Your proof of being within the state over the past year can vary. I usually submit a hotel receipt in the name of my client. You can email scans of these documents by responding to the message. This brings up an important consideration. When should you revisit the state?

You could always travel to South Dakota within six months of your license expiration, but that timing may not be optimal. Cold weather and other plans could get in the way. I encourage clients to schedule a brief trip within one year of expiration around their schedule. This could be during a planned road trip or downtime between other travel. What is important is that you plan accordingly and do not find yourself about to expire while nowhere near the state. If you travel to South Dakota before your renewal eligibility period, simply keep a receipt as proof. You can submit it later once you are allowed to renew. I prefer to go in summer months, but your preference may vary.

Two weeks after the email submission, you should receive your new driver's license at your PMB. It will contain the same photo as the previous version. When this license expires, you must travel to South Dakota and obtain a new version in person. With this plan, you only need to be within the state twice every ten years. Always contact the DMV before you plan your trip. Confirm that you have everything they demand in order to establish residency. It is quite a setback to show up without a mandatory piece of information and be told to come back after you have everything required. Be overly prepared.

South Dakota Taxes

As another benefit, South Dakota does not collect any state earnings (income) tax from their residents. This also applies to travelers who use these states as a permanent address. Before you decide that you can live in a state that taxes income while becoming exempt in a state that does not, think again. It simply does not work like that. Consider the following scenarios.

You are a nomad with domicile in South Dakota. You are traveling the country and spend some time in Illinois. You pick up a job and receive payment via check. Your employer withholds state taxes for Illinois. You will be required to file annual Illinois state taxes regardless of your "home" address.

You are a nomad with domicile in South Dakota. You are self-employed. You spend the majority of your time in New York and rent an apartment. You are required to pay your share of New York income tax. You would need to file an annual New York state return.

Many readers may think they can avoid this and will roll the dice. This is a mistake. One of the most invasive privacy violations is a tax audit. Play by the rules, pay your appropriate state taxes, consult an accountant, and stay off their radar. Federal taxes to the IRS are not impacted by a nomad residency. You would pay these as with any other residency situation. Do not violate any tax laws.

Voting

South Dakota can register you to vote at the time of obtaining a driver's license. You will then be allowed to vote remotely via nominee without entering the state on federal elections. I will not spend much time discussing the details of this, as I no longer recommend that my clients register to vote. This has nothing to do with patriotism or a duty to vote as an American. It is simply because it is impossible to protect your voter registration details from public view. Voter details are public and released in mass quantities to political entities and private companies. If you are registered to vote, your name, DOB, and PMB address are now public information. If you prefer to keep that private, be sure to tell the DMV that you do not wish to register to vote at this time.

Establishing yourself as a domiciled nomad is a big decision which warrants some serious thought. Once complete, you possess a driver's license in a state that does not demand your presence, and displays a physical address you may have never visited. These details will become tightly associated with your identity. When an

adversary starts hunting for you, the first and most logical place to find you will be an address shared by thousands of people. This will be a dead lead. This single tactic may be all you need to prevent your next home address from becoming public information.

Florida & Texas

In the previous chapter, I mentioned a reliable PMB service called Escapees which has a presence in Florida, South Dakota, and Texas. While I have focused on South Dakota for PMB services and nomad residency, both Florida and Texas also cater to full-time travelers and offer nomad residency. In the second edition of this book, I encouraged nomads to obtain services through Escapees, which allowed a primary PMB address in Texas and a secondary PMB address in South Dakota or Florida. This allowed you to choose either state for domicile and a driver's license. I still have many clients who provide Escapees as their official home residence, but I hear the same complaint from most of them. Escapees keeps raising their rates and demanding unnecessary club memberships. This is one reason I now push most clients toward Americas Mailbox. However, there are exceptions. Consider the following.

If you plan to physically reside in Texas, you should consider Escapees as your PMB provider and official address. This provides you a Texas PMB which can be used on your driver's license and government documents. You can register your vehicle in Texas with your PMB as the address on file. Everything official is associated with the state of Texas and your PMB is the only public address connected to your name. Your license plates are not from another state and you blend in with everyone else. You are following all laws and should avoid any scrutiny from any state or government officials. It is a very "clean" plan.

If you plan to physically reside in Florida, you should consider Escapees as your PMB provider and official address for the same reasons listed above. You will have a primary Texas PMB with a secondary Florida "satellite" address. The Florida address can be used in the same way which was previously explained with South Dakota.

If you do not plan to reside in Florida or Texas, I believe South Dakota nomad residency with Americas Mailbox PMB service is the optimal strategy. I no longer see any reason to possess an Escapees South Dakota PMB.

The final consideration is for those under a direct physical threat. If someone is trying to find your location, you should never possess a PMB address or nomad residency within the state which you will be spending most of your time. If you plan on living in Texas, you may not want your public PMB address to also be in Texas. It may provide a starting point for your adversary to begin a search. You may want to possess a PMB in South Dakota while living in Florida or Texas.

Overall, take some time to consider all options. Research the rules, fees, and forms available at the websites of Americas Mailbox (americasmailbox.com) and Escapees (escapees.com). Escapees can help you navigate Florida and Texas residency requirements, as they are more strict than South Dakota. This is a big decision which should not be made hastily. Make sure you are not violating any state laws.

Health Insurance

If you are unemployed or self-employed, it is very likely you are responsible for your own health insurance coverage. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) previously required everyone to possess health insurance, and charged a fee to those who could afford it but chose to go without it. In 2019, this fee was repealed, and the IRS currently does not impose a financial penalty from those with no coverage. This book was written in 2022, and things could be different by the time you read this. As of now, health insurance is technically still required for all of us, but there seems to be no enforcement of this. Regardless of your opinion of the ACA, you should still explore your options for health coverage as a nomad.

Overall, U.S. citizens who have no health coverage through an employer or other avenue acquire their own health insurance through the marketplace of their domicile state. South Dakota uses the federal exchange, and residents enroll through the official HealthCare.gov website. Currently, South Dakota offers two providers. For traditional coverage, you would enroll at HealthCare.gov and learn about your options. Most of my clients do not do this. My wealthy clients often choose high-deductible plans in order to meet specific state and federal requirements while paying lower monthly premiums. If they need to see a doctor or visit a hospital, they pay out-of-pocket until the deductible is met. I have seen this be as high as $10,000 annually. This works well for them because they have the money to pay for services as needed, and only desire coverage for major catastrophes such as an automobile accident or diagnosis of cancer. Clients who cannot afford high monthly premiums also seek out these types of plans, and hope to stay healthy.

Some clients have elected healthcare sharing plans which are not technically health insurance, but pay medical bills when necessary. Many of these qualify for an exemption from the ACA. The most popular of these is Medi-Share. The premiums are very low and coverage has no financial limit. However, there is a catch. Medi-Share is a Christian-based organization, and as a private company they are allowed to apply any restrictions desired. As a small example, they do not provide any coverage, or "sharing", for abortions, unwed pregnancies, birth control, substance abuse treatment, alcohol-related crashes, and many other scenarios which they believe conflict with their beliefs. For many people, this option would never be considered because of these restrictions. For others, it is acceptable.

I believe you should have a solution in mind before considering the nomad lifestyle. These are not easy decisions which should be made hastily. Once you decide on the coverage appropriate for you, contact a provider and make sure they will work with your nomad plans. Possessing no coverage can leave you in a permanent negative financial situation. Purchasing the common default state coverage may leave you with high premiums from which you never benefit. Explore all of your options, and research ideas outside of HealthCare.gov. Any provider will demand your full name, DOB, and SSN, but all should accept your PMB address as "home".

Summary

Possessing a PMB address as your official "home" address on your driver's license has many advantages. You now have an address which can be given out freely without jeopardizing your privacy. You can share this address with banks, lenders, government entities, and private institutions, all without disclosing your actual home location. You can be legally domiciled in a state which respects your right to travel and not be present within the state. Traditionally, your state domicile demands on knowing, and sharing, your true home address. This results in your home address eventually appearing within public people search websites. When your PMB address leaks online, the damage is minimal. No one will ever find you at that address. You can possess a permanent mailing address regardless of your future travel plans and living situations. You can drive anywhere in the country while obeying all registration laws. Having a PMB and nomad residency will assist with many of the upcoming privacy strategies. However, please note that nomad residency is not required in order to apply the techniques within the remainder of this book.

Nomad residency is appropriate for my clients which face an immediate physical threat and must relocate. It provides a legal domicile while the client takes some time to figure out the future. It is not appropriate for those employed within another state with close community ties toward a specific area. Many clients choose this path while executing retirement plans or after leaving a career. I have many friends in the military which use this strategy while being deployed. There are many reasons to embrace nomad residency and equally as many reasons to avoid it. Choose wisely. Consider one final situation a client faced in 2018.

This person executed complete nomad residency through Texas. He went through the steps you read in this chapter. He possessed a Texas driver's license and registered his vehicle in the state. He then reached out to me about purchasing an anonymous home within the name of a trust in California. He had no intention of traveling much and would call California his home. I advised that this would create many complications because he would then be legally required to declare California his domicile state, and would lose his privacy protection. He

understood, and said he would take his chances. He was retired and believed that California would never know he was living in the state. I declined my services unless he agreed to obey all state laws once he purchased the house. He proceeded without me and purchased a home in a trust.

Nine months later, he received an intimidating letter from the state of California. Some of the thousands of license plate readers throughout the state captured his Texas vehicle plates on a consistent basis within a specific city (where he lived). The state demanded that he register himself and his vehicle within the state, and file state income taxes with the Franchise Tax Board (FTB). This stern warning outlined the extensive fines if he did not comply. California does not mess around with non-residents living inside its boundaries. He complied, registered his home address, and his name now appears on people search websites with all of his details.

You can absolutely purchase an "invisible" home in the name of a trust in aggressive states such as California, and possess a great layer of privacy. However, when doing so you must become an official resident of the state and comply with all laws. You can file state income taxes to the address of a PO Box, and display a PO Box on your driver's license in some locations, but the state will demand to know your true residence. I do not accept new clients who insist on living in California full-time while declaring themselves a nomad in another state. It will catch up to them. Aggressive states such as California and New York employ many investigators looking for this activity in order to collect as much revenue as possible. I share this as a warning to readers thinking they can bend the rules while staying anonymous.

Before considering nomad residency for your needs, be sure you completely understand the state laws of BOTH the nomad state and the state where you will be spending much of your time. This method is not intended to be used to avoid a specific state's politics or government requirements. It is a valid strategy for those willing to travel enough to obey the rules of being a nomad. My clients who became legal nomads travel the world, follow great weather, and experience a life which most of us may find unstable at times. They obey the rules to which they agreed with the state of their choice and are sure to not violate any residency requirements of non-nomad states. When properly and legally executed, it offers a level of privacy unavailable within any other tactic. I have been a nomad for several years, and I spend much of my time outside of the United States.

As a final reminder, your PMB as a nomad will appear as a CMRA to any government or financial institution. It will never fool an agency into believing you truly live at that address. You cannot open new bank accounts without heavy scrutiny. However, you can change your addresses within current accounts to the PMB address. Once you have a strong history at the PMB within various reporting institutions, you should experience less scrutiny for new accounts.

International Considerations: This chapter was heavily focused on citizens of America. Many other countries also offer some level of nomad registration. However, the term "nomad" may not be applicable to situations similar to those described in this chapter. I encourage international readers to explore the options available in their own countries of residence. I have received the most beneficial information by contacting local homeless shelters and questioning the ways in which people without physical addresses legally comply with government mandates.

CHAPTER SEVEN
LEGAL INFRASTRUCTURE

If you ever plan to own any assets such as a home or vehicle, you will need some type of legal infrastructure in order to keep it private. This is a holding device which technically owns the asset. Even if you only plan to rent your housing for the rest of your life, you will need to obtain utilities and services which traditionally require your real name. Legal entities such as Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) and trusts can provide a valuable layer of privacy between you and the asset. This chapter outlines specific types of legal infrastructures that you may need in order to complete the rest of this book. None are expensive, and some are free. Before I can proceed with anything, please consider the following paragraph very carefully.

I am not an attorney. I am not YOUR attorney. You should not replicate anything I discuss in this chapter without first consulting an attorney. The following is not legal advice. It is not any type of advice. It is merely explicit examples of the actions I have taken to create legal entities for myself and clients. This chapter is not intended to be a complete representation of the many complexities of trusts and LLCs. It is overly simplified in order to only focus on the issues important for privacy protection. Nothing in this chapter is meant for business use or income. Your scenario will be unique from mine and your privacy plan will require modification from mine. Seek professional legal advice.

Let's start with a trust. There are many types of trusts and you may have heard of a living trust, land trust, or property trust. These are all fairly similar with various levels of complication attached to each. Overall, a trust is a legal entity that you can create at any time. It can be as simple as a few pieces of paper written as a contract. You cannot see a trust, or touch it, but it does exist. The first step in creating a working trust is to prepare and sign a document called a "Declaration of Trust".

Once you create and sign the Declaration of Trust, the trust exists. There must be a person in charge of this trust, who is called the "trustee". With traditional trusts, the trustee manages the property on behalf of someone else, called the "beneficiary", which could be you. However, with a living trust, you are usually the trustee and beneficiary of the trust until you die. Only after your death do the trust beneficiaries you've named in the Declaration of Trust have any rights to your trust property. This may sound complicated, but it does not need to be. Let's walk through each step of creating a living trust first, as it is usually the most familiar to people.

Living trusts are an efficient and effective way to transfer property to relatives, friends, or entities at your death. Essentially, a living trust performs the same function as a will, with one big difference. The assets left by a will must go through the probate court process. In probate, a deceased person's will must be proven valid in court, then the person's debts are paid, and finally the remaining property is distributed to the beneficiaries. This can take over a year. These probate court proceedings waste time and money. By contrast, assets left by a living trust can go directly to your inheritors. They do not need to bother with a probate court proceeding. That means your beneficiaries will not need to spend any of your money to pay for court and lawyer fees. More importantly, the details of the trust are private. If you truly value your privacy, you may want to have one last strategy in place that keeps your final wishes a secret from the public.

All transactions that are associated with your living trust are reported on your personal income tax return. You do not need a separate tax identifier and a trust is not considered a business in the eyes of the law. These trusts are called "living" because they are created while you are alive. They are called "revocable" because you can revoke or change them at any time until you die. While you are alive, you maintain ownership of all property that you transferred to your living trust. You can do whatever you wish with your trust property, including selling it or giving it away. If you want, you can terminate the entire trust as if it never happened (unless you have assets already titled within the trust). A revocable living trust becomes permanent at your death. It allows your trust property to be privately transferred to the people or organizations you have named as beneficiaries of the trust.

For the record, I do NOT recommend titling your home in a LIVING trust. The first reason is that the beneficiary of a living trust is typically also the trustee. This will likely make your name publicly associated with the home. Second, I never recommend titling a home in the same trust as other assets. However, a living trust still has a place in the private person's arsenal. It is a great means to hold investment accounts, online savings accounts, certificates of deposits, vehicles, and other physical items. Let's first learn the basic elements inside a living trust. After, I will explain a traditional trust which takes things a step further.

First, you need a name for the living trust. The customary option is to title the trust to include your name, such as The Bazzell Family Trust. I disagree with this, and I encourage you to select a more common and generic name. The name you choose can be used on other trusts by other people, it does not need to be unique. As an example, you may choose The Financial Planning Living Trust or the 45886 Living Trust. Keeping your name off the title gives you a bit of privacy when it is publicly released as the owner of an asset. Next, it is time to create the Declaration of Trust, which is essentially the contract that makes the living trust valid. The following outlines a typical living trust template, with an explanation of each section within brackets ([ ) and ( ]). Note that each document presented within this chapter is separated by a horizontal line.

The Financial Planning Living Trust
Declaration of Trust

I. Trust Name

This trust shall be known as The Financial Planning Living Trust. It is a REVOCABLE trust created on January 1, 2019.

[This simply identifies the name of the trust and the date it was established. This name and date combination assist with identification and will need to always be accurate as you add assets into the trust. It also clearly defines this trust as revocable by you.]

II. Trust Property

(A) Property Placed in Trust

[YOUR NAME], called the grantor or trustee, declares that he has set aside and holds in The Financial Planning Living Trust all of his interest in that property described in the attached Schedule A. The trust property shall be used for the benefit of the trust beneficiaries and shall be administered and distributed by the trustee in accordance with this Declaration of Trust.

[This identifies you as the grantor and trustee. This gives you the power to manage the trust.]

(B) Additional or After-Acquired Property

The grantor may add property to the trust at any time.

[This allows you to place any future assets into the trust.]

III. Reserved Powers of Grantor

(A) Amendment or Revocation

The grantor reserves the power to amend or revoke this trust at any time during his lifetime, without notifying any beneficiary.

[This allows you to change or completely terminate the trust at any time.]

(B) Rights to Trust Property

Until the death of the grantor, all rights to all income, profits, and control of the trust property shall be retained by the grantor.

[This ensures you have the right to do anything you like with the trust until you die.]

(C) Homestead Rights

If the Grantor's principal residence is held in this trust, Grantor has the right to possess and occupy it for life, rent-free and without charge, except for taxes, insurance, maintenance, and related costs and expenses. This right is intended to give Grantor a beneficial interest in the property and to ensure that Grantor does not lose eligibility for a state homestead tax exemption for which Grantor otherwise qualifies.

[If you decide to title a home in the living trust, this ensures you have the right to live in the home.]

(D) Grantor's Death

After the death of the grantor, this trust becomes irrevocable. It may not be altered or amended in any respect, and may not be terminated except through distributions permitted by this Declaration of Trust.

[Living trusts are locked in when the grantor dies. This ensures your desires upon death are met.]

IV. Trustees

(A) Original Trustee

The trustee of The Financial Planning Living Trust shall be [YOUR NAME] of [YOUR CITY], [YOUR COUNTY], [YOUR STATE], Date of Birth [YOUR DOB], SSN [YOUR SSN].

[This identifies you as the trustee of the trust. These details are private because this trust is never filed publicly. During the next trust option, you will learn how to assign another trustee.]

(B) Successor Trustee

Upon the death of the trustee, or his incapacity, the successor trustee shall be [NAME] of [CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE], Date of Birth [DOB], SSN [SSN]. If he is deceased or unable to serve or continue serving as successor trustee, the successor trustee shall be [NAME] of [CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE], Date of Birth [DOB], SSN [SSN].

[This identifies the person you wish to administer the trust upon your death. The second name is the backup in the event that your first choice is also deceased. These should be people who you are confident will honor the rules of the trust.]

(C) Trustee's Responsibility

The trustee in office shall serve as trustee of all trusts created under this Declaration of Trust.

[This declares the power issued to you as trustee of your own living trust.]

(D) Terminology

In this Declaration of Trust, the term "trustee" includes any successor trustee or successor trustees.

[This defines terminology for the trust to apply to your successor trustee in the case of your death.]

(E) Bond Waived

No bond shall be required of any trustee.

[Legal speak to state that a bond or insurance is not required.]

(F) Compensation

No trustee shall receive any compensation for serving as trustee.

[This declares that trustees are not paid for services.]

(G) Liability of Trustee

With respect to the exercise or non-exercise of discretionary powers granted by this Declaration of Trust, the trustee shall not be liable for actions taken in good faith.

[This protects the trustee.]

V. Beneficiaries

Upon the death of the grantor, the property of The Financial Planning Living Trust shall be distributed to the beneficiaries named in this section.

[This is where you declare the people who should receive your assets when you die.]

(A) Primary Beneficiary

[NAME] shall be given all [YOUR NAME]'s interest in the property listed on Schedule A. If [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, that property shall be given to the alternative beneficiaries.

[This allows you to give all of your assets within the trust to a single person, such as a spouse.]

(B) Alternative Beneficiary

The following property shall be given to the identified alternative beneficiaries ONLY if [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30 days).

[This allows you to specify the people that should receive your assets when you die if the primary beneficiary has also deceased. The following is one example.]

The grantor's children, [NAME], [NAME], [NAME], and [NAME], shall be given all financial accounts and assets listed in Schedule A in the following shares:

25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]

If any alternative beneficiaries do not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, those shares shall go to the remaining alternative beneficiaries, in equal shares.

[This specifies that the remaining people alive receive equal shares of the trust if an alternative beneficiary has deceased.]

(C) Residuary Beneficiary

The residuary beneficiary of the trust shall be [NAME]. If [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, any and all property shall be given to the alternative beneficiaries in the shares specified in Section V, Paragraph (B).

[This is a "catch-all" that specifies any leftover assets go to a single person.]

VI. Distribution of Trust Property Upon Death of Grantor

Upon the death of the grantor, the trustee shall distribute the trust property outright to the beneficiaries named in Section V, Paragraphs (A), (B) and (C).

[This instructs the trustee to distribute the assets as you outlined.]

VII. Trustee's Powers and Duties

(A) Powers Under State Law

To carry out the provisions of The Financial Planning Living Trust, the trustee shall have all authority and powers allowed or conferred on a trustee under [STATE] law, subject to the trustee's fiduciary duty to the grantor and the beneficiaries.

[This identifies the state laws that should be used when identifying the powers of the trust. This is usually your state of residence or domicile.]

(B) Specified Powers

The trustee's powers include, but are not limited to:

1. The power to sell trust property, and to borrow money and to encumber that property, specifically including trust real estate, by mortgage, deed of trust, or other method.
2. The power to manage trust real estate as if the trustee were the absolute owner of it, including the power to lease (even if the lease term may extend beyond the period of any trust) or grant options to lease the property, to make repairs or alterations, and to insure against loss.
3. The power to sell or grant options for the sale or exchange of any trust property, including stocks, bonds, debentures, and any other form of security or security account, at public or private sale for cash or on credit.
4. The power to invest trust property in property of any kind, including but not limited to bonds, debentures, notes, mortgages, stocks, stock options, stock futures, and buying on margin.
5. The power to receive additional property from any source and add to any trust created by this Declaration of Trust.
6. The power to employ and pay reasonable fees to accountants, lawyers, or investment experts for information or advice relating to the trust.
7. The power to deposit and hold trust funds in both interest-bearing and non-interest-bearing accounts.
8. The power to deposit funds in bank or other accounts uninsured by FDIC coverage.
9. The power to enter into electronic fund transfer or safe deposit arrangements with financial institutions.
10. The power to continue any business of the grantor.
11. The power to institute or defend legal actions concerning the trust or grantor's affairs.
12. The power to diversify investments, including authority to decide that some or all of the trust property need not produce income.

[This section specifies the powers granted to the trustee and allows the trustee to execute any requirements.]

(C) Payment by Trustee of the Grantor's Debts and Taxes

The grantor's debts and death taxes shall be paid by the trustee however he deems appropriate.

[This allows the trustee to pay off your debt and taxes from the trust if desired.]

VIII. General Administrative Provisions

(A) Controlling Law

The validity of The Financial Planning Living Trust shall be governed by the laws of [STATE].

(B) Severability

If any provision of this Declaration of Trust is ruled unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall nevertheless remain in effect.

(C) Amendments

The term "Declaration of Trust" includes any provisions added by amendments.

(D) Accountings

No accountings or reports shall be required of the trustee.

[These are a few final formalities that finish the trust's legal requirements.]

Certification by Grantor

I certify that I have read this Declaration of Trust for The Financial Planning Living Trust, created January 1, 2019, and that it correctly states the terms and conditions under which the trust property is to be held, managed, and disposed of by the trustee, and I approve the Declaration of Trust.

Dated: January 1, 2019

_____

Grantor and Trustee – [YOUR NAME]

[This is your signature attesting the creation of this trust. This document should be notarized. I prefer to keep this page separate from the rest of the trust in case an entity requires a page with your signature on file.]

Schedule A

All the grantor's interest in the following property:

ANY ACCOUNTS PLACED INTO THE TRUST

[This would include any assets or properties that you obtain in the name of the trust. You can also include physical items, such as collectibles, but cannot include cash.]

The previous living trust was an example of a document commonly created by those desiring asset protections when they die. It is often associated with elderly people planning for their death and wanting to keep their assets out of probate. This can save a lot of money for their beneficiaries since a probate judge does not need to decide whether a will is valid. This document alone really means nothing until you place assets into the trust. Most people re-title their home into the trust and add all of their financial accounts. When the grantor dies, all of the assets within the trust on Schedule A instantly remain property of the trust. The successor trustee now has the power to distribute the assets in the trust to the beneficiaries defined in the document. This is why choosing a trustworthy successor trustee is vital.

Before you establish your own living trust, think about how it will be used. As stated previously, I usually do not advise the use of a LIVING trust, with you as the trustee, for a home purchase. Your name will likely be filed at the county level in connection with the home and you lose all privacy. I also do not recommend placing your home into the same trust that holds assets in financial accounts. This would connect you and your SSN with the house. Therefore, I only recommend a living trust to privacy enthusiasts if it will be used for financial accounts, such as your investments and online banks. You can title these accounts into the name of your living trust, and the accounts can be distributed by your successor trustee upon your death. There will be no probate, court hearings, or delays. Most importantly, the details of this trust will never be made public. You should contact your financial account companies and request details on transferring your accounts to the living trust.

There are some assets that should not be placed into a living trust. These include tax-deferred retirement accounts such as 401Ks and personal checking accounts that are already set up as "Payable on Death". Traditionally, the living trust is mostly used for homes and other valuable assets by those that do not require extreme privacy. Most people that place their home into a living trust have no concern publicly associating the trust with their real name. It is simply to avoid the probate process involved with typical wills. As a privacy enthusiast, you should consider other options for trusts.

Specifically, you may want to avoid any definition within the trust name. Adding "Living Trust" to the title of the trust gives it an association to a document that you created in preparation for death. Adding "Land Trust" identifies the purpose as to hold real estate. Adding "Property Trust" indicates it will only be used to hold a specific asset. I propose eliminating this behavior, and only referring to your trust as a "Trust", such as The XYZ Trust. Many state trust laws do not acknowledge a difference between various types of trusts. Some state laws apply very specific (and undesired) rules when you label a trust as a Land Trust, which no longer take advantage of the simplification of a traditional trust. Consider the following trust example. It will appear very similar to the previous example, and I will only include an additional explanation within brackets when there is a change.

The XYZ Trust
Declaration of Trust

I. Trust Name

This trust shall be known as The XYZ Trust. It is a REVOCABLE trust created on January 1, 2019.

II. Trust Property

(A) Property Placed in Trust

[NAME], the Grantor, declares that he has set aside and holds in The XYZ Trust all of his interest in that property described in the attached Schedule A. The trust property shall be used for the benefit of the trust beneficiaries and shall be administered and distributed by the Trustee in accordance with this Declaration of Trust.

[This identifies you as the grantor only, which gives you the power of this trust.]

(B) Additional or After-Acquired Property

The Grantor may add property to the trust at any time.

III. Reserved Powers of Grantor

(A) Amendment or Revocation

The Grantor reserves the power to amend or revoke this trust at any time during his lifetime, without notifying any beneficiary.

(B) Rights to Trust Property

Until the death of the Grantor, all rights to all income, profits, and control of the trust property shall be retained by the Grantor.

(C) Homestead Rights

If the Grantor's principal residence is held in this trust, Grantor has the right to possess and occupy it for life, rent-free and without charge, except for taxes, insurance, maintenance, and related costs and expenses. This right is intended to give Grantor a beneficial interest in the property and to ensure that Grantor does not lose eligibility for a state homestead tax exemption for which Grantor otherwise qualifies.

(D) Grantor's Death

After the death of the Grantor, this trust becomes irrevocable. It may not be altered or amended in any respect, and may not be terminated except through distributions permitted by this Declaration of Trust.

IV. Trustees

(A) Original Trustee

The Trustee of The XYZ Trust shall be [NAME] of [CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE], Date of Birth [DOB], SSN [SSN].

[This is the major deviation of this trust versus the living trust. Here, you assign someone else as the trustee. This name will be publicly associated with the trust if you purchase a home, and we will dive into that aspect in a following chapter.]

(B) Successor Trustee

Upon the death of the trustee, or his incapacity, the successor trustee shall be [NAME] of [CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE], Date of Birth [DOB], SSN [SSN]. If he is deceased or unable to serve or continue serving as successor trustee, the successor trustee shall be [NAME] of [CITY], [COUNTY], [STATE], Date of Birth [DOB], SSN [SSN].

[This should be people which you trust to handle affairs associated with the trust. There will be much more discussion about this later.]

(C) Trustee's Responsibility

The Trustee shall serve as Trustee of all trusts created under this Declaration of Trust.

(D) Terminology

In this Declaration of Trust, the term "Trustee" includes any successor Trustee or successor Trustees.

(E) Bond Waived

No bond shall be required of any Trustee.

(F) Compensation

No Trustee shall receive any compensation for serving as Trustee.

(G) Liability of Trustee

With respect to the exercise or non-exercise of discretionary powers granted by this Declaration of Trust, the Trustee shall not be liable for actions taken in good faith.

V. Beneficiaries

Upon the death of the Grantor, the property of The XYZ Trust shall be distributed to the beneficiaries named in this section.

(A) Primary Beneficiary

[NAME] shall be given all [YOUR NAME]'s interest in the property listed on Schedule A. If [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, that property shall be given to the alternative beneficiaries.

(B) Alternative Beneficiary

The following property shall be given to the identified alternative beneficiaries ONLY if [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30 days).

The grantor's children, [NAME], [NAME], [NAME], and [NAME], shall be given all financial accounts and assets listed in Schedule A in the following shares:

25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]
25% to [NAME]

If any alternative beneficiaries do not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, those shares shall go to the remaining alternative beneficiaries, in equal shares.

(C) Residuary Beneficiary

The residuary beneficiary of the trust shall be [NAME]. If [NAME] does not survive the grantor by thirty (30) days, any and all property shall be given to the alternative beneficiaries in the shares specified in Section V, Paragraph (B).

VI. Distribution of Trust Property Upon Death of Grantor

Upon the death of the Grantor, the Trustee shall distribute the trust property outright to the beneficiaries named in Section V, Paragraphs (A), (B) and (C).

VII. Trustee's Powers and Duties

(A) Powers Under State Law

To carry out the provisions of The XYZ Trust, the Trustee shall have all authority and powers allowed or conferred on a Trustee under [STATE] law, subject to the Trustee's fiduciary duty to the Grantor and the beneficiaries.

(B) Specified Powers

The Trustee's powers include, but are not limited to:

1. The power to sell trust property, and to borrow money and to encumber that property, specifically including trust real estate, by mortgage, deed of trust, or other method.
2. The power to manage trust real estate as if the Trustee were the absolute owner of it, including the power to lease (even if the lease term may extend beyond the period of any trust) or grant options to lease the property, to make repairs or alterations, and to insure against loss.
3. The power to sell or grant options for the sale or exchange of any trust property, including stocks, bonds, debentures, and any other form of security or security account, at public or private sale for cash or on credit.
4. The power to invest trust property in property of any kind, including but not limited to bonds, debentures, notes, mortgages, stocks, stock options, stock futures, and buying on margin.
5. The power to receive additional property from any source and add to any trust created by this Declaration of Trust.
6. The power to employ and pay reasonable fees to accountants, lawyers, or investment experts for information or advice relating to the trust.
7. The power to deposit and hold trust funds in both interest-bearing and non-interest-bearing accounts.
8. The power to deposit funds in bank or other accounts uninsured by FDIC coverage.
9. The power to enter into electronic fund transfer or safe deposit arrangements with financial institutions.
10. The power to continue any business of the Grantor.
11. The power to institute or defend legal actions concerning the trust or Grantor's affairs.
12. The power to diversify investments, including authority to decide that the trust property need not produce income.

(C) Payment by Trustee of the Grantor's Debts and Taxes

The Grantor's debts and death taxes shall be paid by the Trustee however the Trustee deems appropriate.

VIII. General Administrative Provisions

(A) Controlling Law

The validity of The XYZ Trust shall be governed by the laws of [STATE].

(B) Severability

If any provision of this Declaration of Trust is ruled unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall nevertheless remain in effect.

(C) Amendments

The term "Declaration of Trust" includes any provisions added by amendments.

(D) Accountings

No accountings or reports shall be required of the Trustee.

Certification by Grantor

I certify that I have read this Declaration of Trust for The XYZ Trust, created January 1, 2019, and that it correctly states the terms and conditions under which the trust property is to be held, managed, and disposed of by the trustee, and I approve the Declaration of Trust.

Dated: January 1, 2019

_____

Grantor – [YOUR NAME]

Schedule A

All the Grantor's interest in the following property:

[List the financial accounts or real estate titled to the trust.]

You likely noticed that these two trust documents look very similar. The key differences are minimal, but very important. In the first living trust, you were the trustee. In the second trust, you designated someone else as the trustee. When a trust is used to purchase an asset that requires documentation with the government, such as a house, vehicle, or boat, the trustee's name is usually registered along with the trust. If you plan to use a trust as part of your privacy strategy, you likely do not want to be listed as the trustee. In a later chapter, I will explain the entire process of purchasing a home with a trust. This action will completely hide the owner (you) from any public records associated with the home. We are not ready for that yet, but this familiarization with trusts will aid you later.

Regardless of the route you take to establish a trust, I never recommend obtaining an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Doing so executes an annual tax reporting requirement, which can complicate your taxes. It also complicates the process of revoking the trust. Since the trust will never be used to generate income, acquire credit, or hire employees, this number is not necessary.

Appointment of a New Trustee

As the grantor of a revocable trust, you have the right to make any changes to it as desired. This includes the ability to change the trustee. There are many reasons one may choose a different trustee. An elderly person may designate a new trustee during the final years of life in order to allow a loved one to sign on behalf of the trust. This could be convenient for making payments when the grantor is unable to complete the process. For our purposes, there is a privacy-related reason that may require you to assign a new trustee.

If you created a trust and assigned yourself as trustee, you may have a situation that warrants the appointment of a new trustee. During the upcoming anonymous house purchase chapter, I explain how a client needed to create a trust and open a checking account in the name of that trust. She made herself the trustee in order to open the bank account, but wanted to assign another trustee before she purchased and deeded a new home in the name of the trust. This would allow her trustee to sign on behalf of the trust on any publicly recorded documents.

The following pages present two amendments to a trust. The first appoints a new trustee, eliminating yourself from the position. The second reverses this decision and places the original trustee (you) back to the position. You may never need these, but know that the option is available.

The XYZ Trust

Amendment to Trust - Appointment of New Trustee

This amendment to The XYZ Trust, dated January 1, 2019, is made this day, [CURRENT DATE], by [YOUR NAME], the grantor of the trust. Under the power of amendment reserved to the grantor by Section III, Paragraph (A), of the trust, the grantor amends the trust as follows:

[YOUR NAME], the grantor and creator of The XYZ Trust, which was created by virtue of a Trust Agreement dated January 1, 2019, and which named [YOUR NAME] as Trustee, hereby terminates the duties of [YOUR NAME] as trustee under said Trust and further hereby appoints [NEW TRUSTEE] as Trustee under the provisions of the Trust Agreement dated January 1, 2019 and known as The XYZ Trust. [YOUR NAME] remains the grantor of The XYZ Trust. In all other respects, the Declaration of Trust as executed on January 1, 2019, by the grantor is affirmed. This amendment was executed on [CURRENT DATE].

_____

[YOUR NAME], Grantor of The XYZ Trust

_____

[WITNESS NAME], Witness

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on this day before me, an officer duly qualified to take acknowledgement, personally appeared the subjects listed above, to me known to be the persons described in, and who executed the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged before me that executed the same. WITNESS my hand and official seal this [CURRENT DATE].

_____

Notary Public

The XYZ Trust

Amendment to Trust - Appointment of New Trustee

This amendment to The XYZ Trust, dated January 1, 2019, is made this day, [CURRENT DATE], by [YOUR NAME], the grantor of the trust. Under the power of amendment reserved to the grantor by Section III, Paragraph (A), of the trust, the grantor amends the trust as follows:

[YOUR NAME], the grantor and creator of The XYZ Trust, which was created by virtue of a Trust Agreement dated January 1, 2019, and which named [PREVIOUS TRUSTEE NAME] as Trustee via amendment on [DATE OF PREVIOUS AMMENDMENT], hereby terminates the duties of [PREVIOUS TRUSTEE] as trustee under said Trust and further hereby re-appoints himself, [YOUR NAME], as Trustee under the provisions of the Trust Agreement dated January 1, 2019 and known as The XYZ Trust. [YOUR NAME] remains the grantor of The XYZ Trust. [ORIGINAL SUCCESSOR TRUSTEE NAME] remains the successor Trustee. In all other respects, the Declaration of Trust as executed January 1, 2019, by the grantor is affirmed. This amendment was executed on [CURRENT DATE].

[YOUR NAME], Grantor and New Trustee of The XYZ Trust

[WITNESS NAME], Witness

I HEREBY CERTIFY that on this day before me, an officer duly qualified to take acknowledgement, personally appeared the subjects listed above, to me known to be the person described in, and who executed the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged before me that executed the same. WITNESS my hand and official seal this [CURRENT DATE].

Notary Public

Certification of Trust

A certification of trust is not a required document in order to possess a valid trust. It is optional, but likely more powerful than the trust itself for our purposes. It is an abbreviated version of the trust document, which contains minimal information about the trust. You may find one useful when transferring property to your trust, such as your home. County and state offices, banks, or other institutions may require proof that the trust exists.

The purpose of a certification of trust is to establish that the trust exists, without revealing the personal details, such as the other assets in it and your beneficiaries. Privacy-minded people do not want to reveal this core information to institutions that require proof of the trust's existence, so they submit a certification of trust rather than a copy of the entire trust.

Most states have statutes that set out the requirements for a certification of trust. Some states also provide a specific form in their statutes. If yours does, you should use that form so that your certification looks familiar to the institutions that will see it. If your state does not provide a form, you can make your own using the following guides. In my experience, state-specific forms are not required. Typically, certifications of trust display the following details.

- The name of the trust
- The date the trust was created
- The trustee's name
- The trustee's powers
- The trustee's signature
- A Notary's signature and stamp

Imagine that you are purchasing a home, and the title company demands proof of the trust. Most people just provide a full copy of the entire trust, including the grantor's name (you), your beneficiaries, your successor trustee, and any other private details. This is unnecessary and invasive. The certification of trust includes all information required by various entities without exposing private details.

When executing a home purchase for a client, no entity ever sees the full trust document. The title company receives the certification of trust which clearly states the powers of the document and the trustee's name. This is all of the information needed for their limited function. I expect this document to be attached to the sale and shared with the county and other third parties. I will use it later while activating utilities. It is the public face of the trust. The following is an example.

CERTIFICATION OF TRUST

STATE OF _____)
) SS.
COUNTY OF _____)

The undersigned, after first being duly sworn and upon their oath, state as follows:

1) THE [NAME OF YOUR TRUST] TRUST was formed on [DATE] and is in existence as of today.

2) THE [NAME OF YOUR TRUST] TRUST is a REVOCABLE Trust.

3) The sole Trustee, [NAME OF YOUR TRUSTEE], has full authority and power to convey real estate owned by this trust, the power to acquire additional property, the power to sell and execute deeds, the power to execute any documents, and the power to deposit and hold trust funds.

4) Title to Trust assets is to be taken as follows: THE [NAME OF YOUR TRUST] TRUST.

5) The Trust has not been revoked, modified or amended in any manner which would cause the representations contained herein to be incorrect.

6) I am the only currently acting trustee.

Dated: [DATE]

_____
[NAME], Trustee of THE [NAME OF YOUR TRUST] TRUST

_____
Notary Public

Let's dissect this document.

- The first section identifies the state and county where the trust was established. This also identifies the state trust laws that would apply to the trust. This is usually the location of the trustee, but can also be the county of the grantor (you). "SS" is the abbreviation for "scilicet" which is a Latin term meaning "namely" or "in particular". It identifies the venue.
- Number 1 identifies the name and date of the trust. These two pieces are vital and should be the same on all documents. The date of trust formation is used to verify the trust in the event two trusts have the same name.
- Number 2 declares that the trust is revocable, and that it can be modified at any time by the grantor.
- Number 3 identifies the current trustee and states their power. This is vital to establish to the requesting institution that the trustee has the authority to sign on behalf of the trust.
- Number 4 defines the name of the trust as it should appear on any titles or deeds. This must be identical on all documents.
- Number 5 confirms that the trust is valid as of the date signed. Some entities will require a version of this certification that has been recently signed.

- Number 6 confirms that there are not additional trustees. If there were, they would also need to be listed and approve any transactions or purchases.
- The date should be the date signed, and does not need to match the previous date of when the trust was established.
- This form should be notarized, as many institutions will not accept it if it is not. Some title companies will want to make a copy of the original document with a "wet" ink signature and will not accept a provided digital scan.

The name of the trustee will vary depending on the way your trust was defined. If you made yourself the trustee, then you would sign this document. If you assigned a trustee other than yourself for privacy purposes, that person must sign the document. Both of these scenarios will be discussed in the vehicle and home purchase chapters.

This is a great time to remind readers that this entire book should be read, digested, and understood before attempting any of this on your own. Please remember that these are simply examples of documents and scenarios associated with my clients. It is very possible that these examples will not be appropriate for your personal needs. A competent estate attorney should confirm the most appropriate path for you.

Choosing a Trustee

You have now learned of the various ways that trusts can be created and later chapters will demonstrate their power during asset purchase and ownership. An important consideration I have glossed over until now is choosing a trustee for your trust. This is a decision that should not be made in haste. You should place much thought into this, as the trustee will need to be involved with any asset purchases.

Before you stress about this too much, know that as the grantor of a revocable trust, you can replace the trustee at any time. You still have the power to make any changes desired. Your choice of trustee might vary based on the purpose of the trust. Consider the following scenarios.

- You are establishing a trust to purchase a home. You do not want your name publicly associated with the purchase or the deed. The home will be titled into the trust name. The county of this home demands to include the trustee's name on the deed, similar to "The #65436 Trust, Jane Doe, Trustee". The trustee will need to sign several documents at closing, which will all be publicly recorded at the county level. You plan to place the utilities within the name of the trust, and the certification of trust will be used as proof of existence. Obviously, you will need a trustee that is available to you and willing to assist.
- You are purchasing a vehicle and plan to title it into the trust. You do not want your name publicly associated with the vehicle's title or registration with the state. The state requires a trustee's name on the application, but does not publish the name of the trustee on the title or registration. The trustee will need to sign the application and provide valid government identification during the process.

While both of these require a cooperative and willing trustee, the second will document an SSN or driver's license number of the trustee. This places more responsibility on the trustee, and possibly some discomfort. The first scenario will not require anything more than a Notary approval of the trustee's signature, and provides some distance between the true identity of the trustee and the purchase. In all scenarios, you must choose an appropriate trustee.

Your trustee will play a vital role in carrying out the execution of a purchase titled in your trust. In most situations, the trustee does not need experience in financial management or private purchases. That is YOUR job. However, they do need to possess common sense, dependability, and trust in your actions. You will be asking your trustee to sign documents that they may not fully understand. While you should fully trust your trustee to carry out your instructions, the relationship must be respectful both ways. You would never want your

trustee unsure of your plan or execution. Choosing your trustee can be one of the most difficult decisions throughout this process. I cannot offer a black-and-white playbook for this, but I can offer some suggestions.

Family: This is a bit dangerous in terms of privacy, but usually the easiest. If you have a close relative that is willing to be your trustee in order to disguise your name from public records, this can work. Before you commit, identify any potential exposure online. Search your name and the family member's name within every people search site and see if there is a connection between the two of you. If so, it is not necessarily a deal-breaker, but something important to consider. Will your adversary identify your family, search for trusts in their name, and assume that you live at the house? Most will not go that far, but some have. If you are running from the paparazzi or a private investigator, they will absolutely follow these paths. If you choose a family member, one with a different last name is always preferred. Since I have a unique last name, and new people search sites with family connections pop up every day, this route was not for me.

Friend: This path can offer a bit more privacy, especially if there are no online associations. If photos of you and your friend are all over Facebook, this is not a wise choice. If you choose to make a friend your trustee, this should be a strong friendship that has a long history. I have people in my life that would proudly serve this role, but the weak link will always bother me. Anyone that had the time to research my past, and search for these names on public records associated with trusts outside of the general areas of the potential trustee, could possibly identify my trust and home. This is a bit far-fetched, but on my mind. If my friend's name was John Wilson, that may sway my thinking. If you have a trusted friend with that common of a name, congratulations. You may have found your trustee.

Attorney: This is a more expensive option, but provides stronger privacy. My trustee is an attorney who specializes in estate planning. For a fee, he agreed to scrutinize my documents and act as a trustee on my behalf. He signed my closing documents on my home as the trustee of my trust, and his name is on record with the county (but no trustee name is listed on the deed). We possess a private contract eliminating any liability on his behalf. He also has possession of my full trust(s) which outline my wishes upon death. The attorney-client privilege offers yet another layer of trust between us. Most estate planning attorneys do not offer this level of service, so you will spend some time hunting for this. When you find it, you have achieved a great layer of protection between you and your home.

Your trustee should be whoever you feel is most trustworthy to do the job, is willing to do it, and will respect your privacy once the job is finished. If using a trust to buy a home, your trustee will likely know the address. These people are now the weakest link. A social engineering attack on them could reveal something you have spent countless hours trying to hide. Please choose wisely.

Limited Liability Companies (LLCs)

Privacy enthusiasts have heard for years that a New Mexico LLC is a powerful tool to help hide the true owner of your home. This can be accurate, but it is not the only option. Furthermore, New Mexico is not the only state that offers fairly anonymous LLCs. For many of my clients, an LLC was not the most appropriate fit. I have owned numerous LLCs and used them to title homes, vehicles, and utilities for myself and clients. This section will first explain the power of an "invisible" LLC, then the practical usage, and finally the details of establishing this entity.

Every state has the ability to create an LLC. Each state has their own requirements, and this can vary from full disclosure of all members to no owner disclosure whatsoever. This is the first step toward choosing the appropriate state for your LLC. Overall, we only want to consider states that do not require public disclosure of the owners or members.

States such as California and Illinois demand that you publicly disclose the full name and physical address of each member of the LLC. This provides no privacy protection and anyone can search your name to find your LLC in seconds. States such as Delaware, Nevada, New Mexico, and Wyoming currently do not require you to

disclose any details of the members of the LLC. They each only require you to possess a registered agent within the state of your filing. This is easy and fairly affordable. However, the anonymous LLC is at risk of disappearing.

In 2021, the Corporate Transparency Act (CTA) was voted into law with the intent to stop the use of anonymous LLCs during money laundering activities. This requires states to collect the names and identifiers of the beneficial owners of LLCs and share those details with the federal government. On the surface, this makes the idea of a private LLC dead, but let's not cancel the idea just yet. First, let's understand what will be collected.

Once the law is applicable, each state will be required to identify the name, physical address, date of birth, and driver's license or other identification number of all beneficial owners of an LLC. This information will be stored by the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and will not be intentionally shared with the public. However, it may be released to any law enforcement agency conducting an active investigation or a financial institution conducting due diligence under the Banking Secrecy Act or USA PATRIOT Act (with customer consent). The information is not available to the general public, nor can it be queried under the Freedom of Information Act. In other words, the public will probably not see these details, but practically any arm of the U.S. government can likely gain access.

Compliance from states is not required until January 2022 for new LLCs, and existing LLCs must provide these details before January 2024. In other words, by the time you read this, creating a new LLC will likely demand your personal information regardless of state chosen.

There are already loopholes being discovered. As an example, the CTA requires reporting of persons who own, directly or indirectly, at least 25% of the ownership interests in a private company, or who control a private company. Technically, you might be able to offer a nominee 76% of control and ownership while keeping your own name off of any record. However, I do not recommend this and will not offer it as a demonstration. You may find yourself without a home when your "partner" turns on you.

Other exemptions from the beneficial ownership reporting requirement may apply. There are a number of entities exempt from the requirement to report beneficial ownership information. These are primarily entities which must already disclose their beneficial owners under other laws or regulations. That does not apply to us. However, entities "deemed not to be viable vehicles for money laundering" may not need to report beneficiaries. Of these, I find the following applicable to our needs.

"...any entity that is in existence for over one year, not engaged in active business, and not directly or indirectly owned by a non-US person."

In other words, an LLC you create for the sole purpose of holding an asset, such as a home, but never generates any income, and is owned by a U.S. citizen MIGHT not be forced to provide beneficiary details. Please note that I am writing this chapter in early 2022 before the final regulations have been established and enforced.

I anticipate the demand to disclose true LLC ownership details by the end of 2022. I am not too bothered by this. As you will read, I typically report any LLC to the IRS in order to obtain an EIN number. Therefore, an association already exists which is known by the Department of the Treasury. My primary concern is always the public availability of personal details. The CTA does not publish owner details online.

Over the next year, you and I will watch these laws take shape together. I will be monitoring closely and disclosing any new discoveries on my weekly podcast. My biggest concern is that individual states will be responsible for the collection and reporting of this information. I expect unintentional data leaks will cause online exposure through misconfigured servers. I suspect some states will not protect the data appropriately. This may the best time to create a few "shelf" LLCs for future use. **Overall, I only establish LLCs which will require an EIN for banking purposes anyway. The government will already know the beneficiary. If the situation is too sensitive to report the beneficiary to the government, I rely solely on trusts.** Let's walk through some examples.

Our first consideration is cost. Delaware requires a yearly $300 fee, regardless whether you use the LLC in any way. Nevada is more expensive and Wyoming is much more affordable, but you will need to find a "nominee" to replace you on the public forms with both. This can be completed fairly anonymously, but I have better options. New Mexico has the most lenient requirements and has no annual filing fee. For most non-nomad clients who need an LLC for asset purchasing, New Mexico is the best choice.

First, you must find a company that provides New Mexico LLC creation services. There are many, and I will not name any specific providers. I will only say that each of them provides an almost identical service. However, the fees for the services are not identical. I have seen companies demand $300-$800 to initiate the LLC and then an annual fee of over $400. This is the high side of this service. The more affordable options cost between $150 and $200 to form the LLC with an annual fee of $30 to $50 for the registered agent service. An online search of "New Mexico Private LLC" will present many options. Do your homework, check reviews, and find the best option for your needs.

A reputable LLC provider will do all the hard work for you. You will pay the initial fee and they will automatically serve as your New Mexico registered agent and your LLC organizer. That means that the only identifying information listed on your Articles of Organization provided to the state is their information. Your information remains private from the state. The provider will obtain the LLC from the New Mexico Corporations Bureau in the name you requested. This is the first choice you need to make. The name of your LLC is important. It should be vague and not have any personal association to you. If you plan to use this LLC as part of your purchase of an anonymous home, you may want to tailor the name toward that strategy. Names such as "Southwest Real Estate Ventures LLC" or "Wilson Home Builders" could be appropriate for utilities and home services. Names such as these appear legitimate versus a suspicious choice such as "Extreme Privacy Seekers LLC". The following website will allow you to search for a name to make sure it is not in use.

https://portal.sos.state.nm.us/BFS/online/CorporationBusinessSearch

Once you have chosen your LLC name and paid the fee to the registered agent, you will need to provide your contact information before they will file for the LLC. The service will want your full name, physical address, email address, and telephone number. Reputable privacy-oriented LLC creation companies will not share these details with the state or any third parties, but check any privacy policies to know what will be done with your data. You should choose this contact information carefully. There is debate about whether you must be honest with these details. You are providing contact information to a private company that does not share it with the state. You could probably get away with an alias. However, I do not recommend this. The reason they need this information is to meet the requirements from New Mexico. The service must know the identity of the creator of the LLC in order to serve any legal process that could arrive. While that is likely outside the scope of your scenario, it is possible that someone could file a lawsuit against your LLC. If so, a subpoena could be issued to your registered agent on your behalf. That agent would then forward the legal paperwork to you. I have created LLCs using both real and alias information, but I now recommend using your true identity (to an extent).

For the name, I would provide your first initial and last name. Your physical address can be a PO Box or CMRA. If you only have a PMB as discussed previously, you could use that. However, I prefer to only use a PMB for things that are heavily associated with your true name. If you have a local PO Box that you use to receive your mail from the PMB, that is a much better option. Your email address can be a ProtonMail account created just for this purpose, and your telephone number can be a MySudo or other VOIP number. Payment can be made using a prepaid gift card or a Privacy.com account (discussed later).

None of these details will be filed with the state, and none will be visible within public records. Only your registered agent will have these details, which is another reason to spend time picking the right service for your needs. I also recommend calling any potential registered agents and asking them about their ability to keep your details private. If you are unable to reach a human and cannot receive an acceptable answer, keep looking. You

will know when you find the right fit. The registered agent service will file your LLC with the state, including the "Articles of Organization", and provide you copies of this document and the "Certificate of Organization". Most reputable LLC creation companies will provide the documents needed, but some may ask you to complete an Articles of Organization form.

Vague examples of the Articles of Organization (which are submitted to the state) and the Certificate of Organization (which is received from the state) are included within the following pages. Your versions may vary slightly. Note that the content on the following pages contains all of the mandatory disclosures. Any other details, such as the names of the members, are optional and should not be included. As a reminder, the following pages only apply to LLCs created in New Mexico. Researching other states should provide similar documents in order to understand the key differences from one state to another. Additionally, these examples are only to be used as tools for privacy, and never to generate any income. I will discuss more on that scenario in a later chapter. The New Mexico Secretary of State website contains more details. I encourage you to read through all documents before considering your own LLC strategy.

ARTICLES OF ORGANIZATION

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

The undersigned, acting as organizer of a limited liability company pursuant to the New Mexico Limited Liability Act, adopts the following Articles of Organization:

The name of the Limited Liability Company is:

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

The latest date upon which the company is to dissolve is:

[DATE]

The name of the registered agent for the LLC is:

[YOUR REGISTERED AGENT BUSINESS NAME]

The New Mexico street address of the company's initial registered agent is

[ADDRESS OF YOUR AGENT]

The street address of the company's principal place of business is

[ADDRESS OF YOUR AGENT]

The mailing address of the Limited Liability Company is

[ADDRESS OF YOUR AGENT]

The LLC will be managed by Member(s).

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC REGULATION COMMISSION

CERTIFICATE OF ORGANIZATION

OF

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

#876345

The Public Regulation Commission certifies that the Articles of Organization, duly signed & verified pursuant to the provisions of the

LIMITED LIABILITY ACT
(53-19-1 TO 53-19-74 NMSA 1978)

Have been received by it and are found to conform to law.

Accordingly, by virtue of the authority vested in it by law, the Public Regulation Commission issues this Certificate of Organization and attaches hereto, a duplicate of the Articles of Organization.

Dated: April 1, 2019

In testimony whereof, the Public Regulation of the state of New Mexico has caused this certificate to be signed by its Chairman and the seal of said Commission to affixed at the City of Santa Fe.

_____
Chairman

_____
Bureau Chief

The Certificate of Organization includes the state issued number to your LLC. This document will be used when an entity, such as the DMV, insists on something official in relation to your LLC. This document can be verified online and duplicates with a more recent date can be ordered. Notice that no personal information appears on these documents.

Technically, you now have an official LLC through the state of New Mexico. You will need to pay the minimal fee to your registered agent every year in order to be legal, and you will likely never need the agent's services again. Now that you own the LLC, you should consider the next steps.

While your registered agent and the state of New Mexico did not require you to disclose an Operating Agreement for your LLC, you should create one right away. This document outlines the terms of the LLC, owner information, and rules of how the LLC will be maintained. Theoretically, no one should ever need to see this document, but having it could assist you in the rare case that any legal battles come your way. I have used a very simple template for all of my LLCs, and I have never needed to display a copy to anyone. If you choose to open a bank account under this LLC, they may want to see this document. I will discuss more on that in a later chapter.

Overall, the operating agreement contains details which identify you as the owner, and can serve as proof of ownership if the need should arise. Much of it is legal speak in order to satisfy requirements of financial institutions. I prefer to create and notarize this document before the Certificate of Organization is issued. Within the document, I present a brief summary of each item, and why it is important, within brackets.

The following example is for a single-member LLC. It is the easiest way to establish an LLC for privacy purposes. You should contact an attorney before executing your own operating agreement in order to ensure that it is appropriate for your unique situation. Creating a complete LLC package, including optional documents which may never be seen by anyone except you, is important. If anyone should challenge your ownership of an asset, through the invisible LLC which has control of it, you want proper legal documents in your possession.

Possessing these documents, which are notarized during the creation of the LLC, and not created only as a response to some negative attention, will weigh heavily in your favor. Double-check all dates to make sure there are no conflicts which could raise scrutiny if challenged. Again, this is where an experienced attorney can be beneficial. My first several attempts at LLC creation in 2008 are laughable now and could be deemed illegal, likely having no power in a courtroom.

LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY OPERATING AGREEMENT

FOR

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

A Member-Managed Limited Liability Company

ARTICLE I: Company Formation

1.1 **FORMATION.** The Members hereby form a Limited Liability Company ("Company") subject to the provisions of the Limited Liability Company Act as currently in effect as of this date. Articles of Organization shall be filed with the Secretary of State.

[This establishes the formation.]

1.2 **NAME.** The name of the Company shall be:

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

[This establishes the name.]

1.3 **REGISTERED AGENT.** The name and location of the registered agent of the Company shall be:

[NAME AND ADDRESS OF YOUR AGENT]

[This establishes the registered agent.]

1.4 **TERM.** The Company shall continue for a perpetual period.

[This establishes the LLC does not have a pre-determined termination date.]

1.5 **BUSINESS PURPOSE.** The purpose of the Company is to hold assets.

[This establishes the purpose of the business and declares it is not designed to generate income.]

1.6 **PRINCIPAL PLACE OF BUSINESS.** The location of the principal place of business of the Company shall be:

[YOUR PO BOX]

[This establishes an address for the LLC (not the registered agent address). This can be a PO Box.]

1.7 **THE MEMBERS**. The name and place of residence of each member are contained in Exhibit 2 attached to this Agreement.

[This references an additional exhibit attached to this agreement, explained later.]

1.8 **ADMISSION OF ADDITIONAL MEMBERS**. Except as otherwise expressly provided in the Agreement, no additional members may be admitted to the Company through issuance by the company of a new interest in the Company, without the prior unanimous written consent of the Members.

[This prevents adding additional members without your consent.]

ARTICLE II: Capital Contributions

2.1 **INITIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**. The Members initially shall contribute to the Company capital as described in Exhibit 3 attached to this Agreement.

[This references an additional exhibit attached to this agreement, explained later.]

2.2 **ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS**. Except as provided in ARTICLE 6.2, no Member shall be obligated to make any additional contribution to the Company's capital.

[This prevents a requirement for you to contribute additional funding to the LLC.]

ARTICLE III: Profits, Losses and Distributions

3.1 **PROFITS/LOSSES**. For financial accounting and tax purposes the Company's net profits or net losses shall be determined on an annual basis and shall be allocated to the Members in proportion to each Member's relative capital interest in the Company as set forth in Exhibit 2 as amended from time to time in accordance with Treasury Regulation 1.704-1.

[This should not be required, but defines how profits and losses will be allocated if the LLC ever generates income or losses.]

3.2 **DISTRIBUTIONS**. The Members shall determine and distribute available funds annually or at more frequent intervals as they see fit. Available funds, as referred to herein, shall mean the net cash of the Company available after appropriate provision for expenses and liabilities, as determined by the Managers.

[This should not be required, but defines how funds will be distributed if the LLC ever generates income or losses.]

ARTICLE IV: Management

4.1 **MANAGEMENT OF THE BUSINESS**. The name and place of residence of each Manager is attached as Exhibit 1 of this Agreement. By a vote of the Members holding a majority of the capital interests in the Company, as set forth in Exhibit 2 as amended from time to time, shall elect so many Managers as the Members determine, but no fewer than one, with one Manager elected by the Members as Chief Executive Manager. The elected Manager(s) may either be a Member or Non-Member.

[This allows you to be elected as Chief Executive Manager.]

4.2 **POWERS OF MANAGERS**. The Managers are authorized on the Company's behalf to make all decisions as to (a) the sale, development lease or other disposition of the Company's assets; (b) the purchase or other acquisition of other assets of all kinds; (c) the management of all or any part of the Company's assets; (d) the borrowing of money and the granting of security interests in the Company's assets; and (e) the employment of persons, firms or corporations for the operation and management of the company's business. In the exercise of their management powers, the Managers are authorized to execute and deliver (a) all contracts, conveyances, assignments leases, sub-leases, franchise agreements, licensing agreements, management contracts and maintenance contracts covering or affecting the Company's assets; (b) all checks, drafts and other orders for the payment of the Company's funds; (c) all promissory notes, loans, security agreements and other similar documents; and, (d) all other instruments of any other kind relating to the Company's affairs, whether like or unlike the foregoing.

[This section defines the powers of Managers.]

4.3 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE MANAGER**. The Chief Executive Manager shall have primary responsibility for managing the operations of the Company and for effectuating the decisions of the Managers.

[This section defines the responsibility of the Chief Executive Manager.]

4.4 **INDEMNIFICATION**. The Company shall indemnify any person who was or is a party defendant or is threatened to be made a party defendant of any action, suit or proceeding, whether civil, criminal, administrative, or investigative by reason of the fact that he is or was a Member of the Company, Manager, employee or agent of the Company, for instant expenses, judgments, fines, and amounts paid in settlement incurred in connection with such action, suit or proceeding if the Members determine that he acted in good faith and in a manner believed to be in the best interest of the Company, and with respect to any criminal action proceeding, has no reasonable cause to believe his/her conduct was unlawful. The termination of any, suit, judgment, order, or settlement shall not in itself create a presumption that the person did or did not act in good faith in a manner believed to be in the best interest of the Company, and, with respect to any criminal action or proceeding, had reasonable cause to believe that his/her conduct was lawful.

[An indemnification provision, also known as a hold harmless provision, is a clause used in contracts to shift potential costs from one party to the other. This example states that the LLC will not seek damages from you. This is largely unnecessary for our purposes, but standard verbiage.]

4.5 **RECORDS**. The Managers shall cause the Company to keep at its principal place of business (a) a current list in alphabetical order of the full name and the last known street address of each Member; (b) a copy of the Certificate of Formation and the Company Operating Agreement and all amendments; and (c) copies of any financial statements of the LLC for the three most recent years.

[This states that you will maintain proper records.]

ARTICLE V: Bookkeeping

5.1 **BOOKS**. The Managers shall maintain complete and accurate books of account of the Company's affairs at the Company's principal place of business. The company's accounting period shall be the calendar year.

[This defines that you will keep proper books and that your business year will follow a traditional calendar year. This is important for businesses that make a profit, but likely not needed in an LLC made for privacy.]

CERTIFICATE OF FORMATION

This Company Operating Agreement is entered into and shall become effective as of the Effective Date by and among the Company and the persons executing this Agreement as Members. It is the Members express intention to create a limited liability company in accordance with applicable law, as currently written or subsequently amended or redrafted.

The undersigned hereby agree, acknowledge, and certify that the foregoing operating agreement is adopted and approved by each member, the agreement consisting of __ pages, constitutes, together with Exhibit 1, Exhibit 2 and Exhibit 3 (if any), the Operating Agreement of SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC, adopted by the members as of April 1, 2019.

Members:

_____ _____

[YOUR NAME] **Date**
Percent: 100%

[This is the official signature page that executes this document. It should be notarized.]

_____ _____

Notary Public **Date**

EXHIBIT 1

LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY OPERATING AGREEMENT

FOR

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

LISTING OF MANAGERS

By a majority vote of the Members the following Managers were elected to operate the Company pursuant to ARTICLE 4 of the Agreement:

_____

[YOUR NAME]

Chief Executive Manager

[YOUR PO BOX ADDRESS]

[This defines you as the Chief Executive Manager. It should be notarized]

_____ _____

Notary Public **Date**

EXHIBIT 2

LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY OPERATING AGREEMENT

FOR

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

LISTING OF MEMBERS

As of the 1st day of April, 2019 the following is a list of Members of the Company:

[YOUR NAME] **Percent** 100%

[YOUR PO BOX ADDRESS]

_____

Signature of Member

[This defines you as the sole member of the LLC. It should be notarized.]

_____ _____

Notary Public **Date**

EXHIBIT 3

LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANY OPERATING AGREEMENT

FOR

SOUTHWEST REAL ESTATE VENTURES LLC

CAPITAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Pursuant to ARTICLE 2, the Members' initial contribution to the Company capital is stated to be $_____.00. The description and each individual portion of this initial contribution is as follows:

[YOUR NAME] $ .00

SIGNED AND AGREED this 1st day of April, 2019.

_____

[YOUR NAME]

[This defines the initial funding of the LLC, if applicable, such as an initial deposit into a checking account in the name of the business. It should be notarized.]

_____ _____

Notary Public **Date**

Let's take a breath and look at what we have accomplished. You chose a name for your LLC and hired a Registered Agent service to file the paperwork on your behalf. They know your true identity, but no personal details were disclosed to the state of New Mexico. You created an operating agreement that outlines the legal details of your LLC. This is a personal document which is never shared with the state or the registered agent. You may never need to show this to anyone. You now have an official LLC that is ready to be used. The next consideration is an Employer Identification Number (EIN) with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). This is a delicate decision that should not be made without serious thoughts.

Your LLC does not require an EIN if you do not plan for it to generate any income. For the purposes of this chapter, you should never be paid by any entity in the name of this LLC. You can place assets in the LLC without an EIN. If you do not possess an EIN, there is no mandatory reporting or tax filing with the IRS. Obviously, if you obtain an EIN, the IRS will know that you are directly associated with the LLC. They will demand your SSN and other details as part of the application. As you can see, there are many benefits to NOT obtaining an EIN for your new LLC.

There are also some advantages. An EIN can go a long way when you want to provide legitimacy for the LLC. If you plan to open utilities in the name of an LLC, the first question from the utility company will be, "What is your EIN?". Without an EIN, they will start demanding your SSN. If you have any plans of opening a bank account in the name of the LLC, the bank will also require an EIN.

Another benefit of an EIN is to provide proof of ownership. If you plan to place a million-dollar home in the name of an LLC, and someone challenges you and claims THEY are the owner, you have a great resource (IRS) that can verify the EIN of the true owner. If you decide to obtain an EIN, make sure to notify your tax preparer. While you will not owe any federal taxes on an LLC that does not generate income, the IRS will expect to see a claim of this on your tax filing. In this situation, your LLC is a pass-through entity to you as the sole member.

The procedure to obtain an EIN from the IRS is very simple, and the result is immediate. The following website has all of the details.

https://www.irs.gov/businesses/small-businesses-self-employed/apply-for-an-employer-identification-number-ein-online

Overall, I do NOT recommend obtaining an EIN unless you know you will need it. You can apply for this number at any time, regardless of when the LLC was created. If you plan to title a vehicle in an LLC, connect a bank account to the LLC, or register utilities in the name of the LLC, an EIN will be required.

Limited Liability Companies (LLCs) - South Dakota - Nomads

The previous pages applied specifically to New Mexico. There are many privacy benefits with that state and you do not need to renew your LLC every year. It is a great choice for those who live in practically any state. However, nomads of South Dakota may choose their own state for LLC creation. The process is much simpler and you can still possess privacy. Much of the process is similar to the previous option, but you may notice many fewer steps and demands. The entire process can be completed online, and you will receive your LLC documents immediately. Begin at the following website.

https://sosenterprise.sd.gov/BusinessServices/Business/RegistrationInstr.aspx

- Choose the "Start a new business" button.
- Choose "Domestic LLC" and click "Next".
- Enter your desired LLC name after you have used the search tool to verify availability.
- Leave "Professional Type" as "none" and click "Next".
- Provide your PMB address or a new PMB address reserved for your LLC.

- Provide your registered agent's name. Americas Mailbox offers this service. Select the "Non-Commercial" option and enter the name of your agent provided by your PMB. Conduct a search and choose the appropriate option.
- Choose your Organizer's name. You can select an individual or a company for this. South Dakota allows you to specify your own LLC as the organizer, which I find interesting. If you would rather assign an individual, you can add your own name or another "nominee". I have a close friend with a very generic name such as John Wilson. I pay him a small annual fee to be my "Contract Officer", and he has the authority to "Organize" my business. His address is not required.
- Choose "Perpetual" in order to set no specific expiration date.
- Select the "Member-Managed" option and "No".
- Ignore the "Beneficial Owners", "Additional Articles", and "Recipient" options.
- Confirm all of your details and click "Next".
- Provide a digital signature. This is a digital input and no "wet" signature is required. The name you provide will be publicly recorded. I ask my Contract Officer to be the authorized signee on my LLCs and he allows me to digitally sign on his behalf.
- Make your payment with a credit card, prepaid card, or masked card (explained later), depending on your desired level of privacy.

After successful payment, you will immediately receive a digital copy of your Articles of Organization and Certificate of Organization. You now possess an official and legal LLC in the state of South Dakota. This is the quickest way to obtain an LLC, and is yet another benefit of South Dakota nomad registration. This may all seem too good to be true. Well, there are a few privacy considerations.

- With the New Mexico option, you hired a middle-man to serve as your agent. The process took weeks to complete. They demanded to know your true identity, but withheld it from public view. In this scenario, the agent at your PMB plays this role. They will also demand to know your true identity. The fee for this service is usually quite minimal, and much more affordable than any New Mexico options. Be sure to enable the registered agent service with your PMB provider before executing.
- Your PMB address will be publicly visible. This may identify you as the owner if your PMB is also associated with your name in public records. Many of my clients open a second PMB address solely for LLC use. You will still need to disclose your real name to the PMB provider and complete the USPS form 1583 as we did previously. However, this prevents anyone from publicly associating the personal PMB with the LLC PMB. In my experience, contacting your PMB provider and stating that you would like to open a second PMB for your LLC can result in a discounted rate.
- South Dakota only requires that your "Organizer" be displayed within public records. There is no identity verification for this person. Play by the rules, but consider a nominee with a common name.
- You should form an Operating Agreement as previously explained. These are applicable to any state.

A South Dakota LLC requires annual renewal. The process is conducted completely online. You will be asked if any details of your LLC have changed. If they have not, you simply pay the $50 annual fee and receive updated digital paperwork. You will be asked to provide a name for the renewal report. I have found that either your original organizer or registered agent's name works fine here. The renewal does not require a signature or verification of identity.

I have executed dozens of South Dakota LLCs and I have never run into any issues. The entire process is automated with very little human interaction. However, this does not authorize you to provide false information or to bend any of the rules. The last thing you want is for the state to terminate your LLC due to inaccuracies or fraud. This is especially true if you use this LLC for assets, which is explained later. LLCs are a great vehicle to mask your name from public records, but they always possess a paper trail back to you (as they should). Unless the government issues court orders to your PMB provider and registered agent, your name should never be publicly associated with the LLC, as long as you used a nominee during creation.

Typical Client Configuration

In an effort to maintain full transparency, I no longer execute New Mexico LLCs for myself or my clients. I believe they are still a valuable privacy strategy, but I have also witnessed increased scrutiny from banks, businesses, and governments. However, anyone who commits to a full privacy reboot typically receives both a trust and an LLC. The following is usually provided to every client, after a ghost address (PMB) has been established, regardless of nomad residency.

- A trust in a generic name with the client as the trustee
- A Certification of Trust with the client as the trustee
- A trust bank account with the client as trustee
- Checks in the name of only the trust (no personal name or address)
- An Appointment of New Trustee form which assigns a new trustee when needed
- An Appointment of New Trustee form which reverses the trustee back to the client
- An account at Americas Mailbox with Registered Agent services
- A South Dakota LLC addressed to the PMB provider and created by a nominee
- An EIN for the LLC from the IRS
- A bank account associated with the LLC
- Checks in the name of only the LLC (no personal name or address)

My clients can then use the trust for home purchases and the LLC for vehicle registration, as explained later in the book. Both the trust and the LLC can be used for all utility payments and the checking account can facilitate payments. The checking accounts can be used for automatic payment withdrawal, which should satisfy verification requirements from many utility companies. There is obviously a paper trail which governments can follow, but the details should not be released publicly.

In some cases, especially for clients in California, I do not create the LLC. This would require registration with the state as a foreign company, unnecessary fees, and additional tax filings. My clients in California rely completely on trusts for all asset ownership. These do not require registration with the state or additional tax filings. They also do not require an EIN to be used effectively.

This is an overwhelming chapter. It is very technical, but hopefully provides some insight into the basic foundations of trusts and LLCs. In the next chapter, we can make our first purchase in the name of a trust or LLC, and start to take advantage of these avenues for privacy protection. It should help explain the power of these legal entities. You will likely find that most of the efforts creating LLC operating agreements and trust documents will go unnoticed. In ideal scenarios, no one will ever see your hard work. You will never expose these documents. However, skipping these important steps would be a mistake. If anything should ever backfire, your attention to detail will be in your favor. If you die, leaving these documents for your beneficiaries will be helpful. Understanding all documents is vital in order to execute the strategies in future chapters.

You may have noticed I do not offer digital downloads of these templates. This is very deliberate. I encourage people to completely understand the documents they create. Signing a digital template is easier, but more reckless. I encourage people to always create their own documents and only include details they understand. Since these examples are not provided as templates for personal use, digital copies are not available. The examples are provided only as a demonstration of my prior usage, and not guidance for your own strategies.

International Considerations: LLCs and trusts are very common in America. However, you may reside in a country which does not acknowledge these specific terms. Most countries possess laws which define legal infrastructures such as sole proprietorships or traders, partnerships, and "limited" companies or organizations. Trusts are widely used internationally, but the documents must conform to the laws created for the specific style of trust. Once you find a suitable infrastructure, locate any online templates which should help you understand your own legal document options.

CHAPTER EIGHT
VEHICLES

Your current vehicle, which is likely registered in your name and current address, can never be made private. You could request a new title under the name of your trust, but the history can never be erased. The Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) is already within dozens of publicly available databases, many including your name and address. I can search your name to identify the vehicle, search the VIN to identify the new owner (the trust), and associate you with the vehicle forever. This does not mean there are no reasons to re-title a vehicle.

If you own a vehicle that you plan on keeping for several years, I do recommend changing the title from your name to the name of a trust which you have established for the sole purpose of titling the vehicle. This does not prevent someone from identifying you through the vehicle, but it does stop daily invasive behavior. If your license plate is registered to your real name and home address, these details are very exposed. The information behind every license plate can be collected in many ways. Consider the following examples.

- You have a nosy neighbor who runs the local HOA and is bothered by your desire for privacy and overall seclusion. He wants to know more about you. He asks his cousin, who happens to be a police officer, to search the license plate.
- You live in an urban area surrounded by license plate readers. Cameras posted on street corners or attached to city vehicles capture every plate and amend their database with the date, time, location, and details of the registration (your name and address). This database can be searched by any other entity connected to this national system. A search of your name reveals your travels and history.
- A road rage incident leads to an aggressor capturing your plate and desiring revenge. A $10 online query reveals your full home address details, and possibly an unwanted visit by an unstable person.

Re-titling your vehicle to the name of your trust or LLC will provide a layer of privacy in these types of incidents. You are not bullet-proof thanks to vehicle history databases, but you are better protected from the daily mass attacks against your privacy. It is not as powerful as a new private vehicle purchase, which I will explain within this chapter. I present several scenarios which vary in protection from the least to most private.

Current Vehicle Re-Titling to a Trust (Non-Nomad)

First, let's consider a scenario where you are NOT a nomad as previously defined. You possess a vehicle, without a lien, registered in your real name in the state which you physically reside. This chapter will only focus on vehicles without liens. While you can re-title a vehicle with a lien, you are at the mercy of the bank holding the loan. Many financial institutions refuse this, because it is a small asset compared to something larger such as a house. If you push the issue enough, they will likely allow the transfer, but they will often insist that your name appears on the title as the trustee of the trust. This eliminates the privacy benefits of this technique. Therefore, I will assume that you will be re-titling vehicles that are paid in full.

This first scenario will be short, as each state is unique. Your state's policies can vary greatly from other states. You will need to contact your local DMV to determine the requirements to re-title your vehicle. The steps outlined in the next sections explain a typical process, but every state has their own nuances. Below are the basic considerations which may sway you away from re-titling your current vehicle, and waiting for the next purchase to execute a vehicle into a trust.

- Any state will allow you to transfer the title from your name into your trust.
- Some states will demand that the trustee name be present on the title.
- Some states will see this as a taxable event, and you must convince them otherwise.

If your state demands a trustee present on the title, it may be vital to adopt a trust with someone besides yourself as the trustee, as previously discussed. If your state does not require the trustee name, it may be acceptable to use a trust with you as the trustee since your vehicle is already associated with your true name. The general idea here is that you will go to your local DMV and identify your options. You should request to transfer the title of your current vehicle into your trust. Present your Certification of Trust and identification, and begin the process. Ensure they know you will remain the owner and that the vehicle was not "sold" to the trust. My experiences with title transfer in various states has been hit or miss. In some scenarios, the hassle was not worth the reward. Often, I had to educate the employee about trusts, and occasionally I left without a successful transfer. If there is any chance you will be selling the car in the near future, transfer is not always justified. Consider the following tutorials before you contact your state's offices. Unlike a traditional driver's license, most states allow you to use a verified PO Box as the address on the vehicle title and registration. This is another strong layer of privacy, as your home address is no longer publicly exposed.

Current Vehicle Re-Titling to a Trust (Nomad)

Next, consider a scenario where you plan to become a legal nomad resident of South Dakota. This could also apply to Texas or other nomad-friendly states, but the documentation here is specific to South Dakota. Another advantage of South Dakota is the ability to title a vehicle before obtaining official nomad residency. This allows you test the waters a bit before diving in completely. The final vehicle registration can also be used to justify your connection to the state, which can make the driver's license acquisition easier.

After the PMB is in place and tested, I prefer to immediately transfer any vehicles to the new state of future or current domicile. If you are not a resident of South Dakota yet, but possess a valid physical address within the state (PMB), you can register your vehicles right away. First, gather your title and bill of sale from the dealership or individual for your vehicle. The title will be surrendered to the state and the bill of sale will hopefully waive any taxes owed.

Vehicle registration is an important step toward the transition to a new state, as well as a great verification tool that may be needed to show association as a resident. The order of events while establishing residency is crucial. If becoming a nomad in South Dakota, I recommend registering your vehicles BEFORE claiming residency. One issue I previously faced with Texas is that you must register your vehicles at the time of claiming residency at the DMV. This was not my only reason for moving away from nomad registration in Texas, but issues with the DMV have encouraged me to focus solely on South Dakota.

You will need the following four forms from the South Dakota Department of Revenue, all of which can be found online on their website at https://dor.sd.gov. Please note that the state is in the process of switching to a new website vendor, so you may need to search for these forms. South Dakota makes minor modifications to their forms often, so expect to see differences between the examples displayed here and the current documents. Always call the state Department of Revenue before sending any documentation or payments.

- Affidavit Claiming Lack of Residence Post Office Address (some counties are no longer requiring this form)
- Application for Motor Vehicle Title & Registration
- Applicant's Tax Payment Verification
- South Dakota Exemptions

The nomad affidavit is likely the most foreign document to most clients, and I have included a verbatim copy on the following page. This may require some explanation, which follows. This document is only required if you have not established domicile in the state. I typically register a vehicle before claiming nomad residency, but this is optional.

AFFIDAVIT CLAIMING LACK OF RESIDENCE POST OFFICE ADDRESS

I, _____, in conjunction with my South Dakota Application for Title and Registration, do hereby declare and affirm that the following facts are true:

1. I do not have a South Dakota Driver's License; and

2. I do not maintain a "residence post office address" in South Dakota or any other United States jurisdiction; and

3. Because I do not maintain a "residence post office address" in South Dakota or any other United States jurisdiction, the address I have provided with my South Dakota Application for

(Title and Registration is strictly for mail-forwarding purposes)

_____
Signature of Affiant

_____
Date

_____
Printed Name of Affiant

_____
Notary Public or County Treasurer

STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA; COUNTY OF _____ Subscribed and Sworn to before me this __ day of _____, 20__.

_____
Date Commission Expires

This document is basically a statement of intent. It has three requirements, which I will explain individually. The first is fairly obvious, as you do not possess a South Dakota license (yet). If you already have one, this document is unnecessary. The second requirement is where we must dissect the terminology. Legally speaking, a "residence post office address" is the place where a person actually physically resides. If you are on the move and do not possess a home in South Dakota, this applies to you.

The statement of "the address I have provided with my South Dakota Application for Title and Registration is strictly for mail-forwarding purposes" provides a bit of legal coverage. It clearly claims that you do not reside at the address provided (PMB), and that it is only used for mail collection. You must complete this affidavit and have it notarized locally.

Next is the application for your new title and registration. This is a lengthy form, and will need to be very precise. This form will transfer your current title from the state you will be leaving to a South Dakota title, and will generate your new license plates for the vehicle. The following explanations should help you choose the appropriate content for this form, which is displayed in a couple of pages.

Section I: This will likely be the first option of Transfer-New-Out-of-State. This notifies the state that you are bringing your title from your previous state into theirs. The optional Brand section is likely inapplicable.

Section II: This should be blank, as you do not have a title yet.

Section III: This is the exact information which will appear on your title and registration. This must be precise. You only need to complete one line in the first section.

Owner/Lessor/Trust: The name of your trust for the vehicle. This is exactly what will appear on the title and the registration. I prefer to use a generic title, such as The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872043 8-A Trust. This specific length of a trust title will be explained later. This may be a trust where you are the trustee and grantor, as explained previously.

Type of Ownership: Trust

Customer Type: Trust

Identification #: This should be your SSN. Before you grimace at this, let me explain. This scenario is the second option discussed in this chapter. As mentioned previously, each option adds additional privacy protection. In this example, your name is already attached to your vehicle, there is a strong history of this publicly available, and you are convincing the state that YOUR trust is the new owner. You will need to send a copy of your SSN card or a tax statement, such as a 1099, as proof of SSN, along with this form. Any state will demand to know the name and identifiers of someone associated with the trust. This allows them to track down a responsible party if something illegal occurs or tickets are not paid. The rest of the options in this window can be left blank.

Owner/Lessor/Trust Mailing Address: This should be your PMB address.

Owner/Lessor/Trust Physical Address: This should be your PMB address.

Lessee/Trustee Mailing Address: This should be your PMB address.

Lessee/Trustee Physical Address: This should be your PMB address.

Section IV: Enter the VIN, Make, Model, Body Type, and all other details exactly as they appear on the current title. The odometer reading should be accurate as of the date of completion. The Dealer Price and Trade-in areas can state "Not Applicable".

Section V: Check the Tax-Exempt box and enter "18" or "99" as the code if you have already paid sales tax on the vehicle through another state. These codes will be explained later. In this section after "3", enter the date the vehicle was purchased from your original bill of sale. Provide the additional sales price and tax details as obtained from your bill of sale or original title application. Assuming you originally paid at least 4% sales tax at the time of purchase, or when registering within your original state, you will not owe any taxes.

If you purchased the vehicle in a state without sales tax, such as Oregon, you will need to pay the appropriate taxes on the vehicle (4%). Overall, most states have a higher vehicle sales tax than 4%. If you purchased from a dealership, you are likely already covered. For most people, the minimum title fee of $10 will be appropriate.

I strongly encourage you to inspect the final page at the end of this form. There are many scenarios where a used vehicle is automatically tax-exempt, such as being at least 11 years of age and sold for less than $2,500. Before submitting this form, be sure you understand each section. There are many support documents on the state website.

Section VI: If you do not have a lien on the vehicle, this can be blank.

Section VII: If you do not have a lien on the vehicle, this can be blank.

After you have completed all of the forms and gathered your Certification of Trust, copy of your SSN card (or tax statement), and previous vehicle title/bill of sale, you need to determine the amount you will owe for the registration plates. South Dakota operates on a calendar year, and your renewal date will vary based on the name of the trust and the current month. Instead of trying to work out the details, I recommend calling the DMV and asking them to tell you the fees. A full year renewal is approximately $50-$100, so this prorated amount should be less.

You can also take this opportunity to tell them everything you have done and ask if there is anything you are missing. Books can become outdated and state policies can change. Never complete these steps without verifying everything with the state. The staff have been surprisingly helpful during my calls.

Earlier in this chapter, I explained that a purposely lengthy trust name, such as The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872043 8-A Trust, could be valuable for privacy protection. In this scenario, you have provided your real name and SSN to the state. YOU are the trustee of your own trust. We accept this because of your previous history with the vehicle. We still do not want your name on the title or the registration. While we only stated the trust name on the form, you provided a copy of required identification, specifically your SSN card.

You also provided your Certification of Trust identifying you as the trustee. Your name is not on the application, but it is on the card and this document. In my experience, most employees will only place the trust name on the title and registration, but some employees may go the extra mile and add your name to the registration. If you chose a name of trust similar to the above, the title could appear in one of many ways, such as the following.

The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872043 8-A Trust

The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872043 8-A Trust, John Doe, Trustee

The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872043 8-A Trust, John Doe, TTEE

There is only room for a set number of characters on the title and registration. This number fluctuates, but it is very likely that your title may display only the following.

The Motor Vehicle #72849573542300111872

In other words, a lengthy trust title might prevent your name from appearing on various databases that receive vehicle registration data from the state. South Dakota does not aggressively share their data as much as states such as California and Illinois, but you must always expect any information to eventually become public. For the sake of transparency, I do not worry about lengthy trust names in association with vehicle purchases.

The current form is displayed on the following page. South Dakota makes updates to this form often, so you should always download the latest version from their website. I have noticed that some counties rely on outdated versions of this form, so be prepared for everything.

Date: **State of South Dakota Application for Motor Vehicle Title & Registration**

I. This application is for (Check one only)	Brand (Check if Applicable)	II. South Dakota Title Number
Transfer - New - Out-of-State ☐	Manufacturer Buy Back ☐ Rebuilt ☐ Junking Certificate ☐	
Interstate ☐ Operation by Law ☐	Manufacturer Buy Back - Rebuilt ☐ Salvage Total Loss ☐	
Repossession ☐ Unpaid Repair Bill ☐	Manufacturer Buy Back - Salvage ☐ Recovered Theft ☐	Title County Number
Abandoned ☐	Manufacturer Buy Back - Junking Certificate ☐ Parts Only ☐	

III. 1-4 Owner's/Lessors's/Trust's Name (First, Middle, Last), Description of type of Ownership (and, or, DBA, WROS, Guardianship, lessee, lessor, trustee etc.). Identification Number (SD Dr. Lic., SD ID, Soc. Sec. No. Fed Emp. ID. No.), Description of Customer Type (Individual, Company, Dealer, Government, Trust).

Owner/Lessor/Trust	Type of Ownership	Customer Type	Identification # (SD DL, SD ID, SSN, FEIN)
Owner/Lessee/Trustee	Type of Ownership	Customer Type	Identification # (SD DL, SD ID, SSN, FEIN)
Owner/Lessee/Trustee	Type of Ownership	Customer Type	Identification # (SD DL, SD ID, SSN, FEIN)
Owner/Lessee/Trustee	Type of Ownership	Customer Type	Identification # (SD DL, SD ID, SSN, FEIN)

ADDRESS
See Special Mailing Address in Section VII

Owner/Lessor/Trust Mailing Address	City	State	Zip Code
Owner/Lessor/Trust Physical Address (Residence Post Office Address)	City	State	Zip Code
Lessee/Trustee Mailing Address	City	State	Zip Code
Lessee/Trustee Physical Address (Residence Post Office Address)	City	State	Zip Code

IV. Primary VIN or Serial Number:

Make	Model	Body Type	Vehicle Code	Year	Weight/CC	Color	Fuel	Previous State/Brand

Secondary VIN or Serial Number: **Year:** **Make:**

Odometer Reading (Complete for vehicles 9 years old or newer): **Units** (Check one): Miles ☐ Kilometers ☐

Odometer Brand (Check one): Actual Mileage ☐ Exceeds Odometer's Mechanical Limits ☐ Not Actual Mileage ☐

Dealer Price Certification: I hereby certify that the purchase price and trade-in allowance in Item V. of the application is correct and that all accessories and added equipment have been reported.

Dealer Name and Number | Signature of Dealer or Dealer's Agent | Dealer Sold Permit

1st Trade-In

Year	Make	Serial No.	SD Title No.

2nd Trade-In

Year	Make	Serial No.	SD Title No.

V. Motor Vehicle Purchaser's Certificate **(Note: A guide published by the automobile industry will be used to check values)**

1. Tax Exempt (If claiming exemption, list exemption #) _____
   Rental Vehicle/SD Sales Tax # _____
   Non-Profit Donated Vehicle/Corporation #
2. Title Only (If applying for a "Title Only," in signing this application you are attesting that the vehicle will not be used upon the streets and highways of this state or any state. Application must be made within 45 days of purchase date.
3. Purchase Date
4. Purchase Price (see Reverse Side) Bill of Sale Not Available Computer NADA'ED
5. Less Trade-In Allowance
6. Difference
7. Tax 4% of Line 6, Snowmobile 3%
8. Tax Penalty & Interest
9. Credit for Tax Paid to Another State
10. Title Fee
11. Late Fee (Application made after 30 days)
12. Lien Fee
13. **Balance Due for Title Application**

VI. Important: Electronic Lien & Title - A paper title is not issued until lien(s) released or upon request by lienholder for other approved purpose.

1st Lienholder:
Mailing Address:
City/State/Zip Code:

2nd Lienholder:
Mailing Address:
City/State/Zip Code

To add additional lienholders, see section XI on reverse side

VII. Special Mailing Address: (If other than owner/lessor address)
Name:
Address:
City/State/Zip Code:

The applicant, under penalties of law and as rightful owner of the vehicle described on this application, declares that the information set forth on this application is true and correct.

PENALTY: Any person failing to pay the full amount of excise tax is subject to a Class 1 misdemeanor.

PENALTY: Any person who intentionally falsifies information on this application is guilty of a Class 6 felony.

MV-608 (05/12)

Signature Date

Signature Date

The next document is the tax payment verification form. This formality prevents you from paying vehicle taxes on a used vehicle that has already had proper taxing applied. In your situation, you may have purchased a new or used vehicle many years prior, and are transferring the title to a new state. South Dakota now wants to receive the appropriate sales tax on that vehicle, especially if it has a new owner. Unlike tax-hungry states such as California, the nomad-friendly states such as South Dakota has waivers to prevent double-taxation. In the original bill of sale for this vehicle, the taxes paid should be clearly defined. That information is used to complete the form, and the taxes paid are applied to South Dakota's tax requirements. As long as the percentage of taxes originally paid meets or exceeds South Dakota's vehicle tax rate, there will be no tax due. The following is an example of this form, SD 1731.

South Dakota
Division of Motor Vehicles
Applicant's Tax Payment Verification

This form must accompany South Dakota's application for title to qualify for credit against South Dakota's motor vehicle excise tax for a like or similar tax paid to another state on the purchase of a vehicle. The out-of-state title being surrendered must be in the same name as the applicant. The applicant receives credit for the percentage of tax paid that is equal to or greater than the tax owed to this state.

Name _____

Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Amount Paid _____ Tax Type _____ Sales tax was paid to _____

Date of payment _____

This statement is made with the knowledge that it is a Class 5 Felony to make a false statement and that in doing so, I am subject to the penalty of South Dakota law.

_____ _____

Applicant's Signature Date

The final document is the South Dakota Exemptions form which is only required if your previous title was in your real name and you want the new title to reflect your trust name. This is a powerful step in this process. It is quite easy to transfer the title from one state to another if the owner information remains identical. Since we are changing the name of the owner (from you to your trust), we must request a waiver of vehicle sales tax.

The previous form explained to the state that taxes have already been paid on this vehicle and waives the need to pay them again. That only applies to the original owner who paid those taxes (you). If you had sold this vehicle, the state would want a vehicle sales tax from the new owner. Transferring from your name to the trust name has the appearance of a new owner. Therefore, this form will request to waive the taxes since you are technically still the owner.

Since you do not possess a title number yet, leave the first field blank. Supply the odometer reading on the vehicle (miles), and place "NONE" in the lien holder field. The tax exemption code, which was also provided within the application, should be "18" or "99". A code of "18" indicates this is a "motor vehicle/boat transferred by a trustor to his trustee or from a trustee to a beneficiary of a trust". This summary is not exactly your scenario,

but it is the only option on this form acknowledging a trust. Technically, you are a trustor transferring the vehicle to the TRUST.

A code of "99" is often a catch-all or "other" option which allows the employee to determine the appropriate assignment for the title. I have spoken with numerous employees of the South Dakota Division of Motor Vehicles over several years about these. They have all agreed that either exemption can be appropriate for the purpose of transferring a vehicle from an owner into a trust created by that same owner. Please call them to determine the current recommendation for your scenario.

Include a Certification of Trust as explained in the previous chapter with all of these forms. By including this document, you satisfy any concern from the state that you are associated with the trust as the previous owner of the vehicle. This ties everything together.

Obviously, South Dakota knows that you own the vehicle and you are associated with the trust. This is acceptable since the vehicle was already titled in your name previously. The title and registration will (hopefully) not display your name, and will only disclose the trust name. If someone queries your license plate, South Dakota will only display the trust name. This is why I encourage clients to never use the same trust for a vehicle as they would use for a home. Isolation between the two are vital. This is also why I encourage clients to never use a LIVING TRUST for a vehicle purchase. If the police need to contact you in reference to a traffic investigation, they can contact the state DMV to identify the grantor of the trust (you).

SOUTH DAKOTA EXEMPTIONS

This form is to be used when claiming an exemption from the South Dakota excise tax on a South Dakota titled vehicle/boat.

South Dakota Title Number _____

Odometer Reading is_____which is actual vehicle mileage

1st Lien holder _____

Mailing Address_____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

_____ Tax Exemption being claimed (indicate number)

BY SIGNING THIS FORM YOU ARE ATTESTING THAT THE EXEMPTION BEING CLAIMED HEREON IS TRUE AND CORRECT. ANY PERSON WHO INTENTIONALLY FALSIFIES INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS GUILTY OF A CLASS 6 FELONY.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Let's catch our breath here and summarize a few things. In the first scenario, you own a vehicle in the state you physically reside. It is registered in your real name and you want a thin layer of protection by re-titling it in the name of a trust created specifically for this purpose. YOU are the trustee of the trust, and you can complete all required paperwork from your state. You are still associated with the vehicle, the state knows who you are, but

your name is no longer captured by intrusive plate scanners that are becoming common in many areas of the country. This is a small step.

In the second scenario, you are leaving your current state and PLAN to become a nomad in South Dakota. Within 45 days of obtaining your PMB, you title and register your vehicle with the state. You have a trust where YOU are the trustee. You submit the application to title the vehicle in the trust name, and you provide valid proof that you have this authority (Certification of Trust). You explain that you already paid the taxes on this vehicle within another state and request waiver of any additional taxes. South Dakota knows you are associated with the vehicle, but your name is not likely displayed on the title or registration. As in the previous option, your name is not collected by vehicle scanners or nosey neighbors with friends in law enforcement. If a police officer needs to identify you, they can do so through the state DMV, but not through a traditional license plate check from within the patrol car.

In both of these scenarios, your home address is no longer publicly associated with your vehicle registration. You either used a PO Box (first scenario) or a PMB (second scenario). The PMB affords more protection because it is not likely near your home. When you are involved in a vehicle crash, and the officer copies the address from your vehicle registration onto the report, it will not be your home. These reports are public property, and anyone can obtain a copy.

I should pause here and give the obligatory warnings. Never lie on any government document. This will bring more attention and kill any decent shot at achieving privacy. Only use the nomad route if you plan on eventually executing full nomad status. This includes leaving your old state behind. If you live in Illinois and order plates from South Dakota, you cannot simply continue to live and work in Illinois while driving your newly registered vehicle. This violates the laws of Illinois (or any other state). Nomad status is for those that desire to travel and will not spend over 50% of a given year within a single state. South Dakota registration allows you to travel in your vehicle within any state, but abusing this privilege will bring unwanted attention.

Next, we take things to the next level with a new or used vehicle purchase. In these scenarios, the vehicle has never been associated with your true name, and there is no history within any database. Much of the process will be the same, but you will no longer be the trustee.

New Vehicle Purchase Through a Trust (Non-Nomad)

Next, assume you are NOT a legal nomad and will be buying a new vehicle. You do not want it associated with your name at any point. This will require a nominee. Any new vehicle purchase and registration must be attached to an individual at some point, and both the dealership and the state will demand identification from the purchaser. This applies even if paying with cash. Consider the following, which was recreated from my notes after assisting a client with her vehicle purchase in 2018.

My client, whom I will refer to as Jane, wanted to purchase a vehicle anonymously. She is somewhat famous, and does not want her name publicly associated with the vehicle in any way. She is not a "nomad" and has no desire to go down that route. She has the cash to purchase the vehicle, but knows the dealership will be invasive in regard to her privacy. She desires an upscale vehicle with a hefty price, but the actions here would apply to any new vehicle purchase with cash. She identified the exact make and model she desired, and I approached the dealership.

I advised that I was representing a private buyer who already knows the vehicle she desires, which is currently on the lot. Jane was not concerned with bargaining, and accepted the typical purchase incentives, which were likely overpriced. When you shop for a vehicle, I recommend visiting several dealerships and obtaining "best offer" quotes from each. Use these to force lower prices from competing dealers. It is a difficult game.

I advised the dealer that I had cash in the form of a cashier's check which would be presented at the time of purchase, and could be confirmed with the local issuing bank. I also clearly stated that the vehicle would be

placed into a trust and that the trustee of the trust would sign all necessary documents. Jane had already established a trust, as explained previously, and chose a standard grantor style trust with a close family friend assigned the role of trustee. The sales person started creating the necessary paperwork, which is when I encountered the first issue.

The dealership demanded government identification from the trustee. They stated this was due to money laundering and other financial crimes, and it was a requirement from the state. I advised that I could definitely comply with this, but that I would need a copy of the state or federal law demanding this for cash purchases. In my experience, many dealers know the law and present me with the Specially Designated Nationals (SDN) List provided by the Department of the Treasury, which the dealership is mandated by law to check during each purchase. The SDN List is comprised of "individuals and companies owned or controlled by, or acting for or on behalf of, targeted countries". It also lists "individuals, groups, and entities, such as terrorists and narcotics traffickers designated under programs that are not country-specific". Surprisingly, this list is publicly available at the following address.

https://www.treasury.gov/ofac/downloads/sdnlist.pdf

In approximately 25% of my dealer interactions, they do not know why they are legally required to check identification and tell me not to worry about it. I present more detail on this, including defenses against it, later in this chapter.

When buying from a dealership which obeys the law, there is no way around this requirement. While some dealers may "forget" to check in order to make the sale, I have encountered many that were willing to let me walk out of the door, losing the sale. Fortunately, acceptable identification for this purpose is not very demanding. I have shown passports, SSN cards, and in one scenario a library card. Your mileage may vary. For Jane's purchase, I displayed a photocopy of the passport of her trustee to the sales person for verification. This is invasive, but does not expose Jane. I refused to allow the dealership to maintain their own copy of it citing the following federal law.

"18 U.S. Code § 1543 - Whoever ... furnishes to another ... a passport... Shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 25 years.

The above words are verbatim from the federal law for "Forgery or false use of passport". I left out a few words, and the entire section appears as follows.

"Whoever falsely makes, forges, counterfeits, mutilates, or alters any passport or instrument purporting to be a passport, with intent that the same may be used; or Whoever willfully and knowingly uses, or attempts to use, or furnishes to another for use any such false, forged, counterfeited, mutilated, or altered passport or instrument purporting to be a passport, or any passport validly issued which has become void by the occurrence of any condition therein prescribed invalidating the same-Shall be fined under this title, imprisoned not more than 25 years.

The full version makes it clear that there must be an attempt to commit fraud in order for this law to apply. My redacted version sounds much more concerning to the dealer. The law requiring dealers to check identification does not require them to maintain a copy of the identification. This is often an awkward moment, but I refuse to allow a car dealership to maintain a copy of a government issued photo identification of me or any client. If I were replicating this today, I would cite 18 U.S. Code 701, which is verbatim as follows.

"Whoever manufactures, sells, or possesses any badge, identification card, or other insignia, of the design prescribed by the head of any department or agency of the United States for use by any officer or employee thereof, or any colorable imitation thereof, or photographs, prints, or in any other manner makes or executes any engraving, photograph, print, or impression in the likeness of any such badge, identification card, or other

insignia, or any colorable imitation thereof, except as authorized under regulations made pursuant to law, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than six months, or both."

I believe that TECHNICALLY this law makes photocopies of government identification cards unlawful. This was not the intent, but car dealerships do not usually have legal teams on site to debate this. The wording is much cleaner than the previous example. I always encourage sales people to Google the code and see for themselves. I will revisit this law later when we tackle companies who constantly wish to copy or scan your identification, such as casinos, clubs, concert venues, and pharmacies.

I furnished a copy of the Certification of Trust, which was signed by the trustee and notarized. This satisfies the requirement for the bill of sale and eventual registration. I advised that I desired the dealership to complete the vehicle registration documents and submit them to the state. The final invoice would include these charges. I only request this when purchasing via a trust within a non-nomad state as a non-nomad. I will explain a better option for nomads in a moment in which I would never allow a dealership to submit my paperwork to the state.

I have found that allowing the dealership to apply for title and registration in this specific situation results in much less scrutiny. When a dealer submits dozens of title requests, they are approved almost instantly. When you or I submit an application, it is scrutinized to make sure we did not make any mistakes. This is especially true when titling to a trust. Many states only offer standard applications that insist that the vehicle be registered to a full name and physical address. Often, dealerships know of more appropriate forms that allow the use of trusts and LLCs.

I always ask to see the application before it is submitted. I expect to see the trustee's name on the application, but I want to make sure the name is not included on the line which displays the title of the trust. We are always at the mercy of the DMV on how it is officially entered. Regardless, the dealership has never known the name of my client, so I never expect to see any concerning exposure.

The address of the trust for the title and registration will vary. Many states will accept a PO Box if you can confirm you receive mail through it. Of those that refuse, some allow the use of a UPS or other CMRA address. Some states enforce a policy of providing an actual physical address. If you do not have a business address or other option, you will be forced to register to your home address. I dislike this option, and I encourage you to find a legal address to use that shares the least amount of personal information while obeying the law. Law enforcement readers may scoff at my opinions on this. I understand. As a retired LEO, I respect the need to track down a criminal after a license plate is identified. You still have this power, but it may take a couple of additional queries. If data mining companies, license plate scanners, and other invasive entities were not collecting and sharing this data daily, I would not feel so inclined to protect our name and home address from appearing on a vehicle's registration.

At some point, the dealership will need a signature from the trustee. If your trustee is local, this is best achieved in person at the dealership. If not, the final documents can be shipped to the trustee, signed and notarized, and shipped back. In my scenario, the trustee was able to respond to the dealership and sign the final paperwork.

Jane now possesses her new car. It is titled and registered to her trust, and her trustee is identified on the paperwork with the state. Jane's name is not mentioned anywhere. The address is a UPS box which Jane owns. If Jane commits a hit-and-run, law enforcement will know her UPS address and her trustee's information. Contacting the UPS store or the Postal Service will identify Jane through her USPS form submitted to UPS. Contacting the trustee will provide another lead. She does not have a free pass to be irresponsible.

I cannot stress enough that your mileage will vary with this. Every state has its own nuances and policies. Each employee at the DMV may have their own opinion on the rules. I only hope that these sections provide some insight into your options. Next, I present the most private execution.

I highly recommend that you always have a back-story memorized for the dealership. As soon as a salesperson meets you, they will be inquisitive. They will either be polite, pushy, obnoxious, or arrogant. They are trained to generate small talk in order to make you more comfortable. They will push you for small details which they will use during price negotiation. If they discover that you have kids, they might push extra safety features and services. If they find out you are single, they may push you toward sportier models. I avoid all of this within the first few minutes with the following dialogue.

"Thank you for your time, I am sure you value each hour as much as I do. I don't plan to waste your day. I have cash to buy a vehicle, I know what I want, and I purchase several vehicles yearly. I am not one for small talk, and I do not hear very well. Therefore, please forgive me if you feel ignored. I simply want to focus on my hunt for a vehicle. Can you please show me the various [insert make, model, and trim package] which you have on the lot? I am purchasing on behalf of a trust, and I have very specific features and pricing which I must accommodate. If you have something which meets my criteria, I can purchase today. The trust beneficiaries are very sensitive to queries about their wealth, so I prefer to keep their information private. I can provide full payment today via cashier's check, and I can provide a proof of funds letter from the bank if you wish. That all being said, let's go pick out that car!"

This almost always results in an enthusiastic sales person ready to complete a sale.

New Vehicle Purchase Through a Trust (Nomad)

Finally, assume you are a legal nomad of South Dakota and you wish to purchase a new vehicle privately. You already have your South Dakota driver's license, and the state is your official domicile. You are in a perfect position to take advantage of several layers of privacy from the public. This section will replicate many of the previously mentioned tactics, so I will keep this abbreviated.

Obviously, the first step is to identify the vehicle you want. This can be from a dealership or a private seller. Having the dealer complete all of the paperwork is always easier, but submitting your own registration application is not difficult. The details were previously explained. The state of purchase should not matter with a few exceptions. Regardless of where you purchase the vehicle, you will owe sales tax to South Dakota. The exception is California. If you purchase a car there, you must pay the inflated California taxes, which will be more than twice the South Dakota tax. South Dakota will not "double tax" you, and allows you to claim any previous state tax paid. Most states will not tax the vehicle purchase, as you will be paying the vehicle tax when you register and title the vehicle. If you buy from an individual, you will pay the taxes at the time of registration.

Let's assume you are purchasing from a dealership. You will provide your Certification of Trust identifying the trust name and name of your trustee (not you). This trustee has the powers to sign on behalf of the trust, but will need to disclose their SSN to the state. This can be very invasive, so make sure you have a trustee willing to participate at this level. You will declare that you will be registering the vehicle in the name of the trust in South Dakota. The address used will be your PMB, and the PMB is already prepared to accept mail in the trust name. The dealer will complete the title application on your behalf and determine the amount owed to South Dakota for taxes and registration. The other documents completed previously are not required because you have established domicile and are not requesting a waiver of taxes. Your trustee will sign the paperwork and you will pay in cash via cashier's check. The process should be fairly painless. If buying from an individual, you will complete the application for title as previously explained. It is the only document you need. The only difference is that you must pay taxes on the new (or used) vehicle at the time of registration.

You are responsible for the vehicle and its usage. It is legally registered for use anywhere in the country. If you misbehave, your license plate leads back to your trust name at your PMB. Law enforcement can quickly identify you and your trustee. However, public databases will only know the trust name and PMB address. Neither expose your home address. Querying the plate through a public or government database will not reveal your name. I have oversimplified the details and benefits, but the previous pages in this chapter have already explained the overall process.

New Vehicle Purchase Through an LLC

You likely noticed that none of my previous scenarios included titling the vehicle to an LLC. There are two main reasons why LLC ownership of a vehicle is not appropriate for many of my clients, especially if they reside in states with no respect for privacy. In a moment, I explain my current preferred method of vehicle ownership, but let's first consider some complications.

Insurance: Many insurance companies refuse to insure a vehicle titled only to an LLC. Those that allow this demand premiums that are sometimes twice or triple the personal rates. The insurance companies will still want to know the primary policy holder and might demand to see your operating agreement identifying the members of the LLC. Most will demand that any vehicles titled in the name of an LLC includes the member information on the registration.

State requirements: Some states require disclosure of all LLC members if you register a vehicle to the business. Many states require out-of-state LLCs to file as a foreign entity within the state of registration. In other words, if you live in California and purchased a New Mexico LLC, you must register the LLC in California before a vehicle can be titled. This registration must include the names of all members (and an $800 annual fee). This violates the privacy of a New Mexico LLC.

Titling vehicles that are used for business purposes to an LLC is acceptable, but that is outside of the scope of this book. Some will argue that a New Mexico LLC is the most private option since the state does not know anything about the members of the LLC. This is true, but the state where you register the vehicle will still likely demand to know a person's name who is associated with the LLC. The application for registration must be signed by someone, and that person will need to be identified. I have previously registered personal vehicles in a New Mexico LLC. Today, the privacy protection is much more limited.

If you choose to register your vehicle in the name of an LLC in your state, almost all of the previous instruction applies. You will need to provide the LLC documents, complete the title application, and sign on behalf of the LLC. If you use a nominee, that person must be included in your LLC documents, which can complicate matters quickly. A trustee can be easily replaced on a trust. Removal of a member of an LLC can require votes and amended agreements.

In past years I have had great respect for registering vehicles into New Mexico LLCs. I believe most states have caught on to this loophole and have taken measures to require additional details about the person. It is absolutely still possible to register a vehicle to an anonymous LLC in some states. However, these opportunities are disappearing rapidly. The stigma of LLCs as a way to hide assets have damaged this practice. The use of a trust seems to be more widely accepted as legitimate behavior. However, there is one last option, which has proven to be the most beneficial strategy for my clients over the past year.

New Vehicle Purchase Through an LLC (Nomad)

Your most privacy-respecting option for a vehicle purchase and registration occurs as a nomad with an LLC registered through your domicile. This strategy combines numerous lessons which have already been explained, and eliminates most hurdles we have observed with the previous options. I explain the entire process through an actual client example from late 2019. This revisits some of the content already presented in this chapter, but I believe it helps summarize the overall ideas. Meet Jen Doe.

Jen reached out to me after I had previously helped her disappear as a nomad in South Dakota. She had already established her new life, lived in an anonymous home, and needed a new vehicle. She insisted that the purchase be made in cash and that neither her name nor SSN be present on any paperwork. Furthermore, she demanded that no SSNs be used throughout the process. She possessed the funds necessary for the type of vehicle she desired, and had already chosen a make, model, and color of her next car. She was not in a huge rush, and asked me to complete the entire process on her behalf the next time I was near her area. Jen was one of my first clients

to complete the program, and I was eager to tackle this issue. I had some new ideas to test since the first version of this book, and she was willing to be my test case. Within a month, I was at her doorstep, and I was not empty-handed.

I had established her South Dakota LLC which would be used for the purchase. She was already a nomad resident of the state, possessed a driver's license, and a PMB. I formed the LLC under a random business name on her behalf and opened a new PMB address for the business under her name (with her consent and assistance). All of this was completed online, and the digital LLC paperwork was generated immediately. The PMB provider knows the true identity of the box holder, but will not release this without a court order. I hired my friend with a common name to act as the "Organizer" of the LLC. The PMB provided an individual to act as the registered agent for the business. If the LLC were to be sued, the registered agent would receive the notice. He would contact her and deliver any court orders. Only my organizer's name, the registered agent, and the PMB address will be publicly accessible.

I gave her all of the LLC paperwork and we created her supporting documents as previously explained. The LLC was now legally hers, and I was contracted to maintain the PMB and registered agent service. Neither her name nor mine is publicly associated with the LLC. A subpoena to the registered agent could identify her, but this is not a concern to me. We obtained an EIN from the IRS, which is mandatory for this protocol. The EIN is associated with her SSN, but this is not public information. She may be required to include this EIN in her annual tax filing, but there will be no income and no taxes due. The IRS provided immediate verification of the EIN and a physical letter soon followed. All of the LLC paperwork was in place. While not completely anonymous, she had a legal business infrastructure which could not be publicly connected to her. We were ready to go shopping.

It was now time to test the local dealers. I refer to this as my "Test Drive Test". I find a local dealer from which I have no desire to purchase, and where I can test drive a couple of vehicles. I start asking questions about their purchase demands, such as ID requirements and payment options. I have found that dealers from various states and metropolitan areas possess different requirements. The only consistency is that most dealers in a specific area usually have the same procedures. As an example, every dealer I have encountered in Los Angeles requires a valid unredacted government photo ID and electronic wire for cash purchases, while dealers in less-populated areas accept redacted identification and personal checks. I learned quickly that this dealer absolutely required photo ID and SSN, but had no payment preference.

Now that I had some basic information about the dealers in the area, it was time to contact the desired dealership. It is important to engage in several conversations via telephone and email before ever responding to a dealer in person. When you show up "cold", you are randomly assigned to the first sales person who has the free time. You will be brought directly to a desk and asked for ID. You may spend an hour at the dealership before you ever enter a vehicle. This is unacceptable to me. Therefore, I avoid drop-ins altogether. Instead, I begin the conversation with a call.

When I contact a dealership via telephone, I request to speak with the commercial fleet sales division. If the dealer does not have a dedicated commercial sales representative, I move on to another place. This is vital for my protocol. Commercial sales departments are less restrictive on purchase requirements such as ID and electronic payments. Also, they are less pushy in regard to sales. These dealership employees deal exclusively with companies purchasing vehicles as part of a larger fleet. The buyer of the vehicle is usually not the owner of title or source of payment. Think of the people who buy vehicles on behalf of a taxi service. Their names are not included on the check or receipt. They are simply the employee assigned to purchase vehicles. While on a much smaller scale, I play that role.

My first call explains that I represent a business which wishes to purchase at least one vehicle. I specify the exact make and model, and ask what availability is currently present on the lot. I then request detailed final pricing for fleet account purchase be sent to my email. I already have an official address ready, such as fleet@myLLC.com. This is never the best price, but a decent negotiation starting point. By opening with an audio call and transferring

the conversation to email, I have established a rapport with the sales person. I continue the conversation remotely and start negotiating a final price. This demonstrates my clear intent to purchase a vehicle, and the dealer knows that I do not need multiple test drives and time to contemplate the purchase. I want to convey that I am a serious buyer ready to complete the purchase. This rapport will provide numerous benefits in a moment.

In this scenario, I had established a good relationship with a commercial sales representative, and he stated that he had the exact vehicle desired. He offered to have it detailed and ready for inspection. I agreed to respond to the dealership at 2 pm on the next day. At 2 pm, I sent a text message to his cell phone to report that I was running late, but would be there that day. This is very intentional. When sales people have a potential purchase scheduled, they have a routine prepared. This may include sitting at their desk to review paperwork or the dreaded meeting with the sales manager. Both scenarios introduce the opportunity for invasive demands such as copying my identification or providing a cellular number to them.

Instead, I showed up at 3 pm. I walked in, advised the receptionist that I had arrived, and asked her to let my sales person know I would be out in the lot looking at the fleet. This is also intentional, as it moves the first face-to-face meeting on more neutral territory. It is hard to complete paperwork, make copies of IDs, or meet the manager while we are outside on the lot. If I am feeling aggressive, I will advise the receptionist to have keys to the vehicle brought out. I then immediately walk toward the lot before a response can be given. Car sales people simply want to sell cars. The more confidence I portray, the more I can control the environment. In this scenario, my sales person practically ran out to meet me at the vehicle he had ready at the entrance. He had keys in hand, introduced himself, and opened the vehicle doors in order for me to inspect everything.

The test drive was not very important, but I decided to sell the role I was playing. Since I had already given him an alias name, a number he believed was my cell, and a business email address matching the name of my LLC, there was very little scrutiny. I was never asked for a copy of my license before the test drive. However, I had already disclosed the LLC name, EIN, and address details via email. This will all be required for the final paperwork, and providing it in advance creates a sense of trust from the sales person. I drove the car, confirmed the vehicle and the negotiated price were acceptable, and asked how he preferred payment. I was now ready to start the paperwork.

We returned to his office and he began asking for information. He pulled up my "lead" in his computer, which is an entry within his database for sales leads. I asked to look at it, and he obliged. It displayed my alias name, VOIP telephone number, and the name and address of the LLC. I was more interested in the portion of the screen which displayed my text message telling him I was running late. Sales people also use VOIP numbers, and rarely distribute their true cellular number. This leads system identified the VOIP number assigned to him, and allowed him to review all emails, calls, and text messages exchanged with a potential client. This also means that my content was stored within this system and likely shared with third parties. I already suspected these scenarios, and I was not surprised.

I confirmed all of the business information and insisted that the vehicle be purchased in the business name. I also confirmed the EIN of the business, and ensured that it was provided any time his system requested an SSN. The sales person seemed familiar with the process of purchasing a vehicle in a business name, and was not very invasive of my own information. However, we quickly reached a point of privacy concern once OFAC presented itself.

As stated previously, dealers must query all car buyers against a database of people who are blacklisted by the government. The U.S. Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) list of specially designated nationals and blocked persons is the database queried by car dealerships. The OFAC list identifies people who are sympathetic with or involved with foreign terrorist groups. Companies in the United States are prohibited from making a sale to anyone on the list. Car dealerships are more scrutinized than other types of businesses, and the government enforces this requirement more heavily on them. During the sale of a vehicle, a car dealer submits your name through the OFAC list, usually using specialized software. If the dealer gets a hit,

they go through seven steps to try to verify the match. This is the first key point. Only a NAME must be submitted.

My sales representative asked to see a copy of my driver's license. From my experience, telling him that I was privacy conscious and refused to do so was not the best strategy. Questioning the need for my true name, address, DL number, and SSN is more likely to raise red flags. I already know that every dealership has a policy to demand government photo ID from every buyer and keep a photocopy on file. I have walked out of dealerships during the final cash-only sales agreement in previous attempts due to this demand. Instead, I stated "You are going to kill me, but I was so worried about bringing all of the appropriate business paperwork, that I forgot to grab my wallet. I can have another employee send over something if that works for you".

Remember my LLC organizer who has an extremely common name? I also hire him to remotely assist in these types of situations. I told my sales person that I could call my partner at the LLC and have him send over his ID. The sales person agreed, and I confirmed that he only needed to query a name. I told him that this employee was a little "weird" and becomes paranoid about identity theft. I stated that my employee would be emailing him a scan of his official government identification, with the image redacted. My organizer sent over a scan of his passport card, blocking out his photo. Since there is no SSN, address, or DL number visible on this ID, there was nothing else which needed redacted. The sales person looked a bit confused and concerned, and said he would need to speak to a manager to make sure this would suffice.

He stepped away for a few minutes and returned with his manager. The boss told me they would need a full DL with photo and an SSN in order to complete the sale. I questioned this demand with the following dialogue, which was discreetly captured with the voice recording application on my phone. For those concerned, I was inside a one-party recording state, which makes this legal.

"The sale is in the business name, and I have already provided the EIN for the business. Also, I have the letter from the IRS confirming the EIN as valid, which you can also confirm directly to them. I will not ask an employee to provide their SSN for a vehicle I am purchasing with business funds. Furthermore, I will not provide my own SSN because I am not seeking credit. The only way you would need an SSN is to conduct a credit check. I am paying in full with a money order, so there should be no credit check."

He started to blame OFAC, but I cut him off with the following.

"OFAC only requires a name and occasionally a DOB. If you get a positive hit on the name, it will then require additional information. At no time does it require an SSN, mostly because the vast majority of the list contains people outside the U.S. who do not have an SSN. If you can show me the SSN field on the direct OFAC submission, I will stand corrected. If you submit my employee's name as required by law, and receive a confirmed positive hit on that name, we are happy to comply with the additional requirements."

He had no desire to show me the OFAC submission, because he knew I was right. Dealers want an SSN in order to conduct a full credit check. Even when paying with cash, they will run your name and SSN to determine your credit score. They will then try to convince you to take advantage of their great financing offers. Why? Because they make a higher commission when you take a loan directly from the dealer financing.

The manager took the black-and-white print of the redacted passport card and had someone query the OFAC list. There was no hit. To be fair, there would be no hit on my name either. I know this because I have identified myself during previous transactions for other clients. He advised the sales person to continue with the paperwork. It was important to me to have this ID sent from a remote location. It is very difficult to tell someone in person that you do not want your photo copied. I do not trust covering the photo portion with something, as the person may remove the covering during the photocopy. By having it sent over remotely via email, any redaction is in my control. Also, if the copy comes from my "employee" with an official email address matching the domain which I used previously, my story appears more legitimate. Remember, we are paying in full with legitimate cash. There is no financial fraud taking place.

You may be questioning why I would allow anyone to send over an ID via email. First, there is no image present of my assistant. Second, his name and DOB can already be found through numerous public sources. There is no secret there. If this ID were to be leaked or breached, it would not have much value to the thief. It was scanned in poor quality and possesses no photo. If it were used to gain credit, it would not be accepted. Since no SSN is present, there is very minimal risk of fraud. Since the dealership never receives an SSN at all, this prevents accidental leakage or association with the ID.

I had successfully bypassed the demand to keep an unredacted driver's license and SSN on file with the sale. You may be a bit overwhelmed while reading this. You likely do not have an LLC organizer with a common name ready to stand in for you. I completely understand. I do not always take this aggressive route. In this scenario, my client insisted that my name was not involved. Most clients simply want their own name hidden from the sale. For most readers, I present the following alternative.

If you are purchasing the vehicle with cash in the name of an LLC with an EIN, there is not much risk in using your own name during purchase. The name you give to the dealer will not be used during registration with the state. It will likely only stay within their internal systems. However, I do encourage you to force them to redact your photo when they insist on making a copy. In episode 135 of my podcast, I include audio recordings of me delicately asking the sales person to properly redact my photo before making a copy, and allowing me to witness the copy being made. Remember, my DL has my PMB address, which is publicly available on people search sites. It does not expose my true home address or my SSN. It is much more vital to register the vehicle with the state in a business name than to worry about the dealer knowing your identity. Only you can choose the level of privacy desired. My strongest advice is to simply never provide your SSN during the sale. It will be abused.

Once we had moved past the awkward portion, it was time to begin the paperwork. This presents another dilemma. I will need to sign several pieces of paper. What name should I use? I made it very clear to the sales person that ONLY the LLC name should appear on any paperwork. This is fairly standard for commercial sales. Since I am authorized by the LLC owner (my client), I can sign any documents I desire. Remember, these are not government forms. These are documents from the dealership, which is a private company. Furthermore, my alias name never appeared within any documents. I was presented several documents and waivers, all of which only displayed the LLC name under the signature line. I scribbled an illegible signature on each. However, I scrutinized a few documents, as outlined below.

Dealerships have a standard packet used for every sale, even if some of the documents are not applicable. The first document I questioned was the "Credit Application". Although I was paying cash and required no financing, I was still asked to submit an application. I refused to sign, which was met with skepticism. I was assured by the sales person that my credit would not be checked. I believed him, as he did not have my name or SSN. However, I was concerned it may give them the authority to use my assistant's name and DOB to conduct a soft inquiry. I blamed a technicality which I observed within the document.

The SSN area of this application had "000-00-0000" as the SSN. This was because the system demanded an entry, but an SSN was never disclosed since the sale was made to an LLC. The last paragraph included "Everything I have stated within this application is true to the best of my knowledge". I informed the sales person that 000-00-0000 was not my SSN, and signing this application with inaccurate data would violate the same document to which I was attesting. He agreed to waive this document.

Next was the credit bureau authorization document. Similar to the previous concern, this form provided consent to the dealer to execute inquires at Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion using any information provided. The only purpose of this query would be to authorize financing, which I did not need. The information included on this form was the LLC name and address. I advised that I did not have the proper authorization to consent to this. I further stated that the LLC would require a board meeting with two-thirds voting approval in order to authorize any credit inquiries or acceptance of credit terms, as clearly addressed in our legal operating agreement. This was not necessarily the case, but he does not know what is in our operating agreements. He agreed to waive this form.

Would it really matter if I signed these? Probably not. Remember, they do not possess any SSN, which would be required in order to conduct a credit check. The EIN has no credit established, and an inquiry for credit would be declined. Even if you refuse to sign these consent forms, nothing stops them from proceeding anyway. This is why it is so important to never disclose an SSN.

The final document which I questioned was the Data Sharing Form. This paper identified the types of data which are shared with third parties, such as marketing companies. The default options display "yes" on everything, and the dealer hopes you willingly sign without reading. However, these documents almost always contain the exact paragraph as follows.

"Financial companies choose how they share your personal information. Federal law gives consumers the right to limit some but not all sharing. Federal law also requires us to tell you how we collect, share, and protect your personal information. Please read this notice carefully to understand what we do."

I then went through each line and questioned whether federal law allowed me to protect my information from being shared. "Can I limit sharing of my data for marketing purposes? How about from affiliates?" I found out very quickly that I could change most of the data sharing authorizations to "No". Will they share it anyway? Probably. However, I felt better about taking a stand against this practice.

The remainder of the paperwork was standard forms. The New Vehicle Delivery Checklist, Agreement to Provide Insurance, Delivery Sheet, Warranty Registration, and final sales contract all needed a scribbled signature, but all were only in the name of the LLC. The only document I was careful with was the Bill of Sale. The "closing manager" told me to sign under the LLC and write in "LLC Owner". I was not the owner any more, my client was. Therefore, I scribbled my signature and entered "LLC Representative". I do not think anyone noticed.

It was time to pay. I asked my sales person for the absolute final amount due, which he provided. I left, picked up the client (in her new car), went to a local branch of her bank, and had her issue a cashier's check in the amount due. This check obviously has a direct connection to her true account, but not one that can be publicly followed. The dealer cannot connect this check to her identity without a court order to the bank. We returned to the dealer, she waited in the car, and I issued the check to the sales office.

Surprisingly to me, most vehicle dealerships accept any type of check as full payment for vehicles. They will hold the title for up to two weeks while the check clears, so there is fairly minimal risk. If the check does not clear, I cannot receive the title and register the vehicle. Similarly, I can obtain credit for a vehicle but never make a payment. Either way, the dealership owns the vehicle until you make good on the full price. After the cashier's check clears, the Certificate of Origin will be mailed to the LLC PMB. We will use that later to title the vehicle and obtain registration plates.

This brings up another point. I never allow the dealership to register nomad LLC vehicles. In almost every scenario, they will make a mistake which could disclose the true owner during registration. It is possible that the dealer would disclose my alias name or my assistant's name to the state, which could then be considered fraud. I always insist that I will register the vehicle myself in this scenario. This usually makes sense if you are buying within a state outside of your PMB and LLC registration area.

This brings us to another issue. Can you buy a vehicle in one state and title it in another? Absolutely. My only exception to this is California. I would never buy a vehicle within that state if I was registering it elsewhere. This is because California dealers are required to charge full vehicle sales tax regardless of titling authority. This tax will likely be higher than what you would pay otherwise. In our scenario, assume I purchased the vehicle in Missouri. After advising the dealer that I owned a South Dakota LLC and would be titling the vehicle there, all sales tax was eliminated from the sale. I will need to pay South Dakota sales tax before the vehicle can be registered. I will explain more on that in a moment.

Let's take a moment to catch up. We purchased a vehicle at a dealership in the name of an LLC. The LLC is owned by my client, who is a South Dakota nomad. The LLC is registered in South Dakota without her name publicly visible in the online documents. The vehicle was purchased with funds from my client's bank account. By issuing a cashier's check, we eliminate anything publicly identifying my client. Her name and account number were not on the check. I signed for everything with a scribble, and my name did not appear on any documents. Only the LLC name was present, and I signed on behalf of the LLC with consent from the owner (my client). Technically, that was my real signature as Michael Bazzell. However, no name appeared anywhere.

Some may say that I committed fraud when I signed all of the paperwork. I disagree. If an alias name was present, and I signed as that alias name, then you may have a point. I entered into legally (civil) binding contracts. However, neither an alias or real name was ever present. I simply signed on behalf of the LLC, which I was authorized to do. Below every signature, only the LLC name appeared. My client, the owner of that LLC, authorized me to sign. If you were replicating this process with your own LLC, you could scribble anything you want over that line. No one can tell you how to sign your name. If it happens to be illegible, so be it. What is most important is that you have the authority to sign on behalf of the LLC. Once the dealership receives their money, they really do not care about much else.

We were allowed to leave with the vehicle. My client drove away in it while I entered my own rental. We possessed the vehicle, paid the full amount due, and never provided a true name of my client or myself. We had a couple of weeks to wait for the check to clear. My client contacted her insurance to tell them about the purchase, and make sure she had coverage under her name and the LLC. I explain more about insurance in a moment.

During the two-week wait, I was bombarded with unsolicited messages from the dealership and various affiliates. Although I clearly specified that they should not share my information, it was obvious that they had. The email address I provided to the sales person was used to register me into their daily spam program; the VOIP number I had provided began receiving text messages about vehicle-related specials; and the PMB received numerous brochures announcing upcoming sales and third-party services. This is why it is important to only use a burner VOIP number, a dedicated email address which can be ignored, and a PMB which can eliminate junk mail. None of this correspondence was connected to any important email accounts, telephone numbers, or physical addresses, so the privacy concerns were minimal.

After the check cleared, the Certificate of Origin was mailed to the PMB. This is a document from the vehicle manufacturer which is used to obtain a title. All of the vehicle details such as the VIN, are present and ready to be transferred to a title. The registration form for South Dakota was displayed previously in this chapter, and I used the same form for my nomad client. However, there were a few important differences. The first line in section three identified the LLC name, "Company" as the owner type, and the LLC EIN as the identification number. This EIN eliminates the need for any SSN or DL number on this application, which is a huge privacy benefit. I supplied the South Dakota PMB address and copied all vehicle details from the Certificate of Origin. Lines 4 through 14, which identifies the purchase price and taxes owed, were left blank. This is because there is a very low chance that your numbers will match the amount South Dakota believes you owe. Let me explain.

My client had not yet paid any sales tax on this vehicle. Since it will be titled in South Dakota, and because South Dakota is her domicile, they are owed the vehicle tax. This source of revenue for South Dakota provides several million dollars annually from nomad travelers, and is a large reason that the state allows nomads to call it home. Like most states, the "sale price" is not the amount you gave the dealer for the vehicle. South Dakota ignores rebates, but pays attention to any extras such as dealer fees and delivery charges. You will pay tax on those. They basically look at your bill of sale and sales contract to determine the negotiated price of the vehicle plus any other expenses. That will be the basis of your tax, ignoring any rebates issued. This seems a bit unfair, but it is standard practice. Some states determine your tax owed based on the sticker price, which is ridiculous. Fortunately, the South Dakota vehicle tax is 4%, which is much less than most states.

The application had no names associated with it. The business name was the registrant, the business EIN was the identifier, and I scribbled a signature at the bottom. If the state department of motor vehicles wanted to track down an actual owner, they could identify the organizer of the LLC within their own records or contact the PMB provider and request owner information. There is a trail which could be followed, but the information is not publicly available. South Dakota is one of the most lenient states in regard to business registration of a vehicle. They do not need to ever receive any individual name.

I submitted the application along with a cover letter including an email address for contact once taxes were determined. I attached the original Certificate of Origin, bill of sale, IRS letter of EIN, and Certificate of Existence for the LLC. I sent everything via priority mail with tracking. Ten days later, I received an email from the South Dakota DMV notifying me of the tax owed on the vehicle. I called their office and paid the bill over the phone with a masked debit card (explained later) created by my client. I received a 3% fee since I paid via credit card, but this resulted in only a $35 charge.

Two weeks later, her license plates arrived at the PMB and she had them forwarded to a nearby UPS store. She replaced the 60-day temporary tags provided by the dealer. The title arrived two weeks later and she now possesses a vehicle with proper title and registration. There is no public record associated with her name. She can renew the registration yearly through the state's website using a masked credit or debit card.

I want to stress again the importance of registering the vehicle yourself in this situation. I have had dealerships insist on providing this service because they will "make sure it is correct". I have seen those same dealers supply inaccurate details on the application. In one instance, the dealership attached a DL number on the registration form instead of the LLC EIN. Do not take any chances. Do it yourself and know that it was done right. The South Dakota DMV is surprisingly helpful when calling with questions. They are also well-versed in the needs of nomads. Never trust a PMB provider with this task. You will be disappointed in the result.

Vehicle Purchase Summary

I realize this can be overwhelming. I have always resisted providing this level of detail in my books in order to prevent confusion or provide too many options. We do not need to overcomplicate the issue. Overall, there are three vehicle purchase choices which will lead you to the appropriate answers.

- Do you own a vehicle titled in your name? Transfer to a trust, with you as the trustee, within your state of residence or domicile. Ensure that the trustee name is not present on the owner line of the application and that only the trust name is displayed as the owner of the vehicle. If this is not possible in your state, consider the following options.
- Are you buying a new vehicle? Title into a trust with someone else as the trustee within your state of residence or domicile. Ensure that the trustee name is not present on the owner line of the application and that only the trust name is displayed as the owner of the vehicle. If this is not possible in your state, consider the next option.
- Does your state enforce publicly displaying the trustee name on the title and registration? Consider the LLC route. Seek approval from your insurance provider and investigate any state requirements for foreign business registration and taxes. This route may be more expensive, but may be your only option.

In any scenario, make an effort to exclude any name and home address from the registration. This step will prevent multiple private companies from collecting, recording, sharing, selling, and accidentally leaking your personal information to the masses.

Loans

All of the scenarios I presented involved a vehicle purchase with cash. If you require a loan, it will complicate things. While many lenders will title a home loan in a trust, most vehicle lenders do not like this. I encourage my clients to purchase a tier of vehicle that can be paid in cash. This may result in a used vehicle from an individual. In my opinion, the privacy benefits when purchasing with cash outweigh the luxuries of a fancy car with a loan.

Insurance

I taught a 2-day privacy course at BlackHat in Las Vegas several years prior to writing this book. I discussed some of these techniques, and an audience member challenged me. He exclaimed that I was committing insurance fraud since my vehicle is registered and maintained in a state in which I am not present. He refused to truly listen to my response, but I hope you will allow me to explain why I disagree.

If you register a vehicle in South Dakota as a nomad, you must obtain insurance within South Dakota. I strongly advise contacting an insurance office within the county of your PMB address. They are much more familiar with the nomad lifestyle than a random office in another portion of the state. Your insurance provider will demand to know who YOU are (not your trustee or LLC name), as your rate and coverage is based on your credit score and insurance history. If you already have history of insurance coverage and a clean driving record, it will likely make the most sense to continue service with that provider.

Assume you had Allstate coverage in Illinois. You recently left that state and now reside in South Dakota. Contacting an Allstate representative in South Dakota can be an easy transition. This will usually bypass a soft credit check and overall scrutiny of your identity and home address.

When I contacted a local insurance representative in my state of domicile, and stated my PMB address, she immediately asked "Are you a nomad"? I made it very clear that I was, and that I travel often. I even went so far as to say that I am rarely in South Dakota, and neither is my vehicle. This was completely acceptable, as they have several members that are in the same situation. The insurance was transferred over instantly, and my rates decreased. I still have my full insurance coverage anywhere I travel.

The most important consideration with these scenarios is to ensure you have proper coverage. If your vehicle is titled into a trust or LLC, your insurance company must know this. More specifically, the trust or LLC must be listed as a "Secondary Insured" party. If you have an accident, and are sued, the lawsuit could be filed against you or your trust/LLC. You want the insurance company to cover both. I have never seen a price increase for this formality with a trust, but LLCs can vary. If you explain that the LLC is a sole-member entity which has no employees and no income, they should have no issue adding this without additional fees. You may want to also explain that you will be the only driver. If using a trust, the insurance company may request trust documents, and the Certification of Trust should be sufficient.

Insurance Apps

I avoid installation of any applications created by my vehicle insurance provider. While you may receive a slight discount in exchange for activating their app, all benefits to you stop there. The insurance companies have much more to gain from your willingness to share personal data with them. The biggest concern is the potential abuse of location information. Many vehicle insurance applications quietly run in the background at all times. They use your constant location to determine speed of travel and other driving habits. This data can then be used to determine your premiums. It can also be used to identify the location of your home, workplace, lovers, and entertainment. Did you park outside a pub for three hours and then race home? That would be documented forever. A dishonest I.T. employee at the insurance company could gain access to this data, and a court order could demand legal release of all collected details. I will not take this risk.

Choosing a Vehicle

One goal of vehicle privacy is to not stand out. Purchasing a bright pink Cadillac or brand-new Lamborghini will generate a lot of attention. People will want to know more about you. I encourage you to always consider vehicles that will blend into the community where you live and avoid anything that is not common. At the time of this writing, the following were the most common new and used vehicles, spanning sedans, SUVs, and trucks.

Nissan Rogue	Toyota Rav4	Toyota Corolla
Honda Accord	Toyota Camry	Dodge Ram
Honda Civic	Honda CR-V	Ford F-Series

The color choice is also important. Red, green and blue tend to be a bit more unique than common colors such as grey, black, and white. Imagine that you drive a grey Honda Accord. You unfortunately find yourself involved in an unjustified and aggressive road-rage situation that you try to avoid. You escape, and the offender finds himself stopped by the police. He blames you for his erratic behavior and demands the police identify you. He can only provide that you have a grey car and it was a foreign model. That description will likely match at least 20% of the vehicles traveling on the highway at any given time. The same cannot be said about a powder blue Nissan Cube.

This is all likely common sense to many readers. What is often ignored are the various features that make a car stick out to a casual observer. Those custom chrome rims and low-profile tires are not standard stock options and provide an opportunity for a very detailed description in order to identify you quicker. The raised spoiler and upgraded blue headlights make you unique from anyone else on the road. Please consider the most boring and common stock options. Your desire should be to blend in and remain unnoticed.

Vehicle Markings

If buying a new vehicle, I encourage you to make a few demands before signing any papers. I have found this to be the most opportune time to insist on a few minor details from the sales person, who will likely do just about anything to complete the sale. Most new cars from dealerships possess a custom registration plate frame with the name of the dealer in big bold letters. This is free advertising, and replaces the stock frame originally included with the vehicle. Demand that it be removed and replaced with the bland frame designed for the car. This is fairly minor, and the dealership should be happy to comply.

Next, consider having all brand logos be removed from the exterior of the vehicle. You may receive resistance from this request, but hear me out. When you purchase a new vehicle, the various emblems or make and model identifiers are not mandatory. There are no laws that demand constant announcement of the type of car you purchased. These are nothing more than free advertisement to the car companies. More importantly, they are identifiers to help describe your car to others. The next time you are in a parking lot, imagine each car without the emblems placed at the rear. It would be difficult for the common driver to identify each.

As part of this request, ask that the removed emblems and decals be preserved and given to you. When you sell the vehicle, the next buyer may desire these decals be present on the vehicle as a status symbol. They can always be glued back onto the vehicle. If you plan to execute this strategy, I encourage having the dealer remove the signage. They have the proper equipment to do this easily and without damage. Popping these off with a flathead screwdriver in your driveway will likely produce undesired results. Removing vehicle markings can also backfire on you. If you have a very expensive car, such as a Porsche, with no decals, you may stick out more. You may be described as "the Porsche without the decals". This makes you more unique. I offer this strategy only for the boring vehicles, such as common cars and trucks. For a more exciting approach, you could purchase inaccurate logos from an auto store. Place a Ford logo on the rear of your new Toyota. This is a level of disinformation that will confuse many. While I present this strategy as half-humor and half-intentional, I do not recommend this technique for everyone as it could make your vehicle more unique. I will confess that my truck has absolutely no markings, logos, or dealer advertisement whatsoever.

Some neighborhoods, cities, counties, and states have windshield sticker requirements. This may be to prove that your vehicle is authorized to park on a specific street or inside a parking garage. I never permanently adhere these stickers directly to my windshield. This would constantly disclose details about my home or workplace. Instead, I attach them to a removable vinyl sheet which can be temporarily positioned on the windshield, but stored privately within a storage compartment when not in use. You can find more details about the brand I use called **Sticker Shield** (amzn.to/3spiKuA).

Vehicle Services

There is a growing industry associated with data collection from vehicle maintenance providers. The next time you have the oil changed at a major vehicle maintenance chain, notice the number of computers involved in your transaction. There will likely be a scanner connected to a computer that will read your vehicle identification number (VIN) and an image of your license plate may be displayed on a screen near your vehicle. This will then populate generic information such as the make, model, and year of your vehicle. It will then query various online databases in order to attempt to populate your name, address, telephone number, and maintenance history, regardless of the alias you provide at the time.

The video cameras in the stall which collect your registration plates are connected to a media server that stores the visual depiction of the event. The computer that prints the receipt will receive all collected information and likely include everything in the detailed transaction report. This invasion is at the expense of convenience. As a final blow, all of this will be shared with multiple companies that have no need to know about your desire to change your oil. There is likely someone reading this thinking "No way, that is not how that works". Consider the following which happened to me in 2016.

I drove a secondary utility vehicle which I own to a national oil change service. It was the typical in-and-out in a "Jiffy" style of establishment. I requested a basic oil change. The worker asked for my mileage, which I did not know. Being a difficult privacy enthusiast that resists ever sharing any information, I said that the odometer was broken. The worker entered a random mileage reading and moved on. Less than a month later, I received a notice from my insurance company.

Since this was a secondary vehicle with minimal use, I had previously qualified for a reduced insurance rate due to low mileage. The data from the oil change visit was sold to the insurance provider, and they determined that the mileage of the vehicle was greater than expected and the rate was to be increased. While this increase is justified based on the coverage purchased and the inaccurate reading, this proves that these records do not stay within the systems at the repair shops. This is why I only patronize the local independent repair shops, and not any national chains. I tend to get better service while I control my privacy.

I also cover my VIN information in order to prevent services from documenting this unique identifier while my vehicle is being serviced. This requires more than just placing a piece of paper over the VIN plate visible through the front windshield. I place black duct tape over both the windshield VIN plate and the VIN sticker attached to the driver's side door jamb. I cut the tape nicely to make it appear more professional, but any mechanic will know what you are doing. However, someone is less likely to remove duct tape than to move a piece of paper covering the number. I also remove my registration plates once I enter the service lot.

Tolls

Some readers can likely remember the days of throwing coins into a toll basket and waiting for the green light acknowledging that you met the toll requirements. I miss these days. Today, it is extremely rare to find a toll road that accepts cash. Instead, the use of various digital transmitters has replaced the necessity to always have coins in the vehicle. These devices, commonly called E-Z Pass, FasTrak, I-Pass, and other clever names, have been great for decreasing congestion and simplifying payment for toll roads. However, they have also taken quite a toll on our privacy. Each device is associated with an individual and vehicle, and all travel transactions are logged permanently. Those of us who possess one of these devices in our vehicle are volunteering non-stop

tracking as we lawfully travel on various highways. If you do not want to participate any longer, you have the options of either ceasing use of the devices or obtaining them anonymously.

First, I should discuss the idea of avoiding tolls. In extremely populated cities such as Los Angeles, one can simply stop using the express lanes. This will cause a delay in your commute and may not be appropriate for you. In other areas, such as the outskirts of Chicago, it may not be this easy. The only main roads which will get you to your destination require a toll. In areas that require the use of toll bridges, you may not have an option but to pay electronically. Most areas which have mandatory electronic tolls offer an option to pay online after use. However, this is quite a burden with continuous use. Therefore, for those of you that must participate in the electronic toll system, I offer the following tips for obtaining an anonymous toll transmitter.

Some major cities have systems in place for prepaid toll transmitters. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the Golden Gate Bridge has a web page at https://www.goldengate.org/bridge/tolls-payment titled "I Want To Remain Anonymous". It provides great detail about how to anonymously purchase a FasTrak device at select stores using cash, and the hours of operation of the office that allows toll funding in cash without any identification. While I do not expect this trend to spread across the world, it is refreshing to see the effort. I suggest contacting your appropriate toll entity and ask if they have an option for "private registration" of a toll transmitter. You will likely receive resistance with this unusual request, but it should be attempted. If (when) that fails, consider the next option.

Most states offer toll passes to businesses which may have multiple vehicles in a fleet. If you chose to register your vehicle to an LLC, you can also register your toll pass to the same LLC. If you did not register your vehicle in an LLC, you can still use the LLC to register the toll pass, but you will lose the privacy protection if the vehicle is registered in your name. If you do not have an EIN from the IRS, simply write "pending" if requested. Everything else can be the publicly available information associated with your LLC. The payment option can be a masked debit card number (explained later). When submitting these applications electronically, a signature is usually not required. Ultimately, the states just want to be paid. As long as you fund the account, pay your tolls, and provide no reason for them to find you, you should have no issues assigning your toll pass to an LLC.

Is this really a concern? Some readers of the first edition told me I was being overly paranoid, as toll readers only transmit minimal information when activated at necessary times. Many do not consider that the unique identifiers transmitted from the device are associated with a real person within the database of that system. I counter their argument with the following situation which earned my client some unwanted attention. "Jill" had purchased her vehicle in the name of a trust, but continued using her toll pass sensor which was previously registered in her true name. One day, she was contacted at her place of employment by two uniformed police officers. They were investigating a fatality accident in which they believed she may had witnessed. She was unaware of any such incident, but she confirmed that she was driving in that area at the time. The officers thanked her for her time and asked her to call if she remembered anything differently. Before they left, she questioned as to why they had contacted her specifically. One officer disclosed that the toll pass reader near the scene of the accident displayed a log which identified her vehicle as being present at the time of the crash. The toll pass system provided her name, home address, and vehicle details. While at her home, a roommate disclosed her place of employment to the officers. The pressure was now on Jill to explain to her co-workers that she was not in trouble.

As a former officer, I respect the investigation tool that toll pass histories provides during serious incidents. As a privacy enthusiast, I do not want police officers contacting me at my place of employment in front of suspicious co-workers. If I did not witness an incident, I do not want to be identified or contacted at all. My client is probably now documented within the investigation in which she had no connection. This is why I apply the following policies toward my own usage of toll passes, and encourage others to replicate.

- I try to avoid areas which require an electronic toll pass.
- If unavoidable, I use cash at booths present at entry and exit.
- If required, I purchase an electronic pass in the name of an LLC.

- If purchased, I apply payments from a masked payment source.
- When not in use, I keep the device protected in a Faraday bag.

There is no law which states you must have your toll pass permanently on display, ready to be queried as you drive through various roads. You must only have it present while traveling on a tollway which requires an electronic sensor. Once you leave the tollway, it is possible that additional readers collect device information, even though it is not required for a toll. I believe that any device which transmits data about you or your vehicle should be shielded within a Faraday bag when not in use.

Private License Plate Readers

Years ago, only government entities established license plate readers across major cities in order to investigate serious crimes. After a robbery, detectives could view the logs and determine any vehicles of interest near the crime scene. Today, many private companies are building their own internal networks of license plate location databases. Consider the money McDonald's is spending in order to eventually track all drive-through customers.

In March of 2019, McDonald's acquired a start-up called Dynamic Yield for $300 million. This company specializes in "decision logic" in order to make food and add-on suggestions to drive-through customers who are in line. Drivers would see tailored options on digital menus, based on factors including the time of day and their previous selections. This will allow McDonald's to track your orders, date and time of purchase, vehicle, occupants, and form of payment. Tie that all together, and they will control a very detailed dossier of your dining activities.

When this happens, do you want to be in that system? This is yet another reason why we should always pay in cash and possess vehicle registration which is not publicly associated with our name. Unfortunately, there are new emerging threats to your privacy associated with your vehicle. In early 2019, a client reached out with a new concern. She was advised by her neighborhood watch president that he had installed license plate readers at all entrances to the neighborhood, and that he was logging all vehicles, along with dates and times, coming and going. She asked me if this was legal, and if I had ever heard of such a scenario. I identified a company that was marketing license plate readers to neighborhoods, and called them to get more details. This call was included in my podcast about the issue (Episode 118: How Neighborhood Watch Watches You).

I learned that many neighborhoods were installing license plate readers in response to property crimes occurring within the area. The cameras collected video footage of each vehicle entering and leaving the neighborhood, along with a text translation of each license plate. The administrator of the system, which is usually the neighbor who purchases the cameras, receives a daily log of all vehicle activity. They can pass along any desired details to the police if a crime occurred. Furthermore, this person can log in to a website and search a specific license plate in order to see a pattern of activity. I immediately began researching the legal implications of destroying such cameras. Hint … it is illegal to damage private property.

I am sure most of the neighborhood watch participants who install these systems have good intent. They want to catch bad guys stealing things. However, this power can be quickly abused. When a neighbor wants to know when you came home last night, they have the ability. Do the logs show the average time you leave every weekday morning and return in the afternoon? This tells me the best time to snoop around your property. Did you have a friend follow you home late on a Saturday night? I now have a permanent record of this visit. Did the vehicle leave early on Sunday? I now have some new gossip for the neighborhood.

It should be noted that these systems do not verify collected data with registration information. The system does not know your name or address. It can only document the letters and numbers on the registration plate. However, your neighborhood watch administrator could easily associate each plate with a specific neighbor's address with a simple drive through the streets. Anyone who desires this type of system to monitor the neighborhood is the type of person who keeps a record of residents' vehicles.

I would never consider living in a neighborhood which possessed this type of monitoring. If a system were proposed, I would fight it and encourage other neighbors to join the resistance. If a system is legally installed regardless of your desires, you will find yourself in the same scenario as my client. My advice to her was simple, yet annoying. I told her she should consider removing her license plates before entering her own neighborhood. This is likely illegal, but with minimal chance of being detected. Please let me explain.

You must legally display valid vehicle registration plates while on any public road. This usually includes the roads within your neighborhood. If my neighborhood entrance possessed license plate readers, I would identify a safe place to pull over before reaching the entrance. I would then remove the plates and proceed directly to my home. After leaving the neighborhood, I would use the same location to re-attach my plates to the vehicle. Technically, I would be illegally driving the vehicle for a few minutes within my own neighborhood. If I were stopped by the police, which would be extremely rare, I would politely explain my reasons, display my plates to the officer, and accept any citation issued to me.

You may be thinking that carrying a screwdriver and removing both registrations plates every day would become quite a chore. You are correct, but the action of removing the plates can be made much easier. My vehicle plates do not attach via screws. I use a magnetic plate holder which requires over 25 pounds of pull in order to remove it. These can be found on Amazon (amzn.to/3bWXyDF). I can easily remove my plates by simply giving them a brisk tug and replace them by pressing them against the vehicle. Please note that these will only work if your plate attaches to an area with a metal backing. I have a vehicle which possesses a plastic well for both the front and rear plates. Therefore, I place the magnetic holders (with plates) above the license plate well where I have access to a metal surface. Your plates must simply be visible, and there is no law requiring you to use the designated attachment areas. Why would I do all of this? There are several reasons.

My newest excuse for these removable plates is the growing presence of neighborhood watch vehicle trackers as previously discussed. I also prefer to remove my plates if my vehicle will be on my property but not in my garage. This prevents Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) installed on many police cars, tow trucks, taxis, and other service vehicles from associating my vehicle registration with my home address. These magnetic holders are also convenient when parking in private garages, airport lots, and large shopping centers.

One concern for a magnetic license plate holder is the increased possibility of theft. This is not a concern to me. If a criminal really wants my license plate, they likely have immediate access to a flathead screwdriver. A traditional plate with screws will not deter a thief. Most thieves will not notice my magnetic holder from a distance. When my vehicle is on private property and out of my sight for a long period of time, I remove my plates anyway.

Many readers might consider displaying their license plates from inside the vehicle. A front plate resting in the dash of the vehicle and the rear plate attached to the interior of a rear window may seem like a good idea. It is not. Almost every state specifically requires registration plates to be attached to the exterior of the vehicle. I never encourage people to execute illegal methods which may bring more attention from law enforcement. This can ruin privacy strategies quicker than anything else.

I hesitantly present one additional option which may keep your license plates private. There are numerous "plate flippers" and "plate covers" online which allow you to hide your plate remotely from within the vehicle. An internal button instructs the frames holding your plates to flip the plate over and display only the black back-side of the holder or lower a cover. Executing this while traveling on any public road would be considered illegal. I believe flipping your plates while on private property could be allowed. This decreases the chances of plate theft and hides your vehicle registration while parked. This may be illegal in your state, depending on your usage, but I could not locate any laws specifically preventing such a device.

The next concern is new optical character recognition (OCR) software being embedded into existing home surveillance systems. One such offering, titled Rekor Systems, launched a service called "Watchman Home". This software can turn nearly any existing home security camera into a license plate recognition device without

the loss of the original security camera functionality. It can be integrated into smart home systems to automatically recognize specific vehicles, and attaches to internet-connected devices for remote monitoring. Any of your neighbors can log in to their own portal to see the entire history of all vehicles traveling near their home. The cost is $5 per month, and there are no physical indications of it being used.

I believe we will see neighborhood vehicle tracking cameras become the standard within the next ten years. The hardware is very affordable and the software costs will decrease with heavier use. Many of your neighbors already possess security cameras facing the street, and possibly your home. Because of this, consider what can be captured from your vehicle registration plate.

Vehicle Privacy

Your vehicle should reveal as little personal information about you as possible through its appearance. Any personal information that is displayed on your car could be a vector for social engineering and should be avoided. You should also be careful about the personal information that is stored inside your vehicle. I hope the following suggestions will encourage you to revisit the privacy and security of your vehicle's interior and exterior.

The items located inside your vehicle can reveal a lot about you. The discarded receipts, shopping bags, coffee cups, and other debris can reveal information about who you are and your pattern of life. Most of this information can be captured from the exterior of the vehicle. Do you shop at high-end retail stores? This may encourage burglary and theft from you. Do you enjoy a certain, unique coffee shop each day? This indicates a physical pattern of behavior that could be used to execute an attack. Is an electric bill or Amazon package, with your name and address clearly visible, on the front seat? This reveals the location where you will likely be sleeping tonight. Items like these can reveal where you live, where you work, and the things you like to do. Keep this information out of your car or hidden from view.

Documents in your car present an additional concern. First, many of these papers, such as your vehicle registration and insurance documentation, often contain sensitive information in the form of your full name or home address. All of this is information you would not want accessed, lost, or stolen. However, you are required by law to have this information in your car during operation, and it must be reasonably accessible. Complicating the matter, you sometimes must allow others to have access to your car. This can include mechanics, detailers, valets, and others. These people may (or may not) be trustworthy, and would have full access to this information.

The concern is the balance of keeping these documents available and accessible while still protecting them from the curious. If your car has a locking glove box it may suffice to protect these documents, as long as you have a valet key (a key that operates only the doors and ignition but not the trunk or glove box) and remember to use it at all times the vehicle is out of your control. If you are exceptionally patient and dedicated to security, you could take these documents with you when you leave the car, but the risk of forgetting them is high and could have legal consequences. Personally, I carry the minimal amount of required information, including an insurance card and vehicle registration (scanned and reduced in size) in my slim "Driving" wallet. This is the wallet which only contains my true identification, which would be required during a traffic stop. There are no personal documents within my vehicle at any time.

Auto Supply Store Profiles

Have you ever stopped by an AutoZone, or any other auto parts place, and had them help diagnose a "Check Engine Light"? This free courtesy is a smart business move. Their portable machines connect to your vehicle through its OBD2 port, extract various vehicle readings, populate this data into their network, and the cashier can recommend the most appropriate part for your vehicle. You may then pay with a credit card in your name and walk out without much thought about the privacy implications. I know I have in the past. If this describes an encounter you have had at these types of places, they now have a record of the following details.

Your Full Name	Vehicle Model	Vehicle Diagnostics
Credit Card Information	Vehicle Identification Number	Store Location
Vehicle Year	Controller ID Number	Vehicle Parts Purchased
Vehicle Make	Trouble Codes	Recommended Purchases

Many may find my paranoia about this behavior unjustified. However, I offer an additional piece of ammunition for my concern. In 2019, I downloaded a "Vehicle Owners" database from a website which sells breaches, leaks, and marketing data. It contained millions of records identifying vehicle owners by name, city, make, model, and VIN. I searched my name and received the following result, modified for my own privacy.

Bazzell, Michael, 2007 Ford Explorer, VIN: REDACTED, Phoenix, AZ

I have never lived in Phoenix. However, in 2015, I stopped at an auto parts store during a road trip full of live training engagements and requested a scan of my vehicle due to a warning light on my dashboard. The store identified the issue and sold me a new sensor to replace the broken part. I likely paid with my real credit card since I was not near my home. While I cannot absolutely confirm this data was provided from the auto parts store, my suspicions are strong. Now, imagine that you applied the tactics from this chapter in order to possess a fairly anonymous vehicle. You would likely be upset if the details were associated with your name and shared publicly. Therefore, we should never attach our names to vehicles during any type of service. What if you already shared your information with these types of stores? I offer the following advice, based on my own experiences.

- **AutoZone**: Contact a clerk within a store. Ask them to retrieve your customer record within their system. While they should demand ID to prove your honest intentions, most never check and allow anyone to access any profile. The clerk cannot delete your profile and corporate headquarters refuses to acknowledge any similar requests. Ask the clerk to update your profile with your new vehicle and contact information (have this ready). If necessary, state you are a vehicle enthusiast and you really want your profile to be accurate. Ask the clerk to overwrite the vehicle information, email address, telephone number, and any other details which appear accurate. If willing, ask the clerk to add your home address, and choose a nearby hotel.
- **Pep Boys**: This is similar to AutoZone, but with a couple of differences. In my experience, they do not store a physical address or history of vehicle scans. However, they do store the make and model of your vehicle if you have provided it during shopping or checkout. This can be overwritten by the clerk with any alias vehicle details.
- **NAPA AutoCare Center**: This store was unique in that they could not search vehicle information by name. Only the VIN could be used. This presents a dilemma. We do not want to provide accurate information, such as a VIN, which could be added to records during the query if the system does not already know this information. In my trial, I provided my true VIN without supplying my real name. The correct vehicle year, make, and model populated, but did not include any personal details. The clerk asked if I wanted to add my name, which I declined. I suspect existing details could be overwritten.
- **O'Reilly Auto Parts**: Profiles at this store are unique from the previous three. It was the only store which could delete each field of a profile. Empty fields were allowed. Once this change is saved, the clerk was no longer able to access any data after searching my name or vehicle.
- **Advanced Auto Parts**: This was similar to O'Reilly, but with one hiccup. The system would not accept an empty field as a replacement for a previous piece of data. However, placing any text, such as "Removed" was allowed. After applying my requested changes, the clerk was not able to retrieve my customer details.

If any stores possess no record about you or your vehicle, then I typically do not recommend creating anything fictitious. However, this does provide a decent disinformation opportunity, so be sure to remember this tactic while reading about "name disinformation" later in the book. In my experience, none of these services will delete your profile. Populating inaccurate details appears to be the only option. To initiate the conversation, you could purchase an inexpensive part for a different make of car to have those details saved to your profile.

Vehicle Tracking

As the technology inside vehicles advances, so do the privacy concerns. Most modern vehicles have the ability to track numerous aspects of our usage such as location, speed, braking, and overall driving habits. In general, more expensive vehicles such as those manufactured by Tesla will possess more privacy intrusions than lesser-priced vehicles such as base model work trucks. However, every modern vehicle possesses a "black box" known as an Event Data Recorder (EDR). The data gathered by these units is commonly acquired after a traffic crash which has resulted in serious injury or death. It usually identifies the driving details leading to the incident. For our purposes, I will not try to evade the capturing of any sensitive data. Instead, I want to focus on the prevention of data being remotely shared with any third parties. The first consideration is the type of vehicle which you are purchasing. Do your homework, but also ask the following questions to the sales person.

- Does this vehicle possess a cellular modem? If the car you want has its own internet connection, there is little you can do to prevent data from being sent about your usage. It is impossible to buy a Tesla without a constant internet connection. I will never consider a vehicle which continuously sends data about me to the manufacturer. If a vehicle has OnStar, then it has an internet connection.
- Does this vehicle require a mobile device in order to apply systems updates? This is a good indicator that an internal cellular connection is not included, but can present new concerns. Many Toyota vehicles refuse to allow use of the radio until a phone is connected in order to apply updates. It will also send data out through this cellular connection without your consent. I never connect a mobile device with internet access to any vehicle. When you do, data will be transmitted and stored indefinitely.
- Does this vehicle have an embedded GPS unit? Is there a service which allows navigation with real-time traffic notifications? If the answer to either of these is "yes", then you may possess a vulnerability. Most vehicles have GPS built into the infotainment system today. You should determine whether a premium service allows data from the vehicle to be sent to the manufacturer. The answer will almost always be "yes". You will likely notice that lower trim packages do not offer a navigation option. This is the desired scenario for me.

Next, avoid any mobile applications created by the manufacturer of the vehicle in order to enhance your experience. Ford has FordPass, GMC offers myGMC, and Chevrolet encourages you to download myChevrolet. While these apps offer great conveniences and entertainment features, they also disrespect your privacy. Let's take a quick look at Nissan, but we could replicate the following intrusions within practically any vehicle mobile application.

Nissan owners have an option to download the NissanConnect app to their smartphones. It allows you to find your parked car; remotely start the vehicle; be notified about upcoming maintenance; or receive a notification of a collision. In order for this to work, a paid service associates your vehicle with your mobile device. The vehicle possesses an ability to connect to the internet, likely through a cellular modem, and the service allows it to maintain a connection to Nissan. This convenience presents two issues.

First, there is a huge security concern. If your phone is lost or stolen, there is an avenue to breach your vehicle. Even if your device is safely in your possession, car hackers have proven many times that vehicles are prone to unauthorized access. Next, there are several privacy implications. The privacy policy for NissanConnect states very clearly that they can share any data about you and your vehicle with other companies. In 2020, Nissan updated their policy with the following entry, without any consent from users.

"If you are a registered Nissan owner and NissanConnect Services subscriber, this update allows Nissan to share information such as your vehicle's mileage and vehicle location with third parties."

If you have already downloaded a mobile application provided by your vehicle manufacturer, registered an account through their service, and associated your vehicle to the account, you should consider wiping your tracks. This should be done in a very specific order.

- Attempt to remove any accounts or profiles within the vehicle's infotainment unit.
- Conduct a hard reset of the infotainment unit, which should return the configuration to the default which was present during purchase. You may need to find instructions within your vehicle manual.
- Disconnect the vehicle battery for at least one minute, which may remove leftover unwanted data.
- Through the app on your mobile device, attempt to remove any association to your vehicle. Afterward, uninstall the app from the device.
- Log in to the account through the designated web page within a web browser. If the vehicle is still present, attempt to remove the association.
- Attempt to delete the entire account within the account settings menu. If this is not allowed, contact the service and demand removal of all data.

You may think this is all overkill. If you do, I present the story of Mathew Marulla, as originally reported at Krebsonsecurity. Mathew leased a Ford Focus electric vehicle in 2013, but returned the car back to Ford at the end of his lease in 2016. In 2020, he received an email from Ford stating that the clock in his car was set incorrectly. Marulla's credentials from 2016 still worked on the MyFord website, and he was presented with an online dashboard showing the current location of his old vehicle and its mileage statistics. The dashboard also allowed him to remotely start the vehicle, as well as lock and unlock its doors. He stated "I can track its movements, see where it plugs in ... Now I know where the current owner likely lives, and if I watch it tomorrow, I can probably figure out where he works. I have not been the owner of this vehicle for four years". If you plan to buy a used car, you should check whether it is possible to reset the previous owner's control and information before purchase. You may also consider demanding that the dealership completes this task. My vehicle tracking rules are quite simple.

- Never purchase a vehicle with an embedded cellular connection. This includes OnStar or any similar competitor. Even when deactivated, the connection still allows remote access and submits data back to the provider.
- Never purchase a vehicle with embedded navigation including real-time traffic information. This indicates an active connection to the manufacturer.
- Never connect a mobile device with internet access to the infotainment unit of the vehicle. This allows data to be sent to the manufacturer.

When playing by these rules, you will encounter minor inconveniences. I received the following complaints from my clients, which include my recommended solutions.

- **Navigation**: Seeing your navigation map on the in-car display is nice. It might also share internet with your vehicle's reporting system. My only solution to this is to rely on your mobile device's navigation on the device's screen. If necessary, mount the device above your dash using a suction mount.
- **Music**: One benefit of connecting a mobile device to the vehicle is the ability to stream music stored on the device or from online streams. Most modern vehicles possess a USB port which accepts flash drives full of MP3 files. My own vehicle allows a 256GB flash drive containing hundreds of albums worth of music. I play the files through the main infotainment dashboard.
- **Podcasts**: Streaming a podcast from your mobile device through your vehicle's Bluetooth is very convenient, but risky. You could load MP3 audio files of podcasts onto the USB drive mentioned previously, but that can be daunting. Instead, I recommend simply connecting your mobile device to the audio auxiliary (AUX) port. No data is transmitted through this 3.55mm audio input.
- **Hands-Free Calling and Texting**: I understand the desire to connect your phone to the vehicle in order to make calls while driving. Many state laws allow this but have ruled touching the phone as illegal. My only solution here is to avoid calls and texts while driving. I know this is unpopular, but we survived without it for decades.

Dash Cams

In 2022, I finally adopted the dash cam. The moment I start my engine, a small camera on my front dash quietly begins recording video of my every move. When I return to my home and shut down the engine, it stops. Video evidence sits on a micro SD card within the unit if needed. After some time has passed, the card becomes full and the oldest data is written over with new video. It loops indefinitely unless I determine otherwise. If something bad happens, I can retrieve the video from that event and use it to my advantage. Before discussing recommended dash cam behaviors and devices, let's understand the reasons why we may want this type of device within our vehicles.

- **Traffic Crash Evidence**: When I was a street patrolman in the late 90's, I was dispatched to investigate many car accidents. Back then, it was my responsibility to determine fault and document behaviors within a traffic crash report. Today, many police departments will not make a report if there are no injuries. You may simply be told to exchange information. If an officer is dispatched, there may be no designation of fault. It will be up to the insurance companies to duke it out. When you have a video recording of the incident documenting fault of the other driver, you might save yourself from an unnecessary deductible and future premium increases. I have witnessed drivers collide with a stopped vehicle while texting, but then claim the other car slammed on the brakes. Dash cam video often dismisses inaccurate claims. The presence of the unit during the investigation may prevent any lies from the beginning.
- **Fraud**: Large cities are ripe with fraud. People will look for inattentive drivers and fake being struck by their car. A quick insurance payout justifies an unnecessary trip to the emergency room. Front-facing video can dispute fraudulent claims.
- **Bicyclists and Pedestrians**: If you live in a populated city, you likely have many bicyclists and pedestrians presenting new dangers to you. While bicyclists have many of the same rights as vehicles while on the road, they also have the same rules to follow. I have witnessed bicyclists ignore traffic lights and then get struck by vehicles. Many immediately claim fault to the driver even though they did not follow the traffic laws themselves. Dash cam video may prevent you from a hefty civil lawsuit. Pedestrians offer similar threats. I have seen many people jaywalk, jump in front of moving cars, or cross busy intersections during a red pedestrian light. They often claim the driver to be at fault, especially when the vehicle is an expensive model. Dash video might save you from paying someone else's unnecessary medical bills.
- **Criminal Activity**: Violence within major cities is common. As I write this, an acquaintance was robbed at gunpoint. A vehicle stopped in the middle of the road in front of his car. Two men with guns emerged and demanded money. They quickly took off. The victim did not think to look for a license plate, but the camera would have captured anything present.
- **Stalking**: A client of mine was having issues with a former boyfriend following her home from work and making rude gestures. A rear dash camera recorded one especially terrifying event where he tried to strike her car. The video evidence was enough to issue a restraining order. Any future videos could result in an arrest.
- **Citation Dispute**: Police are not perfect, and mistakes are made. If I receive a speeding citation which seems unjustified, I will consider disputing the charge. If I have video displaying normal traffic behavior, I can use that as evidence in court. If I purchased a GPS-enabled device which displays current speed on the video, I can present a stronger argument in court.
- **Interior Monitoring**: While I choose a camera which does not record the interior of the vehicle, there are scenarios where that may be appropriate. Ride-sharing drivers for Uber or Lyft may want to record all activity within the vehicle during any rides. This could prove that an allegation from a customer was false, or that a $200 vomit fee was justified. The presence of the camera and a posted recording notice may be enough to prevent bad behavior.
- **Trip Documentation**: I take a lot of road trips. Some are mundane without any activity of interest, while others witness great scenery. Dash cams allow you to preserve the views of a family trip. Free software and online services allow you to compress many hours of footage into a brief video.

- **Alibi**: This is much less common, but video recordings can be an alibi if you are accused of a crime (or a spousal belief of being somewhere you should not). Video of you driving in a town far away from a scene, especially if you are captured walking in front of your vehicle, can dismiss unjustified accusations.
- **Insurance Discounts**: I am aware of only one vehicle insurance provider which offers a discount for the usage of dash cams, but I believe this will become much more common.

There are privacy considerations as well. This book talks about invasive recording of our daily activity. Do we really want to add to this behavior? The only devices I consider for daily usage record locally to the unit's physical storage. They do not upload content to any third-party server. Furthermore, I offer recommendations for models which only record out the front window, and those which also record inside the vehicle. This gives you options for your own privacy desires. Overall, activity on a public roadway in front of your vehicle is fair game. There is no expectation of privacy.

If you are fortunate, the video captured from your dash cam will never be seen by anyone, including you. It will exist on an unmonitored SD card and be destroyed over and over again. If it is needed, you will be glad you have it. A good privacy steward will always make sure that any captured video is never uploaded online, especially to social networks. Hopefully you now have an interest in dash cams. There are a lot of models out there, many of which do not function appropriately. Let's work through them and find a model appropriate for your needs. Always consider the following factors before committing to a specific device.

- **Cameras**: Determine whether you need a single camera or dual lens system. Single cameras only record the activity in front of it. These are typically mounted to the front windshield and capture the traffic in front of you. They are embedded into the recording unit. Dual camera systems also record the activity within your vehicle (and outside the back window). Some devices include a rear-facing camera within the unit attached to your front windshield. I typically avoid these as they can make riders feel uncomfortable. Many units have an option to attach a second camera which can be mounted to the front windshield facing the occupants. These are very common with Uber and Lyft drivers who want to document customer behavior, as previously explained. These secondary cameras usually include a long cable which can allow mounting on the rear window. This provides a better view of rear traffic without exposing riders. Unless you have a specific need, I always recommend a single camera system or dual camera which is mounted at the rear of the vehicle. I do not want the occupants of my vehicle to ever feel monitored, and I do not want video of myself within the recordings.
- **GPS**: I always prefer a GPS-enabled unit. It can display the coordinates and speed at all times within the captured video. This can help identify a specific location of an incident or identify the speed right before an accident or citation.
- **Resolution**: Some cameras will record video up to 4K. I only insist on a minimum of 1440p. I find that most suitable and it allows for manageable video size which still appears clear. I can record over two hours of 1440p video within a 64GB micro SD card before it loops over to the oldest recording.
- **Hard-Wiring**: Many units include an optional wiring kit which allows the unit to record while parked. I do not have much use for these and I do not want the drain on my car battery. If you enter and exit your car often and want the video to never stop, this may be appropriate.
- **Card**: Not all SD cards are the same. Many will proudly display "Class 10" or "Mark 3", but these only refer to the speed of capture. Most modern cards can write data quickly, but the long-term reliability may be limited. Since these cards will be constantly written over with new data, I recommend cards from reputable manufactures marketed as "High", "Pro", or "Max" endurance. I currently rely on the SanDisk Max Endurance 128GB (https://amzn.to/3vBX2YT).
- **Audio**: While most cameras have embedded audio included, some do not. If you need audio recording in your vehicle, make sure your unit supports this. If you do not want your voice recorded while you drive, make sure any audio recording options can be disabled.
- **Access**: Some dash cams require you to download recorded video via a mobile app, cloud-based online storage solution, or Wi-Fi to the device. I avoid all of these scenarios. I only want to access my video directly from the micro SD card. I do not want to install any app or introduce any internet connection.

- **Display**: Some minimal recorders do not possess a display screen. These can help reduce the footprint of the unit, but removes any ability to confirm the device is functioning properly with a proper view. It also allows instant review of recorded videos. I prefer a small screen which can playback videos at the scene of a crash if necessary.
- **Wi-Fi**: It will be difficult to find a device which does not have an embedded Wi-Fi chip. Make sure your unit provides an option to disable it completely.

Now that you know what to look for, consider my recommendations.

- If you desire a single-lens **BASIC** system (1440p video capture), facing only the front of the vehicle, I recommend either the VIOFO A129 Plus ($140) (https://amzn.to/3vGaZVY), Nextbase 422GW ($150) (https://amzn.to/35sz3Rx), or Garmin Dash Cam 57 ($230) (https://amzn.to/3pDnRbg).
- If you desire a single-lens **PRO** system (4K video capture), facing only the front of the vehicle, I recommend the VIOFO A129 Pro ($200) (https://amzn.to/3HJ3HCY).
- If you desire a dual-lens **BASIC** system (1440p video capture), including a front-facing embedded camera and a separate rear-facing camera which can be mounted on the back windshield (which does NOT capture occupants of the vehicle), I recommend either the VIOFO A129 Plus Duo ($175) (https://amzn.to/3HCCJNu) or the Nextbase 422GW ($329) (https://amzn.to/3tqa09y).
- If you desire a dual-lens **PRO** system (4K video capture), including a front-facing embedded camera and a separate rear-facing camera which can be mounted on the back windshield (which does NOT capture occupants of the vehicle), I recommend the VIOFO A129 Pro Duo ($235) (https://amzn.to/3vFyQ80).
- If you desire a dual-lens system, including front-facing and rear-facing cameras which are embedded into the unit itself (which records all activity of the occupants), I recommend the Garmin DashCam Tandem ($300) (https://amzn.to/3vFHL9J).
- Finally, if you only need a single camera system but want the option to upgrade later, consider the Nextbase 422GW (1440p) (https://amzn.to/35sz3Rx) or 622GW (4K) (https://amzn.to/3Mr0Wde). You can add any of the following later.
  Nextbase Rear Windshield add-on for the 322GW/522GW (https://amzn.to/3pDWYUQ)
  Nextbase Cabin View add-on for the 322GW/522GW (https://amzn.to/3hE1hem)
  Nextbase Rear View add-on for the 322GW/522GW (https://amzn.to/3HIKjWY)

Most people I know who wish they had a dash cam have had something happen which should have been captured on video. Like much of this privacy and security game, we must be proactive and not reactive. For less than $200, you can have a silent partner recording all activity around your vehicle. If you ever need the footage, the device will pay for itself ten times over. If you never need any video, consider yourself fortunate. If you purchase a dash cam, take some time to learn all of the functions and configuration options. You do not want to experience a learning curve while on the scene of an accident. Test it often and ensure that the videos are of appropriate quality. If you do not want to capture the GPS coordinates or video of your house within the locally-stored video, disable the recording while near your home in the same manner as the cell phone Faraday bag tutorial. If you experience difficulty playing recorded video, install VLC Media Player for all playback.

Typical Client Configuration

Most clients who demand a full privacy reboot must obtain a new vehicle. It is purchased and titled in the name of an LLC or trust and the registration plates are not publicly associated with the client. Insurance is purchased in the name of the client with the LLC or trust as the secondary insured. A CMRA or PMB mailing address is on file with the provider, and a home address is never given. The insurance company will know who owns the vehicle, but this information will not be available from the license plate details. Any unnecessary vehicle markings are removed and all maintenance services are performed at independently-owned providers. A front and rear dash cam is installed and functioning.

CHAPTER NINE
TEMPORARY HOUSING

I have not booked a hotel room under my true name since 2013. This may sound ridiculous and paranoid, but since you are this far in the book, I accept this risk. In late 2012, I was scheduled to present a keynote at a large conference in Florida. This was a very public event, and the roster of presenters was available on the conference website. I was contacted by a person asking if I would be willing to meet her for dinner the night before my session. She wanted to "pick my brain" about some issues she was having, and knew I would be in town. A quick search of her email address revealed dozens of messages sent to my public email address listed on my website. These messages were very concerning, and included allegations of alien probes, government chips in her head, and an overall theme of mental instability.

I politely declined to meet, citing a late flight and early morning. She responded notifying me that the last flight into the local airport from St. Louis arrived at 6:15 pm and that we would have plenty of time. I again declined, and did not think much more of it. I arrived at my hotel at 7:00 pm, checked in, and walked to my room. A woman was following me, so I took a detour into a stairwell. She followed and sternly stated that she needed to talk with me right away. I returned to the lobby, and we had a very brief conversation. I clearly explained that her actions were inappropriate, and she agreed to leave. I did not sleep well that night.

This may sound like minimal risk and you may think I am the jerk for declining to help her. For a moment, replace the players. Pretend my role is played by a successful woman in the entertainment industry, and the original woman is now a male fan that has sent threatening letters. It may not seem so crazy now. This scenario happens every day. Many of my clients find themselves constantly harassed by people that just want to be closer to them. This includes celebrities, business leaders, and domestic violence victims. You do not need to be famous to have a violent person in your life. Therefore, we must have plans for anonymous housing, even if temporary.

This chapter is a transition in order to prepare you for the ability to purchase your next home anonymously. While you are hunting for the perfect new home, you will need temporary housing. This chapter will define temporary housing as short-term options such as hotels and longer-term solutions such as rental homes. Let's start with the easier of the two, hotels.

Obtaining a hotel reservation is very difficult without a credit card. Some hotel operators will reserve the room without a guarantee that it will be available. Some will refuse the reservation without a valid card number. Lately, many hotels apply the entire charge for the visit at the moment of the reservation. When you arrive, you must provide the card at the front desk to be swiped. This collects the data about the cardholder and attaches it to the sale. There are two main reasons for using an alias while at hotels.

When you stay at a hotel, there is a lot of information that the business can analyze about you and your stay. The amount you paid, the length of your stay, any amenities you purchased, and the distance you traveled from home will be stored in your profile. This will all be used to target you for future visits. Worse, it will be shared with other hotels in the chain that can benefit from the data. Even far worse, all details are leaked publicly though a data breach, similar to the Marriott breach of 2018.

A more serious concern is for a person's safety. If you are the victim of a stalker or targeted by someone crazy in your life, it is not difficult for them to find out the hotel where you are staying. The easiest way would be to contact every hotel in the area where you will be traveling. The following conversations with a hotel operator will usually divulge your chosen hotel.

"Hello, I made a reservation there a while back and I need to add an additional day to my stay. I may have put the reservation under my wife's name, Mary Smith. If not, it could be under my name, Michael Smith. I'm afraid I do not have the reservation number; can you find the reservation without it? It is for next week."

The operator will either be unable to locate your reservation or confirm that an extra day was added. The first call which receives the confirmation will identify where you are staying. A simpler approach may be the following.

"Can I leave a message for Michael Bazzell? He is staying there now."

The response will either be, "We do not have a guest here under that name", or, "Yes, go ahead and I will leave the message at the front desk for him".

A more high-tech approach could be conducted through the hotel's wireless internet. Many hotels require you to log in to the wireless internet before you use it. This usually requests your last name and room number as verification that you are a valid guest. Some amateur programming can create a script that will attempt to log in with your last name and each room number of the hotel until the attempt is successful. This not only identifies the hotel where you are staying at, but exposes your room number. This can be a huge security concern.

You can use an alias name to create your hotel reservation. Since you are not committing any type of financial fraud, I believe this is legal. You will be providing a legitimate source of payment and will pay all charges in relation to the stay. There are three main attacks for this, as outlined in the following pages. The first requires no identification, but carries a bit of risk.

Many hotel chains offer prepaid reservations and digital check-in. I have had the most luck with Hilton properties. I recently needed to travel domestically to an airport hotel, and then internationally for a few days. I wanted to stay off radar and test a new strategy on which I had been working. I have had the best success with the following routine.

- Create a new rewards account with a large hotel chain, preferably Hilton or Marriott. Use any alias name, and any physical address, such as another hotel. The longer this account can "age", the better your chances of success.
- While logged in, search the hotel website for a hotel near the desired location. Watch for notifications about "Non-Refundable". This is actually the desired option.
- Attempt to identify hotels that offer "Digital Keys". This allows you to use a mobile device to unlock the door to your room, often bypassing the front desk.
- Book your room, pay with a private credit or debit card. Many payment options will be explained later. Use the same alias details connected to your alias rewards account.
- The day before your stay, "pre-check-in" to your reservation and choose a desired room with the hotel's interactive online reservation system. Most Hilton properties allow this.
- If you selected a hotel with a digital key option, you should be able to unlock the door with your mobile device. This requires the hotel app to be installed, so I maintain an old Android device solely for this purpose. You can connect to the hotel Wi-Fi through this device and unlock the door from the app.

As always, there are caveats for this to work. Generally, the first time you use this feature, the hotel will ask you to check-in with the front desk. They may want to see identification and the credit card used during the registration. The Hilton website makes this clear with the following disclaimer.

"For Digital Keys: Most new digital key users will need to stop at the front desk upon arrival to activate their digital key. Must have iPhone 4s or newer running iOS 8 and higher or an Android phone running version 4.3 or higher with Bluetooth Low Energy enabled phones."

I have used this technique on numerous occasions. The resistance from the employees at the front desk has varied. In three recent attempts, each with new rewards accounts, I was able to gain entry to my room without displaying any type of identification. All three required me to check-in with the front desk before my phone could be allowed to unlock my room. In all three, I opened the communication with the following dialogue.

"Hi, I have a room prepaid with digital key check-in, but my app says I have to check with you to enable it. Can you help?"

In each scenario, the hotel employee requested photo identification and the credit card used. My response each time was the following.

"I didn't bring my wallet in with me, and my ride has already left. I assumed since I could use my phone to bypass the front desk you would not need that. In fact, your site says that would be the case. If you would like, I can show you my app, confirmation, and receipt of purchase to justify the stay."

This verbiage has always de-escalated any resistance. You may encounter a difficult employee that stands their ground and demands identification. When this happens, I have found a polite request to bring my ID before check-out works. I also always have the Hilton website discussing the ease of digital keys pulled up on my mobile device web browser, which I can display to the hotel employee in my defense. It can currently be found on their website at https://hiltonhonors3.hilton.com/rs/hilton-honors-mobile-app.

I have also tried prepaid options without digital keys, and had no issues at check-in. When I did not have the option for digital keys on the website, my room card was waiting for me at the front desk. Since the rooms were prepaid, I was usually not asked for any ID or credit card. The vital piece for all of this to work is to book rooms which are completely prepaid, non-refundable, with successfully charged fees through your payment method. Once the hotel has received their payment, identification and credit card requirements are more lenient. If you are pushed to provide the physical credit card used during purchase, blame your employer. I have found stating, "My work paid for the room with a corporate credit card. I WISH they trusted me with having a card, but you know how THAT goes". I have yet to be challenged on this.

I will end with a warning. This could fail. You may be denied a room. I find this to be highly unlikely, but it could happen. Also, if you need to cancel a reservation, you will not receive a refund. I only provide this information for those that need it. Domestic violence victims, stalking victims, and those under a temporary spotlight may find this useful. I consider many options when I assist someone with disappearing completely.

In early 2020, I attempted these techniques at an affordable hotel in an urban area. I could sense suspicion from the staff toward every customer. This hotel was in a high-crime area, and the employees seemed on high-alert. I dished out every excuse in the book as to why my client, a domestic violence victim who fled her tech-savvy abuser, had no government identification in the name matching the registration. They were not budging. I was told that she would not receive a room without ID and a physical credit card in that name. I advised I would make a call and come back in a few minutes. A quick Google search identified the hotel owner's name and Truepeoplesearch.com disclosed his home address and landline telephone number. Out of desperation, I told the clerk, "I just spoke with (owner name) and he asked you to call him at home at (home number) if there were any problems. He is a friend and is helping me relocate an abused woman". I sweated a bit from my ruse until she said, "That's fine, I am not calling him this late". That night, I began questioning this line of work.

The next tactic provides more assurance that you will have a smooth interaction with the front desk, and check in under an alias with no resistance. This requires a credit card in an alias name, which is explained in the upcoming anonymous payments chapter. These are fairly easy to obtain and are completely legal. The difficult part of this plan is identification in the alias name. Many people will not be comfortable with the following methods, but my clients in fear for their lives have no issue.

First, create a new rewards account with a large hotel chain, preferably Hilton or Marriott, as previously mentioned. Use any alias name, and any physical address, such as another hotel. This can be created the day of the booking. Upon arrival at the hotel, hand your alias credit card (explained soon) to the receptionist. You will likely be asked for identification. In my experience, stating that your wallet was stolen and you only have the credit card because you keep it in the car is sufficient if you really "sell" it. Your success will vary widely. I always recommend persistently denying that you have ID if you have nothing with your alias name on it. Possessing your rewards card in your alias name is often enough to pacify the request. Very few hotels will turn down a loyal paying rewards member with a credit card in hand. I find that being polite and understanding always works better than acting agitated.

If this does not work, have a travel partner show identification to meet the requirement. This information will most likely not be added to the reservation, and cannot be queried. In 2017, I was checking into the Mandalay Bay under an alias name before the BlackHat conference, where I was teaching a 2-day privacy crash course. I provided my alias name and credit card, but the card was declined. I had not used that card for many months, and the provider blocked the charge as suspicious. Fortunately, a colleague was with me and stepped in with his credit card and ID to meet the requirement. He was not staying in the room, his details were not attached to my stay, he was not tremendously exposed, but he would get billed if I trashed the room (I did not). This is not the best option, but will suffice if desperate.

I prefer a third option. I possess alias identification at all times. Hear me out before you believe I am breaking the law. I would never condone obtaining a real or fraudulent government identification card in your alias name. Not only is that illegal, but completely unnecessary. Instead, I create my own "club", which I am the founder (as my alias name of course). For example, you may be very interested in rock climbing. You could start your own organization titled "The Greater Houston Rock Climbing Gym". Maybe you have some steps on your back porch that you use to "climb". Your definition of climbing might be different than others. Now, you may choose to create an identification card for the members of your backyard gym. This could be completed in Microsoft Word and may include a photo of you. Your local print shop will happily print this on a nice paper stock and laminate it for you. The following should work well at the check-in of your hotel.

"I'm sorry, I left my license at the gym, can I show you my gym membership card until I go back to get it?"

I have also found employer identification to satisfy a demand for ID at a hotel. Assume I possess an LLC titled "The Workplace LLC". I can create an employee identification card containing my photo, alias name, and company logo. I can then place this laminated card into a lanyard around my neck during check-in. The moment I am asked for identification, I do a quick pat-check for a wallet on my back pants pockets and then instinctively grab my lanyard. I pull it toward the employee and allow them to verify that the name matches the credit card. This has never failed me. For added comfort, I add the line "For novelty purposes only, this is not a true ID, and is not to be used for any official identification" on the back (which is never seen unless inspected closely).

There has always been great skepticism about the legality of using an alias. I firmly stand by my views of when it is legal and illegal to use an alias throughout everyday encounters. I offer my opinion.

- **LEGAL:** Non-government identification in an alias name can be legal. There should be absolutely no mention of any government entity. There should be no mention or reference to any real businesses. It should not identify you as an employee of a legitimate company which you do not own.
- **NON-LEGAL:** Any false identification that displays the words city, county, state, government, police, license, driver, court, agent, et cetera is a crime. Any reference to ANY government agency is also illegal. Any resemblance to a real driver's license will get you arrested.
- Never use an alias when identifying yourself to a government official.
- Never use another person's SSN or known real name and DOB combination.
- Never attempt to obtain any credit under an alias name.

Overall, I believe it is legal to provide an alias name to a privately-owned hotel. Do you think famous celebrities stay under their real names? I can verify from personal experience they do not. Why should you not have the same luxury? After the Marriott breach in 2018, people asked if I was concerned. I was concerned for other people, but not myself. My true name does not exist within it. My stay history and payment methods are all in various alias names that are not associated with me. I anticipate more hotel breaches will happen, and my true details will not be exposed.

If you are still uncomfortable possessing an alias identification card with alias credit card, there are other options. I have had great success using services such as Airbnb for temporary stays. In fact, it can be easier than traditional lodging. I have arranged lodging through this service for myself and clients. I simply needed to create an account in an alias name, provide some standard details such as an alias email address and telephone number, and select the property where I needed to stay. I always try to find a location that appears to be a secondary home of the provider or an apartment detached from the renter's residence. Once you have provided acceptable payment through the service, such as an anonymous payment source that is explained later, the individual provider is happy to hand you the keys. They rarely ask to see any type of identification or proof of credit card. Often, a code to a digital lock is given and you never have any contact with the host. This situation can be much less stressful than convincing a hotel clerk you are someone else.

I have had several clients recently report that services such as Airbnb were becoming stricter toward new accounts. Rental attempts using a new account, prepaid card, and alias names were being rejected because of new fraud prevention strategies. I no longer book directly through Airbnb. Instead, I contact home-owners directly, outside of the application. This is legal to do, but the Airbnb members may be violating policy by conducting business outside of the app. I often use the Airbnb website in order to identify the place where I want to stay. I then conduct a search of the address within various people search websites and identify the owner. Finally, I contact them directly through a publicly listed email address and offer cash for the stay. Some avoid this for liability reasons, but most welcome an opportunity to be paid in cash and avoid the Airbnb fees.

The idea of providing an alias name and anonymous payment method works in most short-term stay situations. Whether a traditional hotel, extended stay alternative, or privately-owned property through an online service, they all simply want to be paid. They also want empty rooms filled in order to meet strict quotas. As long as you ensure that payment is made and that no financial fraud occurs, you should have no issues using an alias. If you need something more long-term, you will need to change your strategy.

In 2020, I began registering most hotel rooms in a business name. This cannot usually be done online, but a call during business hours works well. I explain that I would like to prepay for a block of rooms in the business name and make sure my employees are not charged anything. In this situation, hotel staff are much less scrutinous toward ID and payment options. Your experiences may vary, but this is another tool to possess.

Finally, I offer the safest and least sketchy option for semi-anonymous hotel stays. In 2021, I noticed many clients were concerned with possession of a credit card or identification card in an alias name. I respect this anxiety, and I outline more considerations with alias IDs later in the book. While possession of a non-government laminated alias ID can be made legally, you are always at the mercy of police officers, detectives, and prosecutors if you are believed to be acting in a way that violates any one of thousands of local laws. I am probably more comfortable than most with alias ID usage due to many years working under-cover and possessing multiple legitimate government-issued driver's licenses in various names. Today, I question the level of need for alias ID and credit cards for most of my clients. However, I still need to create temporary lodging reservations without using a true full name. I must balance privacy and security concerns with the ability of the client to execute a strategy comfortably. The following has worked well for short-term stays.

Assume your name is Michael Aaron Bazzell. If you create a hotel reservation in the name of Michael Bazzell, you are quite easy to track. There are few people in the world with that name and a few calls to local hotels should locate you quickly. Instead, consider creating the reservation in the name of Michael Aaron. This is a much more generic name. While your adversary may know your middle name, they may not think to begin a

hunt for this name. More importantly, this is not a lie. Your name is Michael, Michael Aaron, Michael Aaron Bazzell, and Michael Bazzell. Even better, you already possess an ID with this information. Your driver's license likely displays your full name on a single line, such as "Michael Aaron Bazzell". However, a United States passport and passport card displays this data on two lines, similar to the following.

Surname:
BAZZELL

Given Names:
MICHAEL AARON

When employees at the hotel ask to see ID, they are quickly scanning for the appropriate data, such as "Michael Aaron". When this is seen in the "Given Names" section, the demand is satisfied. On only one occasion, I witnessed a hotel clerk question the full name not matching the reservation. I simply stated "You are correct, Michael Aaron is my given name but the passport division requires a surname to be added to all cards". This is absolutely true and means nothing, but it provided enough explanation to move on with the process. Obtaining a credit card displaying your first and middle names is quite easy, and is explained in Chapter Eleven. I believe this strategy violates no laws. However, it also provides the least amount of protection. If my client has a unique middle name or is running from a physically abusive person, I never consider this tactic. If you simply want a low level of anonymity while you attend a conference, I believe this is a strong consideration.

Reward Programs Concerns

Most enjoy a free stay or a complimentary upgrade at a hotel due to loyalty points. However, these come with serious privacy disadvantages. When you use the same loyalty account for all of your stays, you create a permanent record of your travel. You also generate a pattern of your history which could be used to determine future locations. If you always stay at a specific hotel over winter holidays while you visit family, and I can see your past stays on your account, I can assume where to find you at the end of the year. Theoretically, only hotel employees should be able to access these details, and this may not be a huge threat. Unfortunately, data breaches, rogue employees, and social engineering make this information visible to anyone who desires it. The simple solution is to either possess several loyalty accounts or none at all.

I currently have a loyalty card with both Hilton and Marriott in three different aliases. I switch it up while I travel and book my rooms with the lessons explained previously. However, if I am staying at a property where I will be meeting a high-risk client, I use no loyalty account at all. I use a clean alias with no history. These rewards profiles can assist with smooth check-ins, but come at a price. There is always a trail and you cannot delete your account afterward.

In 2017, I possessed the highest tier of rewards for each major hotel provider. I received frequent room upgrades, free cookies and fruit plates, and more free stays than I could use on personal travel. However, I gave it all up. The perks did not justify continuing the tracking of my whereabouts, even if under an alias. It was only a matter of time before the account was somehow associated with my true identity.

This brings up a scenario which I encounter often. A client needs to disappear, is ready to start using an alias during travel, but does not want to give up those hard-earned hotel points. I do my best to convince them that free stays and upgrades are not worth the risk. Some listen, others do not. If necessary, I encourage them to use up all the points with their family at a posh resort and get it out of their system. We can then start over when they return. Others absolutely insist on maintaining their status while using a different name. This is possible, but not advised.

Hotels do not allow you to transfer your points to another person. However, they allow you to update the name on the profile if you experience a name change. This is most common after a marriage (or divorce), but they also allow any type of legal name change. I am not suggesting my clients change their names (more on this later),

but I have assisted one client who really wanted to keep the points. He downloaded a name change form from his state, completed all the fields, and submitted it to the hotel chain. The legal paperwork was never processed through any government entity, it was just sent straight to the hotel. They accepted it and updated the name on the account. Again, this still associates you to your alias, and eliminates most of the privacy of using an alias. I do not recommend this technique.

Places to Avoid

If I want privacy, I avoid fancy hotels and resorts. There was once a day when the rich and famous could enter the Ritz-Carlton and expect a private and discreet experience. Today, prestigious entities present more privacy invasions than the smaller chain hotels. The following presents several scenarios I have witnessed on behalf of myself and clients.

- In Los Angeles and New York City, paparazzi stage in front of posh hotels hoping to photograph a celebrity. I have walked into a Holiday Inn with a household-name celebrity and no one noticed. I try to avoid places frequented by photographers with no morals.
- At fancy resorts, staff are trained to memorize the names and faces of all guests. They are also instructed to greet guests by name at all times. Loud echoes of "Hello Mr. Bazzell" any time I walk out of my room are not desired.
- Some resorts advise their staff to research guests in order to make small talk. While at a resort in Grand Cayman during a keynote under my real name, a beach concierge with whom I had never met asked me how the weather was in South Dakota. I do not think he knew what a PMB was.
- While at a beach resort in an alias name during a privacy consultation with a wealthy client facing death threats, I was approached by the pool concierge. She stated, "It is great to see you again Mr. (alias)! I can't believe it has been two years since your last visit!" I do not believe that she remembered me. I suspect she was told my name by other staff, researched my past stays in the internal computer network, and then attempted a conversation which would make most people feel special. The only thing she accomplished was to convince me I needed to change up my alias.
- While checking into a resort, the staff demanded to know my flight number for my departing flight. I was using an alias at the hotel but my true name during air travel. I provided a false number, and was immediately told it did not exist. I conducted a quick search and provided the details of a different flight. This sufficed until staff arrived at my room at 7 a.m. to escort me to checkout in order to make my flight. I should have paid more attention to the departure time of my alias flight.

Overall, you are watched, monitored, and tracked more in expensive resorts than any other short-term lodging option. These are all minor issues to most, but could be devastating to someone trying to disappear. This provides numerous opportunities for an adversary to identify your room number by simply following you and listening to employee chatter. I would never consider placing a victim in this situation. I prefer the anonymity of standard hotels where the staff cares very little about your presence.

Rental Homes

You may need to rent a home indefinitely or while you are purchasing a house. The methods for each are identical. When I need to find a rental home for a client, I insist on the following.

- The house or unit must be independently owned. Large apartment companies will demand a hard credit check and valid SSN from the applicant. This is a deal-breaker. Independently-owned buildings possess owners who can make their own decisions without following a policy manual. Cash can also influence a landlord.

- Utilities must be included in the rent. This often leads to higher overall costs, but better privacy. I will not need to convince the power company to accept an alias name without DOB and SSN in order to activate service. We will tackle that later with a home purchase, but included utilities is optimal while renting.

I always start my rental home hunt through traditional advertisement avenues. I avoid Zillow and other online options. These tend to cater to larger rental companies or individuals with numerous properties. These scenarios often lead to meetings with property managers on behalf of the owners and an immediate application including background check and credit pull. Instead, I start with newspapers.

I found my first apartment in the classifieds section of a local newspaper. This may show my age, but that was the only option back then. Today, many modern rental offerings avoid printed distribution, especially when the internet provides a broader reach. In my experience, the perfect landlords are those who still advertise in the papers. I try to seek out those that have only one or two rental units and prefer to place signs in the yard instead of hiring property managers to recruit tenants. A later chapter tells a true story of working with a private landlord in order to hide a client. Until then, I will include a few notes about the process.

Background checks and credit pulls are off limits. Some may believe that these inquiries do not attach the client to the future rental address, but I disagree. Services such as Experian's Tenant Credit Check and others ask for many sensitive details such as the name, DOB, SSN, and previous addresses of the prospective tenant (the client). These details are also demanded from the landlord. Experian will possess full rental histories of previous tenants from this landlord who chose not to protect their privacy. Therefore, Experian already knows the likely address of the rental unit. They can easily associate the client with the address before the credit report is created. This data is then shared with other divisions of this data mining empire, as well as the next inevitable breach.

My ultimate goal is to never reveal the true name of the client to a potential landlord. Once I find a property suitable, I make direct contact with the owner. I explain that my client is a domestic violence victim and is scared to tell anyone where she lives. When I encounter a landlord who has no empathy for this, I move on. I always offer a cash deposit and first month of rent, as well as the promise of a cash monthly payment in advance. This goes a long way. In dire circumstances, I have offered up to six months cash in advance for the luxury of anonymity. There is no magic to this. You simply need to find the right property owner. Cash is king. It will provide more negotiation power than you might expect. My experiences with a client which are explained later will provide much more detail.

In 2020, I began using my business in order to ease the process of finding short-term rental homes for clients. I established an "anonymous" LLC for this purpose, obtained an EIN, and opened a checking account. I always keep a packet of LLC documentation ready to show a potential landlord. This includes the certificate of organization, confirmation of EIN from the IRS, recent bank statement, and LLC checks. This new method has worked amazingly well, and was created after a conversation with a friend who travels long-term for work at various refineries. I asked him how he handled rental housing, as I know he relies heavily on cash while on the road and can be gone for six month stretches. He advised that he never arranges or pays for rental homes because his employer handles all of the logistics. This changed how I look at rental homes for clients needing three to twelve months of temporary lodging. My first test was in January of 2020 when a client requested assistance leaving an abusive situation.

She located a small home for rent by an independent landlord which included utilities. I asked to see the home and met with the owner. I advised that I owned a small company and needed temporary housing for an employee who was relocating to the area and was having trouble finding a home to purchase. I stated that my business would pay the rent and eagerly provided all of the paperwork mentioned previously (none of which included my name). I encouraged the owner to verify my business details with the IRS and the bank. I also offered a "proof of funds" letter from the bank disclosing the current balance to settle any fears that the owner may have about getting paid. I offered to write a check for the first and last month on the spot and agreed to go to a local branch of the bank, if he desired, in order to verify the check. The owner agreed to rent the home directly to

my LLC with very little interest of knowing the employee's name. He was more interested in my line of work. I told him I managed finances for wealthy people and my new employee was in training for a similar position. Technically, this was the truth. I do receive payments from wealthy people for various services, and I would be teaching my client ways to replicate my process for her own benefit.

Since this experience, I now have a better understanding of the overall tactic. Most landlords assume that a business is less likely to stiff them on rent than an individual tenant. They also hope that future rental opportunities may exist from my business. Best of all, I now use these positive experiences whenever an owner wants a reference. I recently witnessed a potential landlord call a previous landlord asking about my LLC as a renter. After their quick conversation, I wrote a check and received keys to the home. Neither of them knew my real name. Much of this technique involves confidence, manners, and respect toward the owner.

In 2022, a client needed to rent a home for one month while completing the purchase of a new anonymous home. She was heavily targeted with online harassment and threats. She was in physical danger at all times. This was in a busy downtown metropolitan area and there was no chance of locating a rental home which was not maintained by a real estate company. We found a suitable location willing to accommodate a one-month rental, but then we were given the application. The real estate company demanded full name, DOB, SSN, cell, email, three previous addresses, three references, bank details, credit card accounts, and income with recent tax return. Any details provided would be shared, abused, and eventually leaked. Burner contact information was easy, but the rest presented problems. I pleaded to the company with excuses of identity theft, credit freezes, and privacy concerns, but they would not budge. I proposed falsifying information but my client understandably did not want to lie within this application. Instead, we became creative while being honest.

We had recently established a generic LLC titled similar to "Jane Crafts LLC" (not her name) and established an EIN in the name of the business. This allowed us to order checks which only displayed "Jane Crafts" as the account owner. I provided the name on the application as "Jane Crafts" and the new EIN as the SSN. I included my client's real DOB since her name was not on the application. I disclosed her true LLC bank account details and the card number associated with her business debit card issued by the bank. None of these were lies. Every detail was accurate for the new LLC, but nowhere did I clarify this was a business and not her name.

The three references were aliases I have personally used for several years, along with disposable contact information for each. All three numbers received a voicemail from the property manager. I called her back from one and provided an honest positive review of my client. I went further to say "She was a tenant of mine recently, always paid on time, and was never any trouble". This was technically true. She hired me to secure hotel lodging in an alias name for a week after she had escaped a violent situation. She paid me appropriately and truly never was a problem. When the management asked me for specific details about our tenant history, I politely stated that I did not feel comfortable giving out those details without permission from my client and "my state is weird about privacy laws" (which is also true). I again offered reassurance that she was a perfect tenant. A credit check was never executed due to the minimal length of stay.

My client paid the first month's rent and a deposit from her LLC checking account and the check cleared a week prior to the move. They requested a copy of her license, but she stated she did not have a local state ID yet (which was true) and offered a copy of a recent 1099 tax form. This was acceptable and she sent an email with an attachment. This attachment was a 1099 which my company issued to her company (Jane Crafts). It displayed her EIN and mine. I paid her $1 for a brief survey about my services and the 1099 reflected this $1 income, but she redacted the amount with a black box. Since this was under the $600 reporting threshold, I did not need to notify the IRS. On next year's tax return, she will add the $1 to her income. This tax form pacified the landlord and an ID was never required. I am sure she was lucky, and I could not always replicate that strategy.

She moved out after a month and recovered her entire deposit. She was a perfect tenant. While this was all somewhat misleading, there was no fraud. She paid her rent and caused no harm. She never provided her true name at any time. There could later be a connection between her and the LLC, but this was just a temporary stay.

Hidden Cameras and Unauthorized Entry

Regardless of whether you are in a hotel, Airbnb, rental home, or any other type of lodging, you should be aware of hidden recording devices and unauthorized access to your living space. In the past two years, I have had two clients who were surreptitiously recorded nude in hotel rooms and extorted for money over the recordings. Due to pending civil litigation, I cannot speak about those specific events. However, I can explain a typical extortion process which has recently impacted hundreds of victims nationwide.

The typical hotel customers provide their real name, home address, personal email address, and cellular telephone number during the registration process. By now, you know that this is risky behavior. However, I suspect that over 99% of all hotel guests have no concerns about privacy and willingly hand over these details. This information can be used against you when a rogue employee wants to contact you with threats of releasing sensitive content. Consider the following fictional example, based on true events.

- The night manager of a hotel is a creep and installs a small hidden camera in the bathroom of a few empty rooms. He places the devices behind some folded towels, in a tissue box with a pinhole, or within the shell of a smoke detector.
- The device is battery powered and recording is enabled by motion sensitivity. A micro SD card stores any video recorded.
- You check into this hotel under a real name and email address.
- The night manager assigns you to a room he knows to possess a hidden camera.
- You enter the room and change clothes and shower as normal.
- You check out the next day.
- The manager arrives for his shift and enters the empty room you were assigned. He replaces the SD card and inserts the original in his computer.
- He downloads the videos of you nude.
- He searches the customer log and identifies your name and email address.
- He sends you an email from a private account and includes an excerpt of a video displaying you nude in the shower. He threatens to send a copy to all of your friends and family if you do not pay him money or send self-created nude videos.
- You refuse to respond and he publishes the video to dozens of porn sites. He includes your full name within the description. A Google search of your name reveals these videos.
- He locates you on LinkedIn and identifies the names of your co-workers.
- He sends copies of the videos to people within your employment circles. He spoofs an email address to make the message appear to have been sent by you.
- He repeats the process as often as he receives new videos of new victims.

Does this sound ridiculous and far-fetched? It absolutely happens. Search "hidden camera found in hotel room" within any search engine, video website, or social network and you should be presented with plenty of evidence documenting this popular extortion technique. Using an alias is an important step to thwarting this behavior. It does not prevent the capture from a hidden camera, but it prohibits most of the extortion. If you used an alias name and email, the offender will think that is your real information. If he threatens to post the videos with your name on them, no one will know it is you. If he threatens to send the videos to friends and family, he will find no one connected to your alias name. This is only one level of defense toward this type of behavior.

I encourage all of my clients to conduct a thorough sweep for any hidden cameras within all temporary lodging situations. This includes rental homes, as some landlords have been caught spying on tenants. The procedures for identifying hidden recording devices varies from amateur solutions to expensive gear. I will outline my recommendations, beginning with simple and free methods.

- Visually inspect all areas of each room.
- Look for any inappropriate small holes within objects facing the shower or bed.
- Search common areas such as tissue boxes and clock radios.
- Search behind all towels in the bathroom.
- Look for holes drilled into plastic smoke detectors or walls.
- If your room has one brand of fire alarm devices throughout, but a different brand plugged into an electrical outlet, this is suspicious.
- Turn off all room lights and identify any LED lights emitting from devices.
- Always travel with a roll of electrical tape. Cover any suspicious holes or lights.
- Unplug the alarm clock and place it in the closet.
- Inspect all vents for suspicious devices.

If you discover anything which appears to be a hidden camera, choose your next steps carefully. First, personally document your findings with photos and videos. Next, contact the police and file an official report. Allow them to retrieve the device and maintain control of it as evidence. Never complain directly to the hotel staff. This could result in destruction of the device and a cover-up. If you are a high-profile target forced to use your real name upon check-in, immediately request a different room after you are assigned a specific room. If a rogue employee has assigned you to a room with a known hidden device, demanding a new room on a different floor may provide a small layer of protection.

Personally, I always travel with a small amount of gear which assists in quickly identifying suspicious devices. There are a plethora of affordable "hidden camera detectors" online, but I find most of them to be useless. Some have reported that viewing the cell phone camera through the front-facing screen while the lights are out will reveal covert lenses, but I have found this to be unreliable. I now rely on two pieces of hardware any time I stay in temporary lodging.

The first is a Milwaukee Spot Infrared Imager unit. This device was recommended by my friend and former colleague Tom Gibbons, and was discussed on my podcast with him as a guest (Episode 119-How to Find Hidden Recording Devices). This handheld device displays heat sources. Any small camera will possess some type of power and will generate heat unique from surrounding areas. This unit costs $200-$300, but there are more affordable options on Amazon. I will warn you that you get what you pay for with these. If you care enough to search for this type of privacy invasion often, bring the best equipment.

The next device which is always in my travel bag is an old Android mobile phone which possesses the open-source privacy app **Haven** (guardianproject.github.io/haven). Haven is an Android application that leverages on-device sensors to provide monitoring and protection of physical areas. Haven turns any Android phone into a motion, sound, vibration and light detector, watching for unexpected guests and unwanted intruders. Before I explain the usage, let's focus on the installation and device selection.

Fortunately, I possess numerous old discarded Android devices from my government days. These are outdated by today's standards, but will function appropriately for our needs. I have tested Haven on a Samsung Galaxy S4 and various versions of the Motorola Moto G series. First, conduct a hard reset to the device, wiping all data and restoring it to the factory default. You can find details for this specific to your device online. Next, install the Haven app from the Google Play store. If you have a rooted phone with a custom ROM, which was explained earlier, you can also load this app from the F-Droid open-source app store. Always use the latest version of the app and visit its website for the latest details.

Once Haven is installed, scroll through the welcome screens. Select the "Configure" button and accept the default value for each option. You can tweak these settings later if needed. Optionally, add a telephone number for notifications via Signal. I do not use this feature as I do not care to receive remote notifications or connect this device to my Signal account. Your threat model may demand this level of protection. Exit the settings to the main Haven screen.

Please note that this device will only be used for this single purpose (monitoring a room). It will never possess a SIM card and will only use public Wi-Fi. This is a Google hardware device and privacy is always a concern. It should be turned off when not in use and never be present in your home. Therefore, I accept the privacy violations of Google in order to gain the benefits of this app when needed. Please consider whether you need a device like this in your life before jumping in. I also use this Android device to bypass check-in at hotels which offer the ability to unlock the room door wirelessly from the app.

Once you are at the main Haven screen, which will likely display a view from your front-facing camera, choose the settings icon. If desired, enable Video Monitoring and exit the settings menu. Selecting the "Start Now" option on the main screen enables monitoring. The camera will detect movement, the microphone will detect noise, and the internal sensors will detect movement of the device. Begin monitoring and test the settings. When you make a sound, you should see that indication on the home screen. When you move anything in front of the camera, it should detect this activity. You can safely turn the screen off and your device is now monitoring the room.

In a typical situation, I enable all options whenever I leave my hotel room. I place the device propped-up on the desk, leaning against something, in the room while plugged into a power source for charging. The front camera faces the bulk of the room. When I return, I stop the monitoring application and choose the "View Logs" option. This presents any triggers during my absence. This includes any images and videos collected from the camera, audio recordings from the microphone, and notifications if the device was moved. If housekeeping enters the room, I will see video evidence of this and any associated audio files. This small device will let you know when someone entered your room. Further, it allows you to see and hear their actions. This is a powerful tool.

It could also be considered illegal in some situations. A few states in the U.S. are considered two-party states in regard to audio recording. Both parties (you and the people being recorded by your device) must consent to the recording. If housekeeping or anyone else in the room does not know about the recording, they do not consent. This could place you in a criminal situation and must be considered. Furthermore, some other countries have very strict laws about surreptitious recording of any sort. You do not want to be placed in detention in China for such a violation. I have a solution that works well for me.

When I am staying in a hotel, my Android device with Haven installed is always monitoring while I am away from the room. I carry a small laminated placard which states "DO NOT ENTER, RECORDING IN PROGRESS". I place this on the outside of the entry door. This notifies housekeeping of my desires for no one to enter. It also serves as a deterrent to anyone with malicious intent. It indicates that someone is in the room, and this may not be the best burglary target. Finally, this notifies anyone who may enter that a recording device is present. In most situations, this waives any consent issues.

If you chose to enable remote notifications via the messaging application Signal, you can receive the audio and video from your monitoring before returning. This can be beneficial in case you are notified of a threat which would make you stay away from the room. In extreme situations, this app could make you aware of a physical threat from miles away. Imagine if the app displayed video of an intruder hiding under the bed or hotel staff hiding a camera in the ceiling of your room. Again, these scenarios may sound far-fetched to you. For my celebrity clients, it is more common than most would think. Haven does not work on iOS, but I am fine with that. I would never want this app on my primary communication device. It works best on old phones which can be left behind in your room without worry about theft. Please become familiar with the app before relying on it in a real scenario.

In closing this chapter, I hope that you now have an interest in protecting yourself while away from home. Each layer presented here has an impact on your privacy. Alias names, eavesdropping identification techniques, and intentional monitoring solutions will keep you safe from both random and targeted attacks. If you are considering an escape from an unsafe situation, please start with the following considerations.

- **Plan well, but secretively**. Only tell trusted people about your plans, and only if they truly need to know. Save enough money for your escape without generating suspicion.
- **Wipe your tracks**. Clear any internet search history on any computers which can be accessed by your adversary. Do not leave with any mobile devices previously used. Change your passwords to your email and delete any communication which might reveal your new location.
- **Collect the essentials.** Make sure you possess enough clothes, medicine, and any other requirements to get you through the first stage of your escape. Store this somewhere private and secure until time to leave.
- **Possess all necessary documentation**. Make sure you have your real ID, passport, birth certificate, and anything else in your name. Plan to never return to your abusive environment and possess all essential documents and paperwork required to prove your identity and access any financial accounts.

International Considerations: Many readers have reported difficulties using alias names while traveling in countries other than America. I have also witnessed resistance from hotel clerks demanding to copy my passport. Many foreign countries have rules which require hotels to retain a copy of official identification from each guest. This can be quite invasive. I do not have a magic solution for every situation, but I provide the following experience I had at a Hilton in London in 2018. Upon arrival at my hotel, I advised the clerk that I wished to check in, but had a question to ask first. I explained that I just arrived in London, and that I left my passport at the airport during customs screening. I further explained that I had received a text message stating that my passport was found and that it would be delivered to the hotel the following day. I asked specifically if the hotel would accept the package and hold it for me. This was a ruse, but it set the scene for my inability to show ID. I offered her my secondary credit card in my alias name (which was used to make the reservation), my Hilton rewards card in my alias name, and my "employee ID" from the company I own, also in my alias name. She happily accepted these items, made a copy of my credit card, issued my room key, and assured me that the staff on duty the following day would deliver my package. I suspect she forgot all about me within an hour, and I never provided a copy of my passport.

CHAPTER TEN
HOME PURCHASE

This entire book has been preparing you for this chapter. I believe the single piece of information which should have the most privacy protection is your home address. This is where you sleep, where your family spends time, and where you are most vulnerable. If someone wants to harm you, it will likely be at your home. If reporters want to question you, they will stake out at your house. If you take no action to protect these details, you will be on hundreds of people search websites within ninety days after purchase of a new home. You will be a single Google search away from complete exposure.

I mentioned a few scenarios previously where you may want to hide your home address. As I am writing this, there is a Reddit thread asking for the home address of Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. In the first response, the full details of her apartment are legally presented. Last month, an online gamer was "swatted" by police when a competitor spoofed a call to 911 claiming a home invasion in progress at the gamer's address. Last week, a lottery winner was bombarded by members of the press at his home demanding to know what he would do with his millions, while exposing his address to the world. This week, an "Anti-Vaxxer" contacted me because a person with opposing views encouraged Facebook users to send hate mail and "Molotov cocktails" to her home address. Recently, a stalker was arrested for breaking into Taylor Swift's New York apartment. Next week, will someone have an interest in finding you?

We live in an entitled world where everyone believes they deserve access to everything. If you have received public attention for an unfortunate event, protesters believe they deserve the right to scream at you while you try to sleep. If you are publicly involved in a civil lawsuit, journalists believe they have a right to bother you at home at any time desired. I believe things will get worse, and we should be proactive in protecting our address. Because of this, I never purchase a home in my real name, or in the name of a client. I use trusts, LLCs, and nominees to hide the true identity, and I do this while obeying the law. This chapter will be intense at times, and I do not expect every reader to apply all tactics. I present several options as I go, and anything you do to protect your information helps. I also discuss a few of my failures, which are often the best education. I ask that you take a moment and question your own level of threat. Is it at all possible that an adversary may try to find you? Is there any scenario where having a public home address could backfire on you? If either answer is yes, I hope you consider an anonymous home. We cannot predict the future. Once an undesirable incident unfolds, it is too late to hide. You simply must be proactive.

Home Search Considerations

The first step toward obtaining your private home is to consider the overall location. You may already know the general area where you want to live, but there are privacy implications everywhere you look. If you have flexibility within the exact area you wish to purchase a home, you should consider the following.

- **County vs City**: In populated urban areas, there can be many privacy benefits to living immediately outside of city limits. Cities usually have more requirements for various licenses and permits. Everything from pets to parking requires personal information, and most will be placed within insecure databases. Counties, especially unincorporated areas, often have fewer requirements.
- **Occupancy Permits**: Some cities and counties require occupancy permits that identify every individual that resides in the home. Providing false information to this government entity is likely a crime. Avoiding the mandatory disclosure will bring unwanted attention to your home. A call to the local housing division should expose these requirements.
- **Government Presence**: I also look closely at the overall level of government presence within the community. While numerous free government services may be welcome to those who desire them, they come at a cost to our privacy. I pay close attention to the presence, and therefore demand, of law

enforcement. When I see police cars constantly present in a specific neighborhood, it tells me two things. First, this is likely a high-crime area. Second, there is an increased risk of being involved in a traffic stop or police report, which can become public information. I look for quiet areas without the need for much government presence.

- **Neighborhood Involvement**: I always look at the overall level of involvement of the local residents in the neighborhood. When I see a subdivision with an active Facebook page, I become concerned. This is an outlet for people to complain about their neighbors and speak poorly about others behind their backs. When a new person moves into a neighborhood such as this, especially someone who tries to be private, it usually sparks interest and investigation from people that have nothing better to do.
- **HOA**: Homeowner Associations can be very invasive to new residents. I try to avoid them at all costs. Some HOAs require all new owners to submit full details of all occupants and registration information for any vehicles. This is likely improperly stored and eventually shared with the entire neighborhood. Many HOAs possess leaders that abuse the limited authority they believe they have. Some force you to pay annual fees via personal check, and refuse to accept cash. While you may have success providing alias information, the constant scrutiny is unwelcomed by most.

Next, you should consider the method for your home search. Real estate professionals can be very helpful, and I will discuss choosing a proper representative in a moment. However, you will still need internet search resources. I always recommend conducting your own searches for a while before committing to professional help. This will give you a sense of home prices and areas you wish to target. There are some important considerations when using sites such as Zillow and Redfin.

All real estate search sites will push you to create a free account. This will allow you to save searches and receive alerts after registration. However, an account is not required in order to use the services. I encourage people to keep their own notes and never create an account. These sites contain powerful analytics that track users. The information collected about your home preferences, IP address, third-party cookies, and provided details creates a very unique profile, which is valuable to data mining and marketing companies.

Whether you choose to create an account or simply search "anonymously", there are some best practices. Always use an isolated browser which is not connected to any personal accounts. You could install a secondary browser such as Brave, and only use it for home searching. Do not sign in to any other services, especially email accounts and social networks. This isolation will prevent some personal data leakage. If you only wish to possess a single browser, such as Firefox, you can take advantage of Firefox's Multi Account Containers to separate home search traffic within a designated container. As previously stated, this is probably overkill since Firefox introduced "Total Cookie Protection".

Next, you will likely need a real estate professional during your search. The internet has given us most of the tools we need to find a home, but the viewing, negotiation, and closing processes are still easier with professional help. Since real estate commissions are usually paid by the seller, there is little reason to do this on your own. However, use caution. Many real estate representatives are pushing clients to sign contracts guaranteeing a commission. If you choose a house for sale by owner, you may be required to pay your chosen representative a percentage of the sale price. If the seller does not agree to the commission, you are on the hook. I never commit to real estate help until I have found the right person and the right contract. Many reputable representatives will not require a contract until you are ready to make an offer. This varies by location.

Choosing the right person to aid in your home search is very important. This is not the time to simply hire the last person you met who was showing an open house you visited. Because you will be purchasing the home anonymously, you need experienced help. When I am searching for a real estate professional (not all of them are "agents" or "brokers"), I start with an online query. I search for the styles of homes which interest my client. Next, I make a list of candidates who are selling these homes. I then read reviews and eliminate anyone that seems to constantly generate negative comments. From there, I contact each via email (the proper address to use is discussed in a moment) with the following message.

"Hello, I am new to the area and looking to purchase a home in the near future. Your online reviews were great, are you accepting new clients? If so, I will be purchasing under the name of a trust. Do you have experience with this? Can you disclose any of your experiences or any nuances with purchasing under a trust in _____ county? Thanks!"

In my experience, this will generate three types of responses. The first will be no response at all. You may seem difficult right away and not worth their time. Good, weed those people out. The second response is a canned message telling you how great they are and asking you to schedule an appointment. This may be acceptable, but only as a last resort. If you emailed enough people, you should see a third type of response. It will be very specific, directly answer your questions, and display confidence in the ability to title a new purchase in the name of a trust. This is the type of person we want. Schedule a couple of house-viewing appointments and see how you feel about the relationship. This person will be heavily involved in your home purchase.

My next test is to identify the person's willingness to assist in my quest. I first ask which title company they recommend, and then follow with, "What are their requirements to title into trust?" If the real estate representative reaches out, finds the answers, and provides the information to you in a timely manner, I place them ahead of others. When a person does not put the effort to provide clear answers, they are out of the race. I am looking for a person willing to do their homework.

Everyone knows someone who is associated with real estate. When you disclose to friends and family that you are house shopping, you might be bombarded with referrals. These should be avoided. When you contact a friend of a friend that is a real estate agent, you just lost all anonymity. Your real name will be entered into the provider databases and there is now a trail from you to the home you choose. I believe your chosen professional should never know your real name. That may sound harsh, but consider the following.

A client allowed a friend to be the buying agent on her behalf. The home was placed into a trust and her name was not present on the public county records. She placed the utilities in the name of the trust and did a great job of remaining private. Her friend entered my client's real name and details into the database owned by the large national chain realty association. After the purchase, my client began receiving junk mail at her home, addressed to her real name, asking her to refer others to the business that helped her during the purchase. A month later, she began receiving unsolicited mail offers for appliances and exterior cleaning services. The buying agent's company sold their customer list to third parties. My client is now exposed, and can never fully repair the damage. If you want a truly private home, you must watch every step and never disclose your real name to anyone associated with the sale.

Let's assume that you have found a few homes you want to view and you have identified a real estate professional with whom you want to start working. Before you meet, you should have several things in order. I will list these individually including considerations for each.

- **Email**: When you contact real estate professionals, assume that everything you provide to them will be shared publicly. They will register your email for unsolicited messages and share it within various marketing systems. I always create a ProtonMail email address for the sole purpose of the home purchase. It does not identify my name or the trust name. I keep it generic such as home.purchase@protonmail.com. The name associated with this account, which will be seen by recipients, is also generic such as "Homes". This is the only email I will use during the entire process, including closing paperwork. It will not be used anywhere else.
- **Phone**: Your hired professional will want your phone number. This will also be entered into the databases owned by the company and shared with numerous third parties. I designate a VOIP number for this, and choose an area code associated with the general location. I will never use this number for any other personal purpose. I expect this number to become public.
- **Name**: In my early attempts at purchasing an anonymous home, I was very restrictive over any information divulged to anyone. I found that telling someone, "I would rather not give you my name", was not well received. It also caused extra awkwardness during every encounter. I no longer do this.

Instead, I am Michael Johnson. I keep it simple. No one has ever asked for identification during the house hunting process. This will happen closer to the closing, and we will deal with that later.

- **Current Location**: Everyone wants to know where you currently live. Much of this is small talk in order to seem polite, but some is to identify the type of location you may desire. I always have a story ready for this. I usually go with, "I am renting in (nearby town) while I look for a new place". I avoid anything exotic such as Hawaii or anywhere else mildly interesting. If you get pushed for a specific address, have a nearby hotel address ready to go.
- **Current Employment**: One of the first questions you will hear from your house hunter will be, "What do you do?". Again, this is small talk, but anything you say will be documented somehow. Most successful real estate professionals add this to your profile and use it when they need a reference from a specific industry. I recommend keeping it simple. I usually go with, "I work from home as an accountant. It's pretty boring, I add numbers all day". There is rarely a follow-up to this, and you just set the scene that someone will be home at all times when you move in. This can be a burglary deterrent when questionable subjects start asking about you.
- **Business Cards**: In 2021, I assisted a client purchasing a new home. She struggled with small talk and had great difficulty presenting herself under an alias name. My solution for her was business cards. I created a generic card which contained her alias name, occupation, email address, and VOIP number. Any time someone asked for her details during her home search, she just handed them a card and said "It may be easier if you just keep this". This action immediately stopped all questioning, which relieved my client. I find the printable options sufficient for most needs. I use the cards from Avery (amzn.to/385p4zF), which are quite affordable. These can also be convenient when meeting neighbors.
- **Personal Interests**: In general, I hate this type of small talk. Questions such as, "What do you do for fun?" are used to form a relationship. If I say that I play baseball, the other person believes they must mention baseball on occasion in order to build my trust and close the sale. This is typical in all areas of sales. I just say, "I'm doing it now!" and move on. I caution people to avoid saying too much. While it may seem acceptable to disclose your passions for classical piano and vegan food, you just made yourself quite a large needle in a small haystack. Keep it simple.
- **Faraday Bag**: This one may be a bit on the paranoid side, but consider your cellular telephone usage while viewing homes of interest. If you subscribe to the 2-phone plan presented previously, you may want to prevent your device from connecting to cellular towers near your future home. This is especially true if your device is registered in your real name. When you enter a home address into your mapping application for directions, this is stored forever within some platforms. If you buy the home, in which you entered the address into your phone, you now have a small yet permanent connection from your device to your new home. I prefer to meet with my real estate people at their office, and then either ride with them or follow them in my own vehicle. My mobile device is in a Faraday bag during the entire hunt. If I want a photo of something, I ask my agent to take photographs and email the images to me.
- **Social Engineering**: My last piece of advice is to rely on old-fashioned social engineering when necessary. If questions start to become invasive, turn them around and get the other person talking about themselves. When I am asked, "What is your rental address?", I reply with, "Hey, that reminds me, what do you think of the Tempe Heights neighborhood? Do you live near that area? Where would YOU move to?". That should get them on a different track. This can be applied to practically any topic. When asked, "What do you like to do on the weekends?", I return a question of "What is there to do around here? Where do you hang out?". This may take some practice, but will go a long way in your future of being private.

Home Choice Considerations

In regard to choosing a home, most of this decision will simply be personal choice. When I am assisting clients with a history of domestic abuse, I want them to feel safe and have some extra security protection. If my client is well-known, I may place more priority on privacy. Regardless of your situation, I ask you to consider the following issues.

- **Privacy from neighbors**: Most people that reach out to me for help buying a home anonymously have a strong interest in privacy. I first look for privacy fences and windows which do not expose the inside to a direct view from the street. I do not want the interior to seem like the outside is watching in. Big windows and glass doorways are nice, until they are a security and privacy risk.
- **Garage to hide vehicle**: Possessing a garage is vital for any home I will consider. This has nothing to do with the security of the vehicle(s). A properly garaged vehicle does not expose license plates to public view. Attached garages are best, as a vehicle can be loaded for a trip without the neighborhood knowing you are packing.
- **Interviews**: This plays a large role in my selection of a home. The residents surrounding a home can give quite an indication of potential problems, or lack of. I usually conduct a search of the neighborhood on people search sites, identify the residents, and take a look at their social networks. This gives an overall vibe of the community and may identify any bad apples. Researching police reports online is also beneficial. If your area does not provide this, strike up a friendly conversation at the local police department and ask about that specific area. Finally, I place a lot of emphasis on my own "street walk" around the neighborhood.

When I was conducting my street walk for a client in northern Arizona, I encountered a neighbor mowing his grass. I asked if I could step on his property and we had a brief conversation. I asked about the neighborhood as a potential buyer, and he had nothing but great things to say. It turns out the vacant home for sale was the issue, and the entire neighborhood saturated local police with every witness of a drug sale or physical altercation at the residence. The problem-residents finally moved due to the pressure from a proud neighborhood. When searching for a home for a violence victim, I welcome concerned neighbors that are not afraid to get involved. My final question was, "What were their names?" The man responded, "I have no idea, we keep to ourselves for the most part out here, until you cause trouble". Perfect.

You can make any home private with anonymous titling, but you cannot magically make it secure from the burglars on your street. I typically place more emphasis on the surroundings of the home than the house itself. I care more about feeling private and secure than the drop ceilings or hardwood floors. Always take your time and keep these things in mind.

Radio Frequency Monitoring

When I found the home I wanted to purchase, I had one last piece which needed attention. I wanted to know the types of police calls received in that neighborhood. I could access police calls for service and partial reports through the city's website, but those never tell the full story. I wanted to hear for myself. This is why I always spend a couple of days monitoring police radio frequencies for the area. There are two ways to accomplish this.

I like to program a portable police scanner with the frequencies of the departments or divisions responsible for all calls for service within the area of the home. I rely heavily on **Radio Reference** (radioreference.com) to provide the information I need for programming. I then leave the scanner on in my vehicle while I explore the neighborhood. If I can receive the transmissions from my current lodging, I leave the scanner on throughout the day.

I am listening for the types of calls and consistency of interaction. If I hear officers taking reports of vehicle burglaries every morning in the target neighborhood, that is concerning to me. If there seems to be a high number of drug-related arrests, that may influence my decision. However, if most of the calls are vacation checks, business checks, and other proactive patrol scenarios, this is a good sign.

Any time I hear officers doing anything proactive within the community, this tells me that staffing is appropriate; crime is manageable; and an overall desire to protect residents exists. Meaningless public statements from a department's Facebook page should not convince you that an area is safe. Use your own eyes and ears to make your own informed decision.

Possessing a physical police scanner may be overkill for your needs. For most clients, I recommend an online service called **Broadcastify** (broadcastify.com). This free service allows you to listen to live emergency radio frequencies from anywhere in the world. I can be in Los Angeles but listen to real-time calls in New York City. The service relies on radio enthusiasts throughout the world. They configure their own radio equipment to scan a specific set of local frequencies and then broadcast the audio stream through Broadcastify.

Paid members can access historical recordings of any station. You could listen to the previous night's activity the following day. This is very beneficial for hearing the busy midnight shift without staying up all night. I maintain a paid membership at all times. It allows me to retrieve recorded audio of my own neighborhood after I hear about a possible prowler several days or weeks later. It is very affordable at $30 per year.

Home Purchase Considerations

Assume now that you have found the ideal house. You have already established a trust as previously explained. You have a person you trust to serve as your trustee, preferably with a common last name different than yours. You have a notarized Certification of Trust at your disposal, which is signed by your trustee. You are ready to make an offer, and it is time to jump in and commit.

During my initial explanation of my anonymous home strategy, I will assume you are paying cash. I know this just upset some readers. While most of my wealthy clients have spare cash to throw at a problem, the rest of us do not. I start with cash purchases because they are the easiest. I have never had any major obstacles in these scenarios. At the end of this section, I will discuss hurdles that enter into a home purchase when obtaining a mortgage. These will vary depending on your location and lender, but you have options in all situations.

The original offer and earnest money are fairly simple. The contract can be created using digital-only services such as DocuSign, and all of this will be performed by your real estate representative. You can state that you want the offer to be in the name of your trust, and that your trustee will digitally sign. You can use your previously given email address in order to receive the links to the online documents. The earnest money can almost always be in the form of a cashier's check. This is usually a 1% deposit based on the offer price. If you back out without an acceptable reason, the seller can keep this money.

In 2021, I encountered one title company which required the deposit to be submitted electronically via wire. This is not a huge deal, just not ideal. I explained that I had already purchased a cashier's check, but agreed that the remaining funds would be submitted electronically. This was allowed, but I expect more scrutiny in the future. A cashier's check does not identify you or your account and it is usually held by the chosen title company. The DocuSign electronic documents will arrive via email, and require the trustee to click "I accept" a few times. In optimal situations, the signature line only identifies the trust at this time, and not the trustee's name. You can specify this to your representation, but it is not vital. The trustee will be publicly exposed during closing anyway.

I prefer all DocuSign contracts to be delivered to a ProtonMail email address created specifically for this purpose. The email address will become public information and I do not want anything associated with a personal account. I create a free ProtonMail account for this purpose which can be accessed by multiple people if necessary, such as a spouse and trustee. Does your trustee need to be the person who clicks on the approval button for the documents? Legally, yes. However, it would probably never be scrutinized if you completed this formality. Use your best judgement.

Before I move on, I encourage you to research the title company before you commit to an offer. In many cases, the seller chooses the company to use, but you can request a different option if you are uncomfortable with the selection. I always call the chosen title company and ask the following questions.

- Can the deed be placed in the name of a trust?
- Does the trustee's name need to appear on your internal documents?
- Does the trustee's name need to appear on the county deed?

- What documents will you need?
- I have a Certification of Trust, will that suffice?
- Is there any specific wording you need on the Certification of Trust?
- Can my trustee sign from a remote location?
- If you demand a "wet" signature, can this be notarized and sent via overnight mail?
- Will anyone need to be present at the closing?
- When do you need funding?
- Do you accept a cashier's check for earnest money?
- Do you accept a cashier's check for the final balance?

I am looking for acceptable answers and an overall confidence in their ability to title a home in a trust. I have found a few title companies that were completely incompetent, which caused more problems for me. As the buyer, you have the power in this sale. Make sure you are comfortable with the title company selected for this transaction. They work for you, and you have the power to find a better option. I typically call three title companies before I make a choice.

Some sellers will require a proof-of-funds letter. With a cash purchase, this is a document created by the bank holding the funds confirming that a specific amount of money (determined by you) is currently available in the account. I try to avoid these with the initial offer, but I am never surprised to see the request on the final acceptance. If this is required, I will explain bank accounts in trust names in a moment. If securing a loan, this is a document created by the lender acknowledging pre-approval for a specific amount.

After some negotiation, an offer is usually accepted by both the buyer and the seller. There will be several digital "signatures" during this process, all in the name of the trust, and preferably without the trustee's name. Some title companies will insist that the trustee's name is present, and the line will read similar to The Home Buying Trust, John Wilson, Trustee. This is acceptable, as this information will be needed at some point regardless. These documents should stay fairly private, but this data will be used for public documents eventually. Please revisit "Choosing a Trustee" in the legal infrastructure chapter before you commit to someone.

Assume that you now have a contract for the house. The rush for inspections begins, and you need to schedule numerous people to visit your potential new home. This can feel quite invasive to a privacy-conscious person, and I see many people make numerous mistakes at this point. Any company that is hired will demand information from you. Furthermore, they will contact the title company and retrieve any details that it possesses. The service companies will abuse this data by sharing it with third parties, and you have almost no say in the matter. Anything you provide will eventually be public information. Approach with great caution, and consider the following incident which happened to a client in 2018.

My client hired a local home inspection service to inspect the entire house. She found a company with great reviews and felt confident in hiring the service, which she found online. The inspection company used a service called Porch for all reservations and billing. These online services make it easy for the contractor to focus on the job and not the logistics. While convenient for the workers, it is a privacy nightmare for you. The following five excerpts were taken directly from the porch.com privacy policy website in 2019.

- "We may share your information when you consent or direct Porch to do so. Depending on the circumstances, consent may be expressed (i.e., you specifically agree either verbally, in writing or electronically) or implied."
- "You consent to be contacted by these parties by telephone, email, mail, text (SMS) messaging, fax, or other reasonable means at any of the residential, cell or fax phone numbers or addresses you provide, even if they are listed on a national 'do not call' or 'do not contact' list. You agree that these communications may include prerecorded, artificially voiced or autodialed telemarketing messages, and that they may be monitored and recorded for quality assurance and other reasons."

- "From time to time, we may partner with third parties to offer discounts, rewards or other programs or promotions. We may disclose the personal information of the participants in the programs to those business partners. ...We will disclose your personal information to those business partners when you consent to that disclosure, including consent implied by your agreement to the applicable program rules."
- "We may decide to sell, buy, merge or reorganize our own or other businesses, conduct a securities offering, or do a joint venture or other strategic transaction. We could also be involved in a bankruptcy, liquidation, dissolution or similar transaction. Any such transaction may involve disclosing personal and other information."
- "We may share aggregated, non-personal data with service providers, advertisers or existing or potential business partners."

In summary, any information provided can (and likely will) be shared, sold, given, traded, or lost to any company that may have interest in you as a new homeowner. Deals like this are the reason that we all get bombarded with unsolicited mailings in relation to home ownership when we move into a new house. While some may enjoy the promotional material, we have a more important concern. The more your name and address are shared with marketing companies, the faster your information will appear publicly online. If you want to keep your name and address private, you have two obligations.

The first is to avoid companies like this. My client was able to track down a direct telephone number for this inspection service and politely requested to book an appointment directly. Instead of citing privacy concerns, she stated she was not tech savvy and could not figure out the website. The service obliged and conducted the work, submitting a paper invoice and happily accepting cash for the job. The second obligation is to expect every provided detail to be publicly released. Therefore, you will only provide the name of the trust as the customer. If you receive grief for this, tell the provider that the trust is paying for the work, and your name being present could delay payment.

Once the title company starts doing their work, they will probably request to see the entire trust document. This is an extreme violation of your privacy, and they may "record" it with the county. Remember, the entire trust outlines you as the grantor and beneficiary, and your desires for asset distribution when you die. No private or government organization should ever need that entire document. That is the purpose of the certification of trust as explained earlier. Provide a notarized copy of the certification of trust to your representation to give to the title company.

The title company may also request a Statement of Authority signed by the trustee. This will be a form specific to each company, and allows them to continue their work in good faith that the trustee approves all of these actions. This may specify the address and timeline, and is acceptable. All of the future digital signature documents will likely display the trustee name after these documents are provided.

This brings up another important point. You should never need to deliver anything directly to the title company. In my purchases, I never step into a title company's office. They do not know what I look like. By not being present, you cannot be tricked into signing something or displaying identification. Allow your real estate broker to earn their commission and do all of the leg work.

Assume now that the inspections are acceptable and you are ready to proceed with the purchase. A closing date will have been set by the title company, and they will demand the remaining money to cover the purchase price of the home. I now present purchase protocols for both cash and loan transactions. Let's start with the easiest option of purchasing a home without a loan.

Anonymous Home Purchase (Cash)

When paying in cash, I always recommend providing the funds a few days prior to the closing date. Some title companies want the check to "clear" before approving the transfer, especially when the situation is unique. This brings us to the next dilemma. How do you pay the title company anonymously? This can get a bit tricky. The official answer is that you can never have 100% anonymity when buying a home with cash in America, even with the use of a trust. The exception might be homes under $25,000, but that is not very applicable to our situation. This is because there is always a paper trail of the financial exchange. You cannot show up with $300,000 in 100-dollar bills and walk away with the keys. Any check, even a cashier's check, can lead back to you. Therefore, our desire is to be PUBLICLY anonymous. If the IRS wants to prove you bought a specific home, they will succeed. They have the power of court orders to financial institutions. If a private investigator or journalist tries to determine your home address, we can make that extremely difficult, if not impossible.

When I began assisting with anonymous home purchases in 2015, I was able to present a cashier's check for practically any amount. This check was issued by the same bank that my clients used for personal accounts, but the check number was not directly associated with the client. The bank could disclose transaction data if provided a court order, which would identify the client, but the title company would have no details about the client's account. This worked for a couple of years until wire transfers became the mandatory procedure. Today, practically every title company will demand an electronic wire transfer for amounts over $25,000. Most companies claim this is due to fraud, but wire fraud is more abundant than check fraud. I believe that title companies demand wire transfers because it provides less liability than a check. It is easy to immediately confirm a transfer with the issuing bank.

I have given up my fight to provide a cashier's check for the home purchase. My last success was in 2017, and it was quite a struggle. Today, the only sales which accept cashier's checks are auctions of foreclosed properties. I see many bidders bring numerous checks in various amounts, such as $25,000, $50,000, and $100,000, in order to make immediate payment. There is less scrutiny on these lower purchase prices. When purchasing a home through a more traditional process, I provide the final purchase amount via wire transfer from a new account created in the name of the trust. This should be done with much thought, and please consider the privacy implications before submitting a wire.

A wire transfer is an electronic transfer of money. A traditional wire transfer goes from one bank or credit union to another using various computer networks. In order to send a wire transfer, you need specific instructions directly from the recipient (title company). These details are given to your bank, and the wire transfer request is prepared. You may be charged a small fee, and the transfer is almost immediate without a hold on the funds. You must identify the account which will provide the funds. If you have the entire purchase price sitting in your personal checking account, a wire transfer can send the money straight to the title company. However, this process will also send your name and account details. Any information provided to the title company is likely to be filed with the county, and can become public record. Therefore, this is a bad idea. My preference is to create a new account within the name of the trust.

It can be convenient to ask your current personal bank to create a secondary account for your trust in order to send a wire transfer from it instead of your personal checking. This can be a mistake. Consider the financial risk company Early Warning. Early Warning delivers payment and risk solutions to financial institutions nationwide. In 2017, I requested my own consumer report from them. It clearly identified all of my checking, savings, and investment accounts. It easily connected all of the accounts to me, and provided details for every deposit, withdrawal, and payment associated with each account. Early Warning shares this data with over 2,500 financial institutions and unknown third parties. In other words, this company knows when you add an account, all payment details including wire transfers, and historic balances since the account was opened.

My preference is to open a new account at a local credit union in the name of the trust. This should be done in advance of placing an offer on a home. While this institution may participate in systems that share account

details, there will be a degree of separation from your personal accounts. Your procedure for this will vary based on the trustee of your trust. There are two routes I recommend.

- If YOU are the trustee of your trust, you can create this account yourself. You will need to provide your DOB, SSN, and identification. Make sure the account is only in the name of the trust, and that your name does not appear in the title. This account is obviously associated with you, but could be used as a layer of privacy protection when only disclosing the name of the trust.
- If SOMEONE ELSE is the trustee of your trust, you cannot open the account yourself. Banks and credit unions will want to see the trust documents and will only allow the trustee to create the account. Obviously, they will want the DOB, SSN, and government identification from the trustee. This can be very uncomfortable for a trustee, unless it is a close family member or spouse. Consider making yourself the trustee before opening the account, and then amending the trust to assign someone else as trustee during the closing process. This will be explained in a moment.

Both of these options may seem sloppy and they both possess privacy exposure. Neither are perfect, but they may be your only options. I cannot guide you toward your best choice, but I can offer a detailed example of the actions taken by a recent client. I have included a modified timeline to show the approximate dates when each step was taken below.

- January 1, 2018: My client created her trust, assigning herself as the trustee and beneficiary.
- January 2, 2018: My client opened a checking account, in the name of the trust, with a local credit union. The account is associated with her SSN. She complied with all Know Your Customer (KYC) laws. Instead of the entire trust document, she only provided the certification of trust. She deposited enough funds to pay any potential earnest money requirements via a cashier's check from another bank.
- January 10, 2018: My client identifies the home she desires, places an offer from the trust name only, obtains a cashier's check in the name of the trust from the trust checking account as earnest money, and digitally signs the offer in the name of the trust without a specified trustee. The offer is accepted.
- January 11, 2018: My client transfers the approximate funds required for the complete purchase from the bank associated with her personal checking account to the new trust account, via cashier's check, from the original bank. This will require 2-3 days to clear.
- January 15, 2018: My client is informed of the final amount due to the title company to purchase the home and is given wire transfer instructions. She verifies the deposit into the trust account. The payment is due before the closing date on January 30, 2018.
- January 16, 2018: My client provides the wire transfer instructions to her credit union. A transfer for the final purchase price is issued and received at the title company. She made sure that only the name of the trust appeared on the wire, and that her name was not present within the digital transaction.
- January 17, 2018: My client amends her trust and assigns the role of trustee to her niece, who is a trusted family member with a different last name.
- January 20, 2018: My client's niece provides a real "wet" signature on the title company's statement of authority document and my client provides a notarized copy of the certification of trust document declaring her niece as the trustee, and signed by her niece. These two documents allow the niece to digitally sign at closing.
- January 30, 2018: My client's niece remotely executes the digital signature for the closing and my client now owns the home.
- January 31, 2018: My client amends the trust, re-assigning herself as the trustee. Some may choose to postpone this until utilities are activated.

As another reminder, I am not an attorney. In this situation, my client created and controls her trust. She made herself the trustee in order to open a checking account in the trust's name. This will be beneficial during utility activation. Before signing any paperwork with the title company or providing trust documents, she assigned her niece as the trustee. This gives the niece the full power to sign on behalf of the trust. The only name the title company knows is that of the niece. The client is still invisible to the title company.

Anonymous Home Purchase (Loan)

The previous section has been simplified, demonstrating a successful execution with a cash purchase. There are always hurdles faced throughout an anonymous home purchase. The biggest roadblock you will face is when obtaining a loan for a home. You are now at the mercy of the lender in regard to titling the home in the name of a trust. Be selective about your choice of lender. During the initial conversation, advise that you wish to place the home in the name of your trust for estate planning purposes. The first response will likely be positive, but you should push the issue. I recommend the following series of questions to a potential lender.

- **Can I place the home in the name of my trust at the time of purchase?** This wording is important. Some lenders will insist you place the home in your name at the time of purchase with the option to change the deed to the trust after purchase or after the loan is repaid. Titling your home in your name for a single day is enough to expose your address to the internet forever. Most lenders agree to this without verifying with the companies to which they will resell the mortgage.
- **Can the trustee be someone other than myself?** This will be met with resistance. I have witnessed larger lenders reject this while local banks allowed it. If you want to completely keep your name off the county record, it helps to have a trustee other than yourself. Make this requirement clear from the start, and expect to be denied.
- **Does the trustee need to be a co-signer of the loan?** Many lenders which have allowed a third-party trustee later demand that the person be listed within the loan. This is unfair to the trustee and is inappropriate. Obtain a clear answer on this now.

In most situations, your lender will allow you to title the home to the name of a trust, but will demand that you are publicly listed as the trustee or beneficiary of the trust. This is not ideal, but still provides many privacy benefits. If I know your address or the trust name, I will be able to verify through the county that you are the trustee. However, searching your name on the county site should not identify the address. Only the trust name is searchable and will be abused by third parties. Being your own trustee eliminates some anonymity, but that may be required to purchase your home. Titling to a trust simply makes you harder to find.

Overall, a lender will know everything about you, including your SSN and DOB. In order to give you a line of credit, a hard pull will be conducted on your credit history. They will know the address of your home and the name of your trust. However, they will probably not share these details publicly. The concern is a breach or third party which has access to this data. This is why I focus on smaller credit unions and banks. Ask whether the institution resells their loans or keeps them in-house. The latter will place much less scrutiny on the use of a trust. Paying with cash will always be easiest and most private, but possessing a layer of privacy by using a trust during the loan process is also helpful. For most clients, the goal is to stop home addresses from being published on the internet. This can be accomplished, even with a loan.

Tax Record Exclusion

I have had a handful of clients which possess an affiliation with law enforcement who desire privacy in regard to public property tax records. If your home is titled in your real name, many counties offer an option to request these details be hidden from public view. This requires completion of a specific form and a letter from your employer stating that you work in law enforcement.

The only time I recommend this is when you will not be placing the home into the name of a trust. If you are purchasing an anonymous home, I believe this option is an awful idea. In a way, you are making yourself a larger target. A rogue employee, or poor security protocols at the county offices, could expose you and your address. Furthermore, if you are the only home in your neighborhood with missing tax records, you must be someone special. I much prefer proper titling into a trust. You then need no additional "protection", which may actually backfire on you.

USPS Issues

In 2018, I helped a client purchase an anonymous home in a rural area of Missouri. After he moved into the home, he realized there was no mailbox on the property. He soon discovered that the entire neighborhood collected mail at one central group of mailboxes further down the road. These boxes required a key, which my client did not possess.

A call to the post office resulted in a demand for a list of occupants. This was met with immediate concern from the client. I have seen this many times, and the solution has been surprisingly easy. I recommend having your trustee contact the local post office. The trustee should state that they are not currently residing at the property, but that someone can be sent to the local office with the closing paperwork from the title company clearly identifying the trust and trustee name. The owner can then take in these details without the need to provide any type of identification.

Since the USPS is a government agency, we want to be cautious to never lie or give inaccurate details. Showing them the closing paperwork, identifying the full name of the trust and trustee, should be sufficient to add these details to the local carrier's roster. In my experience, possessing the original closing paperwork is enough to be given a key to the mailbox. I encourage the trustee to be listed on the USPS roster in order to accept any mail in that name. Often, property tax bills and utilities will be mailed to the trustee's name instead of the actual trust. The next hurdles include utilities and various home services. The next chapter will present numerous solutions to keep your name out of marketing systems which sell your data.

Children

Children present a new hurdle in the desire for an anonymous home. If your children are home schooled, you likely have no issues. If you reside in an urban area with competitive schools, this could present concern. Many schools demand proof of residency in order to eliminate children from other areas who are trying to avoid their own troubled schools. Overall, I recommend registering your children within the appropriate schools local to your home. However, do not provide your actual home address. This will be placed into many records, including some that will likely become publicly available online. I have found county schools to be much less restrictive about residency requirements than city schools. You will be constantly pressured to provide your home address, and the following ideas may buy you enough time until they stop requesting your personal details.

Obtain a local UPS box and provide that address as a street address. If questioned, state that you are in the process of building a home in a nearby neighborhood. Make sure your actual home address and the UPS store address are both within the boundaries for the chosen school. This keeps your actions legal. If asked where you are staying, provide a hotel address within this same area, and clarify that you want the UPS address used for all mailings. In my experience, you will only receive resistance if that school is strict about blocking non-local students from attending. Make sure that the school you choose is also funded with your property tax payment. This provides additional legal compliance if you should ever be accused of fraudulently enrolling your child into a specific school.

The use of a legal guardian, such as a grandmother, may be appropriate for you. A child can be associated with a legal guardian within school records and that person can sign documents when required. This may not offer a strong layer of protection, but could keep you off school records which will likely become publicly available. In my experience, private schools are much less demanding about home address verification, as they are directly funded by you. Most private schools do not have a specific residency requirement, and will accept a UPS address as the primary residence.

Bringing children into an invisible home can carry many more issues into your life. This will likely generate several long discussions about cellular telephone usage, internet habits, friends in the home, alias names, employment, and the protection of the details you have hidden. I hope that the overall lessons within this book assist with these discussions and decisions. I can assure you that many of my clients lead invisible lives, even

with children in the home. This will require more effort on your behalf, but the work is worth the reward. As an added bonus, creating privacy awareness with your children at a young age may provide many future benefits once they obtain their own independence and enter the world of data mining, credit abuse, and numerous other privacy violations.

Neighbors

Most residents in your new neighborhood will want to get to know you. They likely have great intentions and simply want to be good neighbors. While some may be nosier than others, everyone in your neighborhood is a potential threat toward your privacy. I may not take this harsh of a stance if it were a pre-internet era. Today, we are at risk of online exposure everywhere we turn.

During the home selection process, I mentioned how I monitor Facebook groups in order to identify potential problems before moving into a neighborhood. These same groups are now a threat toward your anonymity. Your neighbors will post any gossip they hear within these groups and use them as an outlet to vent frustrations with other neighbors. My best advice is to stay off the minds of these people. Do not speed through the neighborhood, keep your property maintained, and keep to yourself. These three suggestions will keep you out of the majority of the drama within online groups.

The next concern is new privacy invasion companies such as Nextdoor.com. Nextdoor is a social networking service for neighborhoods. Users of Nextdoor submit their real names and addresses to the website and posts made are available only to other Nextdoor members living in the same neighborhood. The premise seems like it offers a small layer of privacy by allowing people to communicate with neighbors without the content being publicly visible to the rest of the internet. However, I am very concerned with the amount of detail being collected by Nextdoor. First, let's look at three excerpts of the privacy policy.

- "We share information with service providers, affiliates, partners, and other third parties where it is necessary to perform the Member Agreement, to provide the Services, or for any other purposes described in the Policy."
- "We may share your personal information with certain third-party service providers to help us operate, provide, improve, understand, customize, support, and market our Services."
- "We share some aggregated information about our neighborhoods with government agency members and other organizational members."

In other words, much like every data mining company in America, they have the right to do practically anything they want with your information. After moving into my anonymous home, I received a letter in the mail from Nextdoor. It was an invite to join the group assigned to my neighborhood, and it specified the neighbor (full name and address) who requested Nextdoor to contact me. This already felt invasive, but I played along. I assumed this would be a great opportunity to learn more about my neighbors and apply some disinformation about myself.

The invite included a specific code which allowed me to join Nextdoor without providing address verification. I entered the code on the Nextdoor website, and it immediately populated my entire home address (but no name). The code was unique to my house. Nextdoor then demanded to know the name of the primary occupant of the home. I entered J Doe, and I was declined. An error message notified me that the system required a full name in order to complete the registration. I entered John Doe and was declined again. I was informed that real names must be entered, and I began to wonder how people would join if their name was really John Doe. I settled on John Williams and I was allowed to proceed.

Nextdoor asked me to complete a profile about myself which included interests, hobbies, and my overall reason for joining Nextdoor. Fortunately, there was an option to skip all of these. They then requested the full names and email addresses of all occupants, which I skipped. I was then prompted with a screen telling me I needed

to invite one friend to Nextdoor, and I was offered the option for Nextdoor to connect to my contacts in order to easily select someone. I skipped all of this.

Nextdoor then displayed all of the local addresses in my neighborhood which had not enrolled in the service, and asked if they could send invite letters to each of them on my behalf (disclosing my full name and address). Skip. Finally, they pushed me to install the Nextdoor mobile app (in order to collect more details from my device), which I declined. By default, all local users now see the email and full address in my profile.

I realize I am a bit paranoid, but this smells like a data mining company to me. Imagine all of the extremely accurate information they receive from the occupants of a household which is not available anywhere else. I suspect that we will see this data emerge into other people search companies. The email address I provided for my profile was unique to this service. I eagerly watch for it to appear within other online repositories. I will update this on my podcast if anything should surface.

I never posted to the neighborhood group on Nextdoor, but an announcement was made that I had joined. The entire group received a public message on the community wall stating my full (alias) name and street of residence. I then began receiving unsolicited messages ranging from "Welcome to the neighborhood" to offers for home improvement. Reading through the comments, I observed the usual offenders. Most were people complaining about speeders and ugly properties. On one post, the commenter identified the license plate of a vehicle which upset her, and a response identified the name and address of the owner. These groups are your next threat, and can quickly unravel all of your privacy strategies protecting you.

While updating this chapter in April of 2020, I logged in to my Nextdoor accounts in order to identify the ways in which communities were embracing this technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. I was not surprised to see posts shaming neighbors, including full names and addresses, who were not "social-distancing" correctly. However, most of the content was for the purpose of spreading unverified information and conspiracies associated with the area surrounding my neighborhood. It was a mess.

Because of the popularity of online groups such as Nextdoor, which allow abuse of collected data, I ask you to consider what information you will provide to your new neighbors. Expect that any details could become public within an internet group. If you upset someone, do you want your full details shared with other neighbors?

I insist on always providing an alias name and backstory to my neighbors. They all call me John. They believe I travel the country applying software patches to large commercial heating systems. I am boring to them and they do not think of me often. It does not change my relationship with them, but it makes me worry less when someone decides to mention me on the internet. No one knows my true name or background.

I stay away from any neighbors fueled by drama. If I am mentioned or documented within their social networks, the data will not compromise my privacy as it will not be accurate. This may seem extreme to most. However, there are no "re-dos" when sharing personal details with a neighbor. Anything provided will be repeated, embellished, and exposed. Choose wisely.

Finally, always remember the amount of effort which was required to obtain your private home. I doubt you want to unnecessarily repeat that process with a new property because of a small mistake which disclosed your true identity. Spend considerable time creating your new alias which will be presented to neighbors. Rehearse and repeat before "going live".

If you already created a Nextdoor account and want your personal data removed, you must first deactivate the account and then request deletion. I took the following steps once I knew I did not want to participate within the platform.

- Navigate to https://nextdoor.com/deactivate/.
- Select any reason desired.

- Deselect "Share this feedback with your neighborhood Lead(s)".
- Click "Deactivate".
- Navigate to https://help.nextdoor.com/s/contactus.
- Under "I have a question about", choose "My neighbor account".
- Under "Relating to", choose "Deleting my account".
- Click "I still need help".
- Create a message demanding deletion of your account and removal of all content.

Nomad Home Ownership

You may have some confusion about how the privacy benefits of nomad residency, as explained previously, can be combined with home ownership. There are countless scenarios which legally allow nomad residency while owning a home, and likely as many which do not. I am not an attorney, and I could never acknowledge every unique situation, but I have opinions on many common scenarios which I encounter often. I ask you to consider the following situations which I have witnessed during consultations with clients.

- A client became a nomad through South Dakota while leaving an abusive relationship. She eventually decided to purchase a primary home in South Dakota. The home was titled to a trust and her name was never associated with the purchase. She is employed in South Dakota, and her employer only knows her PMB address. She is legally a South Dakota resident and has no issues with the government by only using the PMB address. This could be replicated within Texas by using a PMB provider such as Escapees.
- A client became a nomad through South Dakota. She later purchased a home in California, titled to a trust. She lives in this home full-time and owns no other properties. She never rents another home or lodging. Eventually, California will demand that she become an official resident or face steep fines. Legally, she should become a California resident and surrender her South Dakota license.
- A client became a nomad through South Dakota and traveled the world in an RV for two years. He later purchased a home anonymously in Washington, but kept the RV. He continues to spend winters traveling through southern states and a few months in summer at his home in Washington. As a full-time traveler, he meets the requirements of nomad residency from South Dakota and calls his RV his "home". Washington does not have a state income tax, so he would not need to file a tax return to that state for any income earned while inside the state.
- A retired client became a nomad through South Dakota and later purchased two homes in the name of his trust in other states. He does not spend more than a few months per year (total) in either home. He travels most of the year. He chose to keep his South Dakota nomad residency and calls his PMB "home". If pushed by either state of his homes, he could prove he spends minimal time in that state.
- A client became a nomad through South Dakota. She later purchased a home in New York, titled to a trust. This is not her "primary" home as she travels often as part of her employment. She spends more nights away from her home than inside it. She calls South Dakota her domicile state. She spends much of her time in California as an actress, but owns no property there. Both California and New York could argue that she should be a resident of their state. She files a California tax return to claim her California income. She never works in New York and files no return there. This is a bit of a grey area, and should be discussed with an attorney.

Remember that you technically do not "own" your home. Your trust or LLC owns it, and you are the beneficiary. However, you should be cautious of state income taxes. If you earn money while physically inside a state with income tax, you owe your share. I have many clients who are legal nomads but spend much of their time in tax-aggressive states such as California. They make sure to possess a CMRA mailing address in California, and use it on their state tax returns, which claim all income earned while in the state.

Personally, I never recommend home ownership, even titled to a trust, in states such as California and New York, while trying to maintain nomad residency in South Dakota. It will catch up to you and you will face legal

scrutiny from state government. It is simply not worth the risk or hassle. If you plan to live full-time within any state, you should be a resident of that state. If you can justify nomad residency due to extensive travel or multiple homes and an RV, then you may qualify. Do not make this decision lightly.

In my experience, states without income tax on wages such as Alaska, Florida, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming are less concerned with nomads being in their states. High-income states such as California, Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Washington D.C. are always looking for residents who are not paying their share of state taxes. If you purchase a home in a non-nomad state, research the driver's license address requirements and apply the lessons throughout this book toward that situation. Most states simply want their tax, transportation, and other revenue from their residents. Keep them happy and live your anonymous life without scrutiny.

Purchasing a home "anonymously" can be quite difficult. I often see clients struggle with this. I recently advised a couple which were quite concerned with the entire process and their ability to complete the various steps without making mistakes. They did not plan on making the purchase for another year, but wanted to be prepared. I encouraged them to conduct a trial run, knowing they would not buy anything at this time.

They contacted a real estate professional; toured some homes; provided their aliases; and asked many questions about the specific process of purchasing a home in the name of their trust within their desired county. There was less pressure on them since they knew they could make mistakes. It also helped them learn more about various local neighborhoods.

My clients did well during their practice. They never disclosed any personal details. Some readers may be unhappy with me for potentially wasting the time of the real estate professional when my clients knew they would not buy any of the houses toured. Several months later, when they were ready to purchase, they re-contacted the same real estate agent and found a home. The commission was earned.

Selling Your Home

While you can get away without an SSN during the purchase of your home, it will likely be required when you sell it. This is because the title companies are required to report income from a home sale and must associate it with a specific SSN or EIN. The IRS requires you to pay taxes on income from a home sale if it exceeds a specific threshold. Most people are exempt from this taxation if the home was their primary residence, but title companies will insist on an SSN or EIN for the submission. I do not worry much about this, but I have a few rules for myself and my clients.

First, I only place a home for sale once I am completely out of it. I do not want strangers inside my home without me being present. I do not want any real estate professional to have access to my home at any time thanks to digital locks which can be opened with a smartphone. Once I am gone with no plans on living in the home again, I no longer care about the number of people entering and viewing the house.

Once I have moved to another anonymous location, I have no objection associating my name and SSN with the purchase of the previous home. I sold my house in 2015 which had no connection to me. It was in the name of a trust. During the closing process, I provided the trust documentation disclosing me as the beneficiary. My trustee provided a fresh signature. I provided my SSN to the title company for the check to be issued and confirmed a trust checking account associated with my true identity. There is now a trail from me to the residence, but I no longer live there.

Some may be worried about tax issues upon the sale of a home. The profit you make on the sale of your home might be taxable, which is known as capital gains taxes. This is why the title company will demand the SSN of the seller. The IRS typically allows you to exclude up to $250,000 of capital gains on real estate if you're single and $500,000 if you are married and filing jointly. For example, if you bought a home 10 years ago for $200,000

and sold it today for $800,000, you would have a profit of $600,000. If you are married and filing jointly, $500,000 of that gain might not be subject to the capital gains tax, but $100,000 might be.

This exception to capital gains taxes has a few requirements. The house must have been your principal residence; you must have owned the property for at least two years (there are some exceptions to this); and you must not have claimed the $250,000 or $500,000 exclusion on another home in the two-year period before the sale of the current home. Always contact a tax professional to understand your unique scenario.

Complications

Purchasing an anonymous home in America can present many complications, but is almost always possible. Some countries possess stronger privacy laws which do not make owner information public, and decrease much risk of associating your home to your true name. Some countries insist on documentation of the owners and occupants of every home, which can present more concerning problems. Please use the methods presented here in order to identify equivalent privacy strategies within your own country if needed.

I have never encountered a country which forbid home ownership by an entity such as a business or trust. If you do, consider the use of a trusted nominee for the documentation, but pay close attention to all fine print. Stay legal, but stay private. Most countries simply need a "face" to the purchase. They want a documented human being who has the authority to make the purchase with funds. They also want someone to hold accountable in the event bad things happen on the property.

I have witnessed rare situations where a state demands to know a trust's beneficiary or director during the home purchase process. These demands are typically enforced by the title company. While an estate attorney can help you navigate this intrusion, consider the following. An LLC can be the beneficiary of a trust. As the grantor of a trust, you can temporarily assign another person as the director before closing, and reassign yourself as director after. We can usually find privacy strategy loopholes any time a state begins to tighten their controls. This strategy exceeds the scope of this book, but information is plentiful online.

Finally, any future homes should not use the same trust as any previous houses. A new home is a perfect opportunity for a fresh start, and allows you the freedom to disclose your true identity with any previous purchases. Since the names of each trust, along with previous and current addresses, will be publicly available, someone could match your old home with the new house if the same trust is used. While this is unlikely to happen, do not take any shortcuts. The extra effort of establishing a new trust is justified. Expect to encounter your own unique hurdles during your home purchase. Your two biggest issues will be purchasing while obtaining a loan and insuring the property. I explain options for the latter in the next chapter, but loan companies will aggressively try to convince you to avoid titling in the name of a trust. Stand firm on this requirement and force them to work with you. Remember, home loan companies earn a lot of revenue from your monthly payments. Make them work for it.

Final Thoughts

As I updated this chapter, I was following the aftermath of the U.S. Capitol siege. Numerous FBI agents and countless amateur internet sleuths began hunting the people captured on video during the event. I learned about David Quintavalle. David is a retired firefighter from Chicago who was identified by members of an online community called Reddit as the man visible in numerous online videos striking police officers with a fire extinguisher. The internet mob began calling his home and threatening his family. He was labeled a terrorist by his neighbors. Individuals even showed up at his home to torment the household members. He was reported to the FBI and forced into an interrogation.

The problem is that David was not present at the siege. He was shopping in Chicago at the time (and kept his receipts as proof). An online stranger compared images of the suspect to David's Facebook photos and determined they depicted the same person. Without any vetting, the attacks began. A week later, the suspect in

the videos was identified as Robert Sanford and arrested. However, David still receives threats, and police officers continue to monitor his home. If you do not place photos online, you cannot be wrongly compared to criminals. If you title your home in a trust, your address cannot be easily searched online. If you prevent your home from any association to your name, you can stop internet mobs and journalists from confronting you at your home. David did nothing wrong, but continues the fight to clear his name. Do not let this happen to you.

Typical Client Configuration

A summary of this chapter was previously provided, but I believe I should present more details here. During an anonymous home purchase, I typically advise the following.

- Open a checking account in the name of the trust associated with you as trustee.
- Prepare a computer for anonymous online home searching.
- Meet with a home search specialist without providing your true name.
- Select your desired home.
- Amend your trust to appoint a new third-party trustee.
- Provide a Certification of Trust signed by your trustee to the real estate professionals.
- Provide a Certification of Trust signed by your trustee to the title company.
- Provide earnest money for the deposit via check from the new trust bank account.
- Complete all inspections in the trust name.
- Provide full purchase price to title company via bank wire from the trust account.
- If purchasing with a loan, have the funds wired under the name of the trust.
- Have your trustee digitally sign all documents before closing.
- Have your trustee manually sign closing documents in front of a Notary.
- Send all closing documents via certified mail.
- After purchase, establish utilities in the name of your trust or LLC.
- Establish home insurance in the name of the trust associated with your true details.
- Establish a local mail receiving option.
- Create rapport with your neighbors under an alias name (if desired).
- Never associate your home address with your true name.

CHAPTER ELEVEN
PAYMENTS, UTILITIES, & SERVICES

Assume that you have purchased your home privately. You have a "safe house" in which you can sleep well at night, without worry of any current or future adversaries showing up unannounced. You have completed a vital step, but now you have many smaller hurdles to conquer. Eliminating your name from the county records and public deed prevent much of the online scraping of public information. However, utilities and services are your next enemy. The moment you provide your name and SSN to a utility company for a "soft pull" of your credit, these details, including your new address, are shared with numerous data mining companies. I tested this in 2015.

I had just moved into a short-term rental which had no association to my real name. A former colleague owned the home, which had been vacant. I paid cash in advance and he handed me the keys. I only planned on staying a few months, so I was not extremely concerned with long-term privacy. I set up anonymous utilities, as explained here, with the exception of the power company. This was in California, and the power company was a government entity. This city provided its own power services. I was a bit new to the extreme privacy game and I was cautious not to provide any inaccurate information. I activated service with my true name and DOB. Within 60 days, my home address appeared associated with my name on a consumer information report available to third-party credit companies. I was burned. I expected this, and did not think much of it, as I was moving soon. Today, I would never repeat that mistake.

If you are not diligent about possessing anonymous utilities, your hard work purchasing a private home will have been wasted effort. Many power companies, insurance providers, and household services supplement their profits by sharing customer data with third parties. My rule is to never associate my true name with my home address in any way. This includes any service that has a connection to my home. This chapter will explain several options to help you create your own anonymous payments strategy. First, we need a way to make anonymous payments. I recommend a multiple-tiered approach. You should always have numerous options for payments available at any time. I have placed them in order of most desirable to least.

- **Cash**: This may seem obvious, but cash is your most anonymous payment source. I recommend that all clients maintain a steady supply of cash in the house in a secure location. Any service that accepts cash should receive it as a priority. Most clients make monthly trips to a bank branch a few cities away and make a withdrawal large enough to meet the demands for the month. I never suggest visiting a bank branch within or near your city of residence. This creates a pattern that can identify a great starting point to find you. Personally, I only withdraw money while traveling, and almost always outside of my home state. Cash leaves no digital trail, aside from video surveillance and fingerprints.
- **Virtual Currency**: The cleanest way to make an anonymous purchase is to use virtual currencies such as Bitcoin. If properly obtained and spent, there is practically no way to be identified. I explain many important considerations within this chapter.
- **Prepaid Cards**: In previous books, I spoke highly of a specific line of prepaid cards. Today, I do not have much preference. These will only be used for in-store purchases, and never online. In order to use any prepaid card on the internet, you must first register the card to your SSN. If you only use them in stores, no registration is required. I look for cards that are NOT reloadable, and display wording similar to "gift card". I prefer options which can store at least $500 to minimize the purchase fees for each card. Prepaid cards leave no absolute digital trail to you if purchased with cash, aside from video surveillance, fingerprints, and transaction histories. Transaction history is stored forever, and purchases with the same card can be identified and analyzed. In a moment I will explain how this compromised a client.
- **Privacy.com**: This is a requirement for me and almost every U.S. client. This free service allows you to possess unlimited unique debit card numbers which can be attached to a specific vendor. Payments can

include any name and billing address desired. Full details will be explained in a moment. There is obviously a connection to you, but it is not visible to the merchant.

- **Trust/LLC Checks**: Limited use of checks can be beneficial. Your bank can issue checks with the LLC or trust name without your name appearing anywhere. This creates a strong trail to you, but may be required on occasion, as detailed later. These are directly connected to your SSN, but the merchant does not see this association.
- **Secondary Credit Card**: This may exceed the comfort zone of some readers, but it can be helpful when a true credit card is required. This was previously mentioned in the temporary housing chapter, and will apply to a few payment strategies. I will discuss additional related options in this chapter. This is the least private of all options, as the number is identical to your personal credit card number. Credit agencies will have immediate access to this connection, as will merchants if you use both personal and alias cards.

Prepaid Cards

There is a common misconception about prepaid credit cards being anonymous. While they can offer a great layer of privacy, any digital card payment is going to leave some trail. I am very cautious about the original purchase location and any use near my home. It is also vital to keep possession of all cards, even after the balance has been spent. Leakage of the card or account details can immediately expose your purchase history and could jeopardize the privacy of your home address. I will explain with the following details from an experience with a client in 2018.

An important part of any complete privacy reboot includes continuous testing. You might purchase an anonymous home with 100% success. However, what happens after a year or two? Are you still private? Did your name and address leak onto the internet? By constantly testing our strategies, we can have more confidence that we have succeeded. In this case, my client reached out to me, through her attorney, in order to conduct an assessment of her overall privacy. She lived in a home titled to a trust, and never associated her true name to her address. She followed all of the rules set forth in this book, and was doing everything correctly. Her threat model was high. She had a stalker who went to great lengths to track her. When he found her in the past, he violently assaulted her and destroyed her home. I was happy to see her testing her privacy strategy.

I confirmed with the attorney that I had full consent to attack her privacy strategy in any way I desired. I then contacted her directly and made sure she had truly invited this activity. Once everything was in writing, I began my attempts. I started with the easy stuff, such as people search sites, data mining services, and public records. Even with my inside knowledge of her home address, I was unable to find anything concerning. I then tried to connect a cellular account to her, but was unsuccessful. My attempts to gain access to any digital accounts using recycled credentials failed. It was obvious she had done a great job maintaining her new lifestyle. It was time to step things up a bit, using a recycled tactic that helped in a previous situation.

In 2017, I was tasked with a cheating spouse investigation. I knew the name and address of the target, and my job was to determine if he was having an affair. I purchased a prepaid credit card from a grocery store and shipped it to the target. I claimed that he had won the $250 gift card when he completed an online survey several months prior. Even if he was suspicious of the story, very few people will turn down free money. This is especially true for people hiding another life from their family. Before shipping the card, I documented the details including card number, expiration, security code, and website to check the balance. I checked the card transactions every day on the card's website. I only needed to provide the card number, expiration, and security code in order to have full access to the history. After a few days, it was used at a Chili's restaurant a few towns away from his home. A few nights later, it was used at the same place. While monitoring the activity, I saw a pattern of use at the same Chili's every Tuesday and Thursday evening. This was where he was meeting his mistress. I provided this information to a local private investigator who captured photos of the two people eating, and later doing other things in the suspect's vehicle in the parking lot.

I borrowed heavily from this playbook for my new client. A condition of her job was that she must possess a LinkedIn profile, claiming employment from the company which hired her. It is a global company, so she did not need to provide any city or state of residence and employment. However, it was my start. I purchased a $100 gift credit card and placed it into a "Thank you" card. Inside the card, I wrote a small note thanking her for attending a conference at which she recently made an appearance on behalf of her company. I found evidence of this within an online roster of participants for the conference. I mailed this card to her name addressed to the headquarters of her company. I knew this would cause a delay, but that she would likely receive the card within an internal mail system. Nine days later, I saw activity on the card.

She used the card as payment at a gas station and later a Starbucks. This provided me a general area of her residence. Since I already knew her address, I knew I was on the right track. However, this would not necessarily expose her home if my actions had been conducted by her adversary. I patiently waited until she gave me the single purchase that I needed in order to connect her to her home. After logging in to the card's website with the card details, I saw a new purchase to a pest control vendor. A quick search of this business revealed that they offer in-home pest services such as spraying poisons to kill various critters. A documentation on the purchase made me believe that the card was swiped through a Square branded card reader, which allows people to accept credit card payment with their mobile device while on-site at an inspection. The purchase also displayed the transaction number, which could be used to track the purchase to an account.

I contacted the pest service and stated that I was in charge of purchasing for a small company and was attempting to identify a payment made for pest services. I provided the transaction number visible on the card's history to the employee and asked if she could tell me which property made the purchase in order to update my records. She immediately provided my client's alias name and home address. I thanked her for the time and ended the call. I had made the connection. I had exposed her home address.

You may think this tactic unfair, but her stalker is savvy and would never hesitate doing something like this or even worse. I do not place any fault on her for using the card. I had previously taught her to never use her real credit card for any home purchases and to only use a prepaid gift card or Privacy.com when absolutely necessary. What I failed to stress was the importance of avoiding the use of any gift cards associated with her name in connection to the home. I take full responsibility. She now knows to watch out for this type of attack.

The lesson here is that prepaid credit cards are great when needed, but still carry risk. In most situations, cash could have been used instead. Every credit or debit card maintains a permanent history of all transactions. Even though my client never associated her name with the purchases, I could still see a pattern of behavior. When it was used at the same Starbucks every day for a week, that makes me assume she lives in a specific neighborhood. This could lead me to more intrusive behaviors in order to identify her home. This may all seem far-fetched for some, but these attempts are the everyday reality for my clients.

My client was not upset at the trickery and seemed grateful to know about the potential exposure. On a more interesting note, she now uses this tactic to monitor her young son. She gives him prepaid cards as holiday gifts and monitors the locations where he spends the money. She assures me it is only to make sure he is not visiting shady places or potentially exposing the family any further. You may disagree with this type of behavior, but I respect her freedom to exercise her powers as a parent of a young teenager as she wishes.

My last guidance on prepaid cards is to use them sparingly and erratically. I only use one when I have no cash or cannot pay in cash. I purchase the cards while I am traveling in order to prevent the exposure of my local grocery store. I keep several cards in my possession at all times and label them with my own identification system. The following are examples.

- A "Travel" card which is only used while I am away from home. The purchase history contains transactions from several states and has very little identifiable pattern. It is never used near my home.
- A "Home" card which is only used when absolutely necessary in my home state. I never use it within the city where I live, but I have used it during local outings and errands. It has very minimal use, as I

rely on cash when near my home. An example of usage would be a merchant which will not accept cash, such as a local utility. This card is purchased with cash from a local convenience store with an outdated video surveillance system which only stores ten days' worth of video.

- A "reserve" card with no usage. It is clean and was purchased out of state. It is for emergencies when I need to make a sensitive purchase. If not used within a year, I transition it to the first slot to prevent expiration, and replace it with a new card.

These are just a few ways I have used prepaid cards. It is important to establish your own methods of privacy with which you feel comfortable. Most importantly, know the risks associated with any type of digital payment. In 2020, I observed many retail outlets demanding government ID for all prepaid card purchases. Some stores, such as CVS, even scan the ID and save it. However, other stores, such as Dollar General, typically do not have the hardware to scan IDs. I would never allow any store to scan my ID for any purpose whatsoever. Please use caution and identify privacy-respecting locations.

Privacy.com Masked Debit Cards

In simplest terms, this is a service which provides free masked debit cards which charge back to your checking account. A week rarely goes by when I do not use a new or previously created Privacy.com masked debit card. The reason is that these cards are absolutely free to the user. I currently use this service for many scenarios from one-time online purchases to recurring monthly automated charges. The mobile app and web interface make the generation of new cards extremely easy.

At the time of this writing, registration is open, but only to U.S. citizens. As explained previously, Privacy.com generates unique masked debit card numbers that can be used for online purchases without disclosing your real identity to the online vendor. The purchase is passed through to a checking account on file with Privacy.com, and the funds are withdrawn immediately, as is common with any traditional debit card. Due to increasing pressure from the financial industry, Privacy.com must verify all new users. This will require you to provide your real name, physical street address, and date of birth. This data will be used to verify you against public records. If you cannot be verified, you will not get an account. This is frustrating to privacy seekers, but I understand the necessity due to rampant fraud and federal laws.

The resistance I hear from most people is in reference to the requirement to connect a valid bank account to Privacy.com. Who is to say that the company will not be hacked? I agree that Privacy.com is now the weak link for a cyber-attack toward your account. However, the same could be said about your bank where you hold the checking account. In my experience, your bank is more likely to get hacked than your account at a masking service such as Privacy.com. Therefore, I proceed with connecting a checking account to Privacy.com. However, I do not blindly attach my primary accounts to this service. Instead, I strategically connect a dedicated account that cannot withdraw funds from any other personal or business accounts. This can be done in a couple of different ways.

Many financial institutions, whether traditional banks or credit unions, issue a primary checking or savings account to each member. Secondary accounts can be added under the umbrella of this primary account. These could be checking accounts to isolate proceeds from a home business or savings accounts to encourage various savings goals. While these are all openly connected to the primary account, they each have their own unique account number. A creation of a secondary checking account and connection of that account number to Privacy.com protects any assets that exist in any other accounts. This provides a layer of protection for those concerned about exposing their finances to fraudulent purchases.

Another option is to create a business checking account solely for use with Privacy.com. The negative result with this method is the likelihood of expensive fees attached to a business checking account. I have found that in each of these scenarios, there is usually a minimum balance that can be maintained to avoid any checking fees. I keep these accounts funded at all times in order to meet the minimum requirement, but not enough to cause a panic if fraud wiped out the account. Everyone's threshold for this will vary.

The best feature of Privacy.com is the flexibility in setting up each card based on what it will be used for. By default, cards are designated as "Merchant" or "Burner" cards. Merchant cards will attach themselves to a merchant (the first merchant to place a charge on the card). Once this has happened the card cannot be debited by any other merchant. Burner cards are single-use and expire after the first charge has been placed on them. These cards should be used for different purposes.

Merchant cards should be used for recurring payments. Since there is no charge for Privacy.com cards, you can create cards and leave them active indefinitely. Attaching to a single merchant is a huge security benefit. If the merchant spills customers' credit card data it will not affect you at all, because the original merchant is the only one who can debit the card. When creating a Merchant card, you can define a maximum transaction limit per week, per month, per year, or per charge. There are reasons to use each of these options. For example, when setting up a utility bill that will be charged monthly, you can use the "per month" option, limiting the total charge amount to what your maximum electricity bill might be. For items like auto insurance which are only billed annually or semi-annually, you may wish to use a yearly or per-charge total instead, setting the limit to your annual insurance rate.

Another important feature of Privacy.com Merchant cards is the ability to "pause" the cards. This allows you to ensure that the card cannot be used unless you log in to Privacy.com and re-enable it by clicking the "Play" button. This is a great feature for cards that are used infrequently on services like online retailers. For instance, you may wish to have an Amazon account, but you might not want the card to always be active if you only use it occasionally. This allows you to freeze the card, ensuring nothing can be billed to it by any merchants.

If desired, you can also associate multiple bank accounts to your Privacy.com account. This is useful if you have several accounts whose transactions you would like to protect with Privacy.com. All of the settings applied to Merchant cards can be changed at any time, with the exception of the merchant. Once the card has "locked" to a merchant there is no way to reverse this. I believe this is a highly desirable feature, as it prevents users from re-using the same credit card number on multiple sites.

Burner cards are only valid for a single transaction. The use-case for these cards is different than that of Merchant cards. Burner cards should be used for one-off purchases from merchants which you do not fully trust; will not use again in the future; or who are likely to implement recurring charges after your initial transaction. As soon as the initial charge is debited from the card, it expires and can never be used again.

When using Privacy.com cards, you can assign any name you like to the card. You can also use any billing or shipping address you like. There are many ways you can use this flexibility. You can use it to order packages to your home without revealing your true name. In this case, you would use the alias name of your choice and your home address as the shipping address (but never the billing address). You can also use it to create disinformation by giving your real name and a false billing address when purchasing online services which do not need shipped to a home. You are limited only by your imagination.

The final customization I like to make to any Privacy.com account is to enable "Private Payments". This feature is disabled by default. When you make a purchase to Amazon through a virtual Privacy.com debit card number, the transaction on your bank statement appears similar to "Amazon - $54.03" or "Privacy.com-Amazon". This discloses the merchant to your bank which provides your checking account. Your bank still knows everywhere you spend money. The "Private Payments" option in Privacy.com allows you to choose one of the following entities which will be displayed for all Privacy.com purchases.

Privacy.com
H&H Hardware
Smileys Corner Store
NSA Gift Shop

While the NSA Gift Shop entry was an option which I jokingly proposed to the CEO of Privacy.com when he was on my podcast, I do not ever use it. I usually choose the Privacy.com option for all clients. This way, all uses of a masked debit card will appear as Privacy.com on the bank statements. Since the bank already knows the source of the transactions, I do not find this reckless. It will remind the client that the charge originated from their Privacy.com account. More important, the bank will not know the identity of the actual merchant for each transaction. If an adversary is in possession of a subpoena for your bank records, or has obtained unauthorized access to your account, no information will reveal the purchase details.

In 2019, I contacted an old friend who now works at a branch of the bank I use for business purchases. I asked her if I could see the details of some transactions on my account, and she obliged. I brought in my statement which displayed only "Privacy.com" and the amount of purchase on three specific transactions. She turned her computer screen toward me, and showed me the full record of the first transaction. It displayed the following details (with my explanations in parentheses).

- Date of transaction (The date which matched my own records)
- Amount of transaction (The amount which matched my own records)
- Privacy.com (The merchant which matched my own records)
- Privacy.com PRIVACYCOM (If I had not chosen to hide the merchant, it would display the merchant name first, such as "Amazon.com PRIVACYCOM")
- ACH Trace # (844) 771-8229 (The telephone number for Privacy.com)

In other words, the detailed records at the bank did not identify the merchant, such as Amazon, for each transaction. A court order to Privacy.com would obviously reveal this, but partner companies of my bank, and entities such as Early Warning, do not get to see the data.

As with any important accounts, be sure to choose a very strong username and password for your Privacy.com credentials, and enable two-factor authentication through a software token such as Authy. I also encourage clients to "close" cards which are no longer needed. This action permanently closes the cards, and allows you to make new cards for similar purchases. Some users have reported that multiple open cards for the same merchant, such as Amazon, flags the account as suspicious and may cause an interruption. While I have not been able to replicate this, it makes sense to close cards as soon as they are no longer needed.

Once your account is active, you can generate new masked card numbers. These are typically used during online purchases when a customer must manually enter the information. Many merchants may block these cards the first time they are used due to heavy abuse by criminals. I explain more about these scenarios later. If you attach these cards to established accounts with prior successful purchase histories, you should have fewer problems. These masked debit card numbers can also be used in person at many establishments. There is no physical card, so you cannot allow someone else to swipe the card during a sale, but audibly giving the details will usually provide a successful result. Consider the following way that I use these numbers for in-person purchases.

When I am at the veterinary clinic under an alias name, I am required to pay via debit or credit card due to a cashless system during the COVID-19 pandemic. I advise them that I have a virtual card which I can read to them. I read the number, expiration, and three-digit code aloud to them while they enter it within their sales processing system. The charge completes as with any other card. If someone is listening and tries to use the number at another establishment, the charge will be declined due to the merchant lock. This allows the purchase to be processed under my alias name and any local postal code.

Note that the BILLING address entered into an online payment option is sent to Privacy.com, and it is stored there for seven years per federal law. It is not shared or sold, and is secured internally. Because of this, I always use a random address for billing information, but a true address for shipping details (when required). Since Privacy.com allows any address to be used during checkout, there is no need to ever provide a true billing address which is associated to your home. The exception is for services which require the billing and shipping details to match. For those, I typically ship to a CMRA such as a UPS store or other mail drop.

Privacy.com Concerns

It would be false to say this service was a perfect privacy solution. Any financial institution is bound by government requirements to track and verify users, and Privacy.com is not immune to these demands. This service relies on a third-party company called Plaid in order to verify user identities. We do not know the depth of involvement Plaid has with Privacy.com, but we know there is an exclusive relationship between the two. Since Plaid connects to thousands of banks and is primarily funded by companies such as Goldman Sachs, American Express, and Citibank, I had assumed that various levels of data sharing existed. This is not a pleasant thought, but the best option we have for free virtual debit cards.

In 2021, Plaid created an online sharing portal at my.plaid.com with the goal of providing individuals information stored from within their financial accounts. I never recommend this type of activity. You are required to connect your bank and Privacy.com account to Plaid's servers. Instead, consider visiting https://plaid.com/legal/data-protection-request-form/ and requesting a copy of all available data stored about you by Plaid. After receiving the information, you can request removal of all data within this same page if desired. I completed all processes and discovered that Plaid possessed absolutely no data about my five years of Privacy.com usage, and no details from the shipping addresses used during online orders. This was quite a relief and calmed my fears about the relationship between the two companies, which exists solely for account verification.

What does this mean in the real world? I believe that transactions through Privacy.com provide value to us. They allow us to use alias names and prevent merchants from knowing our true identity and account details. It helps us prevent credit card fraud and unauthorized card transactions. It is NOT a mechanism to hide transactions from banks, governments, or credit agencies. I believe the anonymization protections stop immediately after the merchant. It is important to understand these limitations and not assume this service is a magic solution. While I rely on Privacy.com card numbers every day on behalf of myself and clients, it can never replace the anonymity provided by cash. I provide the following advice to clients using Privacy.com.

- Never associate your true home address with billing details.
- Always use an apartment address in another state as the billing address.
- Never fund a NEW online shopping account with a Privacy.com card.
- Attach Privacy.com cards to established online accounts with purchase history.
- Delete cards which will no longer be used.
- Pause cards which are not currently being used.
- Activate "Private Payments" within the service.

Trust / LLC Checks

If you established bank accounts in the name of your trust or LLC, you may wish to have checks available for semi-private payments. If you need to write a check for a product or service, one from a trust account without your name may provide more privacy than a personal check containing your name and address. When you open the bank account, most institutions will give you some free temporary checks. These are designed to provide immediate payment options while you wait for a full order of checks to arrive. If you decide to go this route, please consider the following.

The bank will usually offer five to ten free checks. They print them on-site on professional paper stock. I like these because they are usually the larger sized version which appear more professional than a smaller personal check. I always push the limits here and ask for double the amount offered. On one occasion, I encountered a new employee who was instructed to do anything to make the customer happy. I walked out with 150 "temporary" free checks. These checks do not expire, and you may never need to order more.

The bank will likely place all known details on the checks. This often includes the LLC or trust name, your name, your address, and your role in the entity. This eliminates any sense of privacy. I always ask that only the name

of the trust or LLC appear on the check. If questioned, I advise that I might be moving soon and would rather not provide an inaccurate address. Most importantly, I do not want my name listed on the check. Most banks comply with this request.

If you need additional checks, I do not recommend ordering through your bank or any third-party services. Regardless of your directions to the bank, it will still likely place your name and address on the checks. Third-party check printing services are more demanding. Due to fraud and abuse, most now require you to include a name and physical address which can be verified through public records. They will only send the checks to the address printed on them.

I prefer to print my own checks. This may seem shady, but it is completely legal. I purchase professional check paper through Amazon and create an Excel spreadsheet for easy printing. I can now print my trust name with routing and account numbers at the same time I enter details about the payee on the check. I can choose whether to include any address I like, such as my PMB or UPS box. Usually, I do not include any address. Printing your own checks allows you the freedom to control the data disclosed within each. As long as you are providing accurate entity titles and account details, there is no fraud here. Overall, I possess checking accounts for most of my trusts and a few of my LLCs. I will later specify the few instances when this format of payment is preferred over other options.

Secondary Credit Cards

Most credit card companies will issue additional cards at your request. These cards usually possess the same account number as the primary card and all charges will be applied to the primary account holder. These cards are often requested by parents to give to their children for emergencies or by individuals to allow usage by a spouse. Any time the secondary card is used, the charge is processed as if the original card had made the purchase. Since the secondary card is part of an account that has already been confirmed, there is usually no verification process to obtain the additional cards.

To request an additional card, which you should refer to as "Secondary" or "Authorized User" cards, you should contact the credit card company by calling the telephone number on the back of the card. Tell them that you want a duplicate card in the name of a family member. You can request an additional card in any name that you want, including your new alias. You will be warned by the credit company that you are responsible for any charges, and the new card will be sent out immediately to the address on file for the account. If you do not want this new name associated with your home address, be sure to update your address on file with the credit company to your PMB or UPS box as previously explained. I recommend confirming that the new address is active before ordering additional cards.

Many readers of previous books reported difficulty in obtaining a secondary card from traditional banks, such as Bank of America or US Bank. Readers report that these entities demand a DOB and SSN for each secondary card holder. I have found this technique to work best with traditional credit card companies, and it has never worked for me with a debit card. In a moment, I present my updated recommendation for secondary cards since the previous edition of this book.

You may be reading this and thinking that there is no way that this could be legal. It is absolutely legal as long as you are not using this method to commit fraud. The card is attached to your account, and you are paying the bill. It is not identity theft because you are not claiming to be a specific person. If you were using someone else's Social Security Number and opening credit lines with their information, then this would be illegal. You must only apply this to your own account over which you have authority. Additionally, you must always follow the rules.

- Never provide your alternative name to law enforcement or government officials.
- Never open new credit lines with your alternative name.
- Never generate any income with your alternative name.

- Never associate any Social Security Number with your alternative name.
- Never receive any government or community benefits in your alternative name.
- Only use this name to protect your privacy in scenarios with a credit card.

Secondary Credit Card Concerns

There is a fine line between the use of an isolated alias name and possessing a secondary credit card in that name. If an alias name is needed due to death threats, you should never obtain a secondary card in this new name. This is because the credit card company associates you to the alias and reports this information to numerous third-party organizations. Consider the following scenario which represents my own experience with Chase.

I possessed a Chase credit card in my true name, associated with my SSN. During the application process, I requested a secondary card in an alias name. For my own privacy, I will not disclose the name. Assume it was "Mike Doe". I never used the card which was issued in my true name. I only wanted the account for the secondary card in my travel alias name. This way, I had a credit card in an alias name when I checked into hotels under that alias. Since I had never used that card in my true name, I should have some isolation between me and my alias. This is actually quite incorrect.

A few months after I began using the secondary card, I conducted a query of my own name within the data aggregation service CLEAR. My report immediately identified "Mike Doe" as one of my associates and aliases. This is because Chase shares the details of every card holder with dozens of other companies. Per their online privacy policy, Chase shares full details of your account and transactions for "joint marketing with other financial companies" and their "affiliates' everyday business purposes". In other words, Chase tells others what you are doing. Furthermore, Chase does not allow you to limit or prohibit this sharing. While all credit cards share some data about your transactions, Chase seems to go overboard. Because of this, I have canceled all of my Chase cards and I no longer recommend them to clients. In a moment, I explain my current process. Secondary cards have caused much confusion with my clients. I present two scenarios which may help identify when it is appropriate to use a secondary card and when it should be avoided.

- I possess an alias name which I use while I travel. I check into hotels under this name and I possess a secondary credit card in the name. It is loosely associated to me through financial records, but not within public people search websites. It allows me some privacy while outside my home but a non-public digital trail exists.
- I possess an alias name which is extremely confidential. It is only used in situations where I do not want to be associated with my true identity. It has been used during the purchase of my VPN, cellular telephone, and mobile data plan. I would never obtain a secondary card in this name. It would create a trail from me to the services and devices for which I want to remain private.

Current Secondary Credit Card Protocol

I have possessed secondary credit cards in various alias names for over a decade, and I have helped countless clients replicate their own process. In 2020, I substantially changed my credit card protocol for clients. As stated previously, I no longer recommend Chase cards, and now encourage clients to obtain American Express (AMEX) accounts. Part of this is because all Chase transactions are captured by both Visa and Chase, and both refuse to allow you to control sharing of the data. Chase's online privacy policy also clearly boasts that you cannot limit data sharing to third parties. Let's compare that to American Express.

If you log in to an active AMEX account and navigate to the "Privacy Center" via the link at the bottom of the page and then "Your Privacy Choices", you will see numerous sharing options which appear similar to those present within Chase. However, AMEX allows you to disable all of them, which I recommend doing. In fact, AMEX was the only card I could find which allowed the consumer to prohibit sharing to outside companies. Furthermore, since AMEX is not affiliated with Visa or MasterCard, you are eliminating additional exposure by keeping these purchases within the AMEX network.

After these modifications, I believe you possess the most private credit card option available today. No credit or debit card is anonymous, and all leave a digital payment trail. Since daily credit card use is required by most of my clients, I simply try to find the lesser of all evils.

AMEX encourages additional authorized user cards for both personal and business accounts. You can submit a request online or via telephone. However, AMEX demands an SSN and DOB be attached to every secondary credit card issued. This presents a big problem if you want a card for "John Doe" but do not have a valid SSN to provide which matches that name. Instead, consider a new strategy. For most clients, a secondary card with only their first and middle names works fairly well as an alias. Assume your full name is George Michael Bluth. Using George Bluth, Michael Bluth, or the full name could be a privacy invasion, especially when checking into a hotel. However, George Michael is generic. It is also not a lie. Many clients have expressed concerns about using a completely fake alias, especially those carrying security clearances. Using only a first and middle name is usually much more acceptable.

I typically tell a client to call AMEX and ask for a secondary card be issued in only the first and middle name. Explain that you are the victim of stalking, and prefer not to use your last name at hotels. Advise the AMEX personnel to add your SSN to this card. The new card will not have your last name displayed. I believe there is a much clearer legal use of an alias card which displays true information than one which is completely fake. For extreme clients, I still rely on completely alias-named cards through AMEX business accounts. Although AMEX encourages users to add an SSN and DOB for each cardholder, the business accounts allow more discretion, and they will issue cards to any name desired without providing an SSN when pushed. Recently, the following steps were used with a client.

- Generate an EIN from the IRS for your LLC. If you do not have an LLC, register for an EIN as a sole proprietor. AMEX may scrutinize sole proprietors for business cards.
- Apply for a free AMEX business card with true name, SSN, and EIN via telephone. During the process, request a secondary card for an employee. When prompted for a DOB and SSN, consider a response similar to, "Our company privacy policy prohibits distribution of employees' SSNs. I accept all responsibility for the usage of the card and authorize my own SSN to be used."
- Provide one or multiple alias names for the new "employee cards".

I have helped clients obtain business cards as sole proprietors without the need for an LLC on numerous occasions, but having an LLC EIN provides a much smoother process. One client possesses a business account with over 20 alias cards without ever providing any additional SSNs. The limit imposed by AMEX is 99 cards, but I never recommend testing this. Finally, I present what I believe is the best feature of the AMEX secondary business cards: each card possesses a unique number. While the numbers are very similar, the last five digits are unique. Consider the following reasons why this is important.

- A retail business does not know that your alias card is under the same account as your personal name. If you had used your real Chase credit card at a grocery store and later switched to using the alias Chase card, the store knows the same number is on each and treats the purchase history as one. AMEX cards are not vulnerable to this.
- Many online retailers restrict credit card numbers to a single account. If you have a credit card number within an account in your true name, creating an alias account with the same number will cause issues.
- Companies which share purchase information with third parties will not be able to disclose that your personal card number is associated with your alias card.
- Hotels cannot associate your previous true name with your new alias by comparing credit card numbers used during payment.

AMEX is far from perfect. It is still a credit card company profiting from your activity. Compared to traditional Visa and MasterCard providers, I believe AMEX is a much better choice for both privacy and alias usage. Be aware that AMEX conducts a soft pull on your credit each time you request a secondary card, and will require a credit freeze to be lifted each time you add a card. I always recommend applying for any desired secondary cards at the time of application in order to avoid these roadblocks.

Alternative Secondary Credit Card Protocol

There are three concerns from some clients in regard to AMEX credit cards. The first is that AMEX typically requires a slightly higher credit score than most Visa providers in order to be approved for an account. The second is the occasional merchant which does not accept anything other than Visa or MasterCard. Finally, some clients do not want the awkward telephone call with AMEX support during which they must convince the representative to create a secondary card in one name while associated to the SSN of the account holder. Most clients want a simple option for numerous secondary alias credit cards without much resistance from the provider. In these scenarios, I recommend Capital One credit cards.

First, I should note that Capital One has a privacy policy almost identical to Chase. You cannot control the major data-sharing abuses. If you choose a traditional credit card such as these, I believe it is vital to be using a PMB or other CMRA address as the physical "home" address. They will absolutely share account details with data mining companies and credit bureaus. I do not possess a Capital One card, but I recently helped a client obtain an alias card via a brief phone call. After calling the number on the back of the primary card, we explained that we wished to obtain two "Authorized User" cards, per the following wording on Capital One's website.

"An authorized user is someone you add to your account without any additional application or credit check. They'll get a card with their name on it and share your line of credit. As the primary cardholder, you'll still be responsible for all charges and, if you have a rewards card, you'll earn on every dollar they spend."

The representative only asked for the names desired on the cards. After reading a warning about the primary card holder being responsible for all purchases, the cards were shipped. In three days, my client possessed two credit cards in alias names ready for use. Both cards displayed the exact same card numbers as the primary card in her real name. This is a minor issue, but we should all be aware of the risks when using multiple names with the same card number. If the primary card in the real name is never used, this is not much of an issue.

Obtaining secondary cards through Capital One was much easier than AMEX. However, privacy is not always easy. I believe it is worth the effort to secure AMEX cards in alias names with unique card numbers. This helps hide your true identity from merchants. If AMEX is not an ideal option for you, I prefer alias Capital One cards over any card in a true name. You must choose the level of privacy (and effort) desired and then execute your strategy. Expect failure at some point, and keep pushing until you achieve the level appropriate for your needs.

Secured Credit Cards

I have not found a credit card provider which would agree to provide an alias card in the name of only a trust or LLC. This is unfortunate as such a card would not include any name at all, eliminating the need to use an alias. Traditional business credit cards require your SSN and a full credit check, and they will still place your name on the card above the trust or LLC name. My only solution to this is to obtain a secured business credit card. Secured business cards allow business owners to set their own spending limits by placing a refundable security deposit that doubles as their credit line. The security deposit is important because it protects issuers from the possibility of default which thereby allows you to qualify for most secured business credit cards regardless of your credit history or how much disposable income you have. For our purposes, a secured credit card replicates a prepaid card, but has a much more professional appearance.

These cards can display a business name, including a trust or LLC, without the need for a real name underneath. There are two main types of secured cards. The first, and most popular is the type that builds a line of credit for the business while it is used. We do not need that. Instead, I search for cards that simply provide a limit equal to the current balance of the account. I also look for cards that do not require an SSN. These will demand an EIN for your business, so these will be limited to LLCs only. If you want a card issued in the name of your trust, you will need to contact numerous companies. Be prepared to be declined, but I occasionally find a new secured card that is less restrictive. The following online searches may be of great benefit.

secured credit card no ssn / secured credit card no ein / secured credit card ein only

Recently, I have found a few physical banks which offer secured business credit cards. If you have already established a personal account at an institution that offers these, it will be much easier to customize your card. I recently entered a bank branch where I possess a personal checking account. I advised that I had created a new LLC, and wanted to obtain a secured credit card. I stated I was not looking to establish credit, and only wanted the card for convenience. I deposited $1,000 into a new account and received a card with only my LLC name visible within a week. I can now use this card without disclosing my name.

Now that we have your sources of payment established, we need strategies on the proper use of each. There will be many times over the first few months of residency in a new home when a service or utility needs to be activated. You will be asked for your full legal name, address, DOB, SSN, and other sensitive information. None of your personal details should ever be associated with your home address. We will need to be creative and resourceful.

Alias Wallets

Isolating your aliases within their own wallets is vital for my clients. You do not want to keep secondary credit cards in alias names in the same location. Presenting a credit card in one name while you are holding two additional cards in other names looks suspicious. You want to be able to immediately access any credit cards or non-government identification cards as if it were natural. While I can offer a couple of ideas, you should ultimately choose the method best for you. Hopefully the following will generate your own thoughts.

One of my clients carries four "slim" card wallets. These are small, thin wallets which hold a couple of cards on each side with a thin pocket in the middle for cash. He chose RFID-blocking wallets, which is also my preference. These are abundant on Amazon, but I currently only use the Silent Pocket options (amzn.to/3tmB7kl). These are available in several colors, and the following is the strategy he and I found best for his needs.

- **Blue**: This wallet is associated with his true identity containing his real driver's license, passport card (no address) and credit cards. He chose blue for this one as it is the wallet he will retrieve when stopped by the police for his awful driving (blue lights). The passport card can be used when an official ID is needed, but he does not want to share a home address (PMB).
- **Black**: This wallet is his primary alias that he uses for travel purposes. This contains a secondary credit card in his alias name which he uses for hotels, dining, and social interactions. It also contains his alias gym membership card, "employer" ID, and random travel reward cards. They are all in the primary alias name.
- **Green**: This wallet is designated only for shopping (green reminds him of money). It possesses prepaid credit cards and gift cards. No identification is required. He grabs this whenever he will be purchasing anything from a physical store.
- **Red**: The final wallet is red and only used during international travel. It is the larger style of passport wallet. It contains his passport, official state ID in his real name, and a second credit card in his real name reserved for international use. It is the primary form of payment for this wallet. Each of these four wallets contain a few hundred dollars in cash for emergencies.

Another client chooses to use binder clips as his wallets. His situation is very unique and he possesses four "wallets" at all times. Each set contains the appropriate identification cards and secondary credit cards, with a small amount of cash folded once around the cards. The small binder clip holds it all together. He knows immediately which alias is represented by the type of currency on the outer layer of the wallet. The $20 bill is the primary, $10 bill is the secondary, $5 bill surrounds the third alias option, and $2 bill covers the fourth.

ID Scanning and Copying

A previous chapter briefly discussed optional responses when a car dealership demands to copy your license when purchasing a vehicle. I want to revisit this under new context. We now see many retail establishments demanding to store scanned copies of identification or collect text details of IDs from various barcodes stored on the backs. This is usually unnecessary and the data collected is often abused. I have witnessed the following scenarios within one month while updating this chapter.

Retail Returns: Due to an abundance of gift card fraud, retail establishments have cracked down of returns of products. Stores such as Walmart and Target are members of an entity called Retail Equation. This company monitors returns to retail stores. When the store requires identification in order to return a product, they typically scan the ID card and the details are sent to Retail Equation. If your passport card does not populate the desired fields, the employee will likely manually enter your details. All of your returns are stored and analyzed. If you return enough products to trigger a flag on your account, stores will stop accepting returned items. Your profile is available to many companies and other unknown recipients. In a moment, I explain how to retrieve your own profile including a list of items which you have returned.

Medical Organizations: Any visit to a doctor, dentist, hospital, or urgent care is going to require identification. I accept this, as they need to verify insurance benefits and ensure proper prescription details are transmitted. However, I do not allow anyone to collect a digital scan of my photo within any identification card.

Pharmacies: I recently required a prescription eye drop. It was not a controlled substance, and not a medication which is abused. However, the pharmacy demanded I present valid ID. After displaying my passport card through a windowed wallet, they demanded I remove the card so they could scan it into their system. The scan was a digital acquisition which would populate my details and store my photo forever across their nationwide network. No thanks.

Entertainment Establishments: In late 2019, I went out with friends to a comedy show in Los Angeles. After submitting my ticket for entry and displaying my passport card to prove I was of legal drinking age, I was told they needed to scan my ID into their system. When I asked where the data was stored, the level of encryption applied to the transmission, and to see a copy of the terms of service for this requirement, I was told to move along.

Adult Products: If you have ever purchased alcohol, you have likely been "carded". Many years ago, this meant flashing my ID and the clerk doing the math to make sure I was of age. Today, stores require the clerk to scan the barcode on the back in order for their systems to determine that my date of birth is valid for purchase. Many of these systems record the details and share them with third parties.

My solution to this is two-fold. First, I only provide a U.S. passport card whenever an entity wants to scan a barcode stored within an identification card, such as a grocery store. This is because the barcode on the back of a passport card simply contains the numeric digits directly to the right of it, which only identifies your card number. There are no personal details stored within this code. Furthermore, most businesses, such as grocery stores, do not have software which knows what to do with these details. The card number obtained during the scan will likely get rejected. Most scanning systems are looking for a date of birth, name, and address. All of these details are present within the barcode of most driver's licenses or state identification cards. Second, I rely heavily on the federal law mentioned earlier. U.S. Code, Title 18, Part I, Chapter 33, Section 701 states the following.

"Whoever manufactures, sells, or possesses any badge, identification card, or other insignia, of the design prescribed by the head of any department or agency of the United States for use by any officer or employee thereof, or any colorable imitation thereof, or photographs, prints, or in any other manner makes or executes any engraving, photograph, print, or impression in the likeness of any such badge, identification card, or other insignia, or any colorable imitation thereof, except as authorized under regulations made pursuant to law, shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than six months, or both."

This law was created for military identification cards and insignias, and was likely never intended for our use. I have the exact wording mentioned here, followed by an online URL which can be used to verify the same content (https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/701), printed onto a sticker and affixed to the back page of my passport. When I use my passport as identification during one of the previous scenarios, such as a visit to a doctor, and an employee insists on copying the identification page, I present this section of my passport. I explain that I could be committing a crime allowing the passport to be photocopied. If needed, I sell it further by telling any employees that they may definitely be committing a crime by doing so. It is always met with skepticism, but most employees do not want to take a chance with federal law. I always offer them the URL so that their manager can look up the law and see if they agree. Most do not indulge me, and move on to the next requirement of my visit.

Whenever you make purchases using the techniques throughout this book, you are likely to be asked for identification. I hope that you consider these solutions when this happens. I have encountered numerous data breaches which included full digital scans of passports and identification cards. I do not want to ever be exposed within these common occurrences, and I suspect you feel the same way. The more of us who refuse this unnecessary privacy invasion, the more common our rebelliousness becomes. It may create awareness for future visits. When all else fails, and an employee demands to copy my ID, I respond "Of course! However, I would like a copy of yours first. Is that acceptable by you? If not, why?". I have yet to experience an employee allowing me to copy their ID, as that would be a privacy invasion.

Online ID Submission

I now see an increasing demand for online submission of identification. I witnessed this in 2021 when my retirement brokerage company locked my account until I submitted a photo of my government identification. This was "for my safety", but they could not explain how sending a copy of my ID made me any safer. If I refused to send a copy of my ID through their online portal, I risked losing my account access. If I sent an unredacted copy of my ID, I risked exposure during a breach, leak, or employee compromise. This brings us to my next recommendation of "redaction and watermarking". There have been times when I had no choice but to offer copies of my identification through online portals. When this happens, I only submit the minimum requirements as safely as possible.

First, I only submit a copy of my passport card, as previously explained. Next, I redact the full-size photo on the left and the small image icon on the right. I use Photoshop for this, but you could simply cut pieces of adhesive notepaper and attach directly to the card before capturing a photo. Finally, I watermark the digital image before submission. I typically insert text diagonally over the digital image of the card which states something similar to "Scanned image created for ____ Company". This way, if this image should ever leak to any public website used by criminals, I will know from where it originated. It also makes it clear to the requesting party that I am holding them accountable for any abuse of the file.

The next hurdle is the demand to upload identification to third-party services such as ID.me. This service provides a verification system which helps confirm a customer's identity. My experience with them in 2021 should help explain. I had a client who received a request from the IRS to submit paperwork justifying a claim made within her tax return. The IRS demanded that she first confirm her identity through ID.me. ID.me demanded an unredacted copy of her driver's license and a "selfie" of her holding this ID. The IRS refused to communicate with her until she completed registration with ID.me and ID.me refused to complete the

registration until she uploaded this sensitive information, which would likely be abused someday. She refused and contacted me.

I understood her resistance to register with a third-party verification company in order to comply with the request from the IRS. Unfortunately, she could not simply take her business somewhere else. Instead, I came up with a plan. I asked my client if she wore glasses, and she confirmed that she owns a pair for reading. I then asked her to send the following communication to the IRS personnel while she was at work on a day in which she did not possess her government identification (left her wallet at home).

"I am writing per your request to send a copy of my ID via computer or mobile device to an online company called ID.me. I have a medical eye disorder called Presbyopia. I am currently unable to send my photo ID through any online system. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) states that government entities must not deny the visually impaired full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations provided. Please identify an alternative way to verify my identity."

None of this was a lie. My client does have Presbyopia, which is a fancy way of saying she needs reading glasses. She was unable to send ID because she did not have it with her during the communication (it was in her vehicle). The ADA does mandate this protection for those in need. While these four sentences are individually factual and not necessarily relative to each other, they made it clear we would not be submitting data to ID.me. The IRS responded with an alternative in-house method of identity verification and my client was able to complete her business with the government. Will you have the same results? Probably not. We may have been lucky and made contact with a rational human being who sought other options. By now, they may no longer accommodate our ridiculous demands. In February of 2022, the IRS announced that it would minimize its usage of ID.me and would no longer make in mandatory to file online taxes.

Home Insurance

Acquisition of any type of insurance always brings difficulties when attempting to achieve privacy. Insurance companies want to know whom they are protecting. They will use your credit score to determine their risk providing you coverage. Misrepresenting yourself or your entity is not only illegal, it will likely eliminate any payout when you need to file a claim. Imagine you provided an alias name to the insurance provider and your home was destroyed. You file a claim, which is approved. The check is written to your alias. How would you deposit it? What if you are required to display identification to receive the check? What happens when a neighbor sues you because of a fall on your property? Your insurance company will not cover you if your name is not on the policy. These are real issues.

The bottom line here is that your home insurance policy will need to be accurate. This does not mean that you must give up all personal privacy. You have a few strategies at your disposal which can provide various layers of privacy while remaining legal and properly protected. Before I discuss my recommendations, I present past experiences that should be avoided.

In 2018, I assisted with the purchase of an estate. My client wanted to remain completely anonymous and was quite wealthy. The purchase of the estate with cash was simple, and the utilities were all activated with alias names or details of the trust. The last issue was insurance. All providers in that area demanded to know the name, DOB, and SSN of the home owner and account holder. The trust could be named as a secondary insured party, but the policy mandated full details of the owner. The insurance companies confirmed that any payment made due to a claim would be paid to this name, and not the trust. There was no budging. Either my client disclosed his true identity, or there would be no policy.

My client chose the latter. He decided to simply avoid home insurance altogether. He was wealthy, could have purchased numerous additional homes in cash, and decided that his privacy was worth more than the money he could lose after a catastrophic event. I discouraged him from this, but his mind was made up. To this day, he possesses no home insurance coverage.

I disagree with this decision for two reasons. First, a home is likely our biggest asset. If a tornado or fire destroys the home of my clients, they are unable to purchase another. If they possess a loan on the home, insurance is mandatory. Economically, it does not make sense to proceed without insurance. Additionally, you now possess great personal liability. If someone is injured on your property, you are the sole party reliable for payment. This could quickly bankrupt you. Therefore, I insist on insurance for my home, and I strongly encourage my clients to do the same.

Some may wonder why we cannot use our trustee for the insurance policy. We could, but this is probably a very bad idea. Your trustee would need to provide their own personal details, and the policy would be priced based on their credit history. Next, this would likely violate the terms of the policy. Almost every home insurance policy states that the listed party must be an occupant of the house. The fine print will usually specify that immediate relatives also possess coverage. Technically, you might be covered if your sibling was your trustee, but I think you are playing with fire.

The following methods assume that you established a private home titled to the name of your trust. Whether you possess a loan or paid in cash will not matter. These tactics attempt to obtain completely legal and appropriate coverage for your home.

My first recommendation is a personal visit to a handful of local providers in the area of your home. Calling random online providers will get you nowhere. They will not provide a quote or any details without the immediate demand for your name, DOB, and SSN. These are all out for me. I call ahead and ask to arrange a meeting to speak directly to the local insurance agent for each business. I ask to reserve the meeting under the name of the trust. If I am pushed for a real name, I advise that I am not sure which trustee will be at the meeting. I show up in person, well dressed and polite.

I start with some honesty. I advise the agent that I represent a trust which is in the process of purchasing a home. The occupant(s) of this home are very private. They have been the victims of stolen identity, cyber-crimes, and other unfortunate situations. I further explain that the full details of their identity, including DOB and SSN have been publicly exposed. This likely applies to every American citizen. If appropriate, I conclude that one of the occupants has been harassed and threatened, and is in fear of a physical attack. I explain that I am taking every step I can to ensure that their true identities are not publicized on the internet.

At this point, I rarely receive any resistance. I usually see signs of empathy on the face of the person with whom I am speaking, and all of these scenarios seem very common. I proceed to ask some very detailed questions. I already know the answers, but I find that allowing the agent to discuss the situation creates a better dialogue.

- What information will you need about the owner of the home?
- Can the policy be placed in the name of the trust?
- If not, can the trust be listed as a secondary insured?
- Does your parent insurance company share customer data with any third parties?

In almost every discussion I have had in these scenarios, I learn the following:

- Almost every insurance provider allows the inclusion of the trust name as a secondary insured party, but rarely as the primary policy entity. This applies to traditional home policies. A Social Security Number will be required to generate a new policy.
- Insurance companies insist they never share customer details with third parties. Minimal online investigation reveals this to be inaccurate. As only one example, consider the privacy policy of State Farm. It begins with "We do not sell customer information". The excerpts below identify the ways in which they share customer details. The content in parentheses is my own opinion of how this could expose your home address.

"We share customer information inside or outside our family of companies":

- for our everyday business purposes, for public policy purposes, and as permitted or required by law. (This is a catch-all, and gives them the right to do practically anything they desire with your information.)
- as needed, to handle your claim. For example, we may share name, address, and coverage information with an auto body shop to speed up repairs on auto damage claims. (This allows them to share your true name and address with any service provider. This eliminates the idea of using an alias name for the company that will replace your porch after a storm.)
- with consumer reporting agencies, for example, during the underwriting process. (This is the most invasive. These agencies devour your personal information, and amend your profile. You will not be anonymous very long.)
- in connection with a proposed or actual sale, merger, transfer, or exchange of all or a portion of our business or operating unit. (If this insurance provider is sold to another company, your information is transferred and the new privacy policy applies.)
- with companies that perform marketing or other services for us or with whom we have joint marketing agreements. These agreements allow us to provide a broader selection of insurance and financial products to you. (This basically allows the insurance company to share your details with any company willing to purchase it.)

The summary here is that every major insurance company has the right to do whatever they want with your information and it will be exposed at some point. Therefore, we must take our own precautions. Now that you know the risks, let's establish our best defense possible.

In 2017, I assisted a client with the purchase of an anonymous home. She was the victim of a targeted home invasion, and sought a safe place where she could not easily be found. Home insurance should be secured before the closing date, as you should have protection the moment you own the property. I visited a major insurance chain that possessed a local office and an independent agent. We made it through the small talk and I explained the unique scenario of my client. He seemed very willing to assist any way he could.

My first concern was the issue with the trust. I explained that my client, and the true occupant of the home, was not the trustee of the trust which is purchasing the property. Therefore, lumping together the entire policy into one entity might not make the most sense. I asked if he could provide a business policy in the name of the trust and a separate renter's policy in the name of my client. This is common with rental homes and other situations where a business entity owns the property but does not reside in it.

With a traditional home insurance policy, there is coverage of the dwelling, property, and liability. There is also protection for the contents. This is a typical "package deal". If you owned a rental property, you would want protection if the house was destroyed or someone was hurt. However, you would have no interest in coverage for personal items, such as the renter's furniture. These policies are more affordable because they provide less protection than a traditional policy. If your tenants wanted coverage, they could purchase a renter's policy to cover only their belongings. I like to apply the best of both worlds toward my clients' policies.

I explained that I desired a policy in the name of the trust as a business entity for the home and property. The trust obviously will not be an occupant. The trust would own the policy and make payments. The trust is covered from a liability perspective and the property is covered from damages. This type of policy is commonly used for businesses. Since no business will be conducted, and the property is not open to the public, the fees associated with this type of policy are usually quite affordable.

For my client, I requested a renter's policy in her name. This covers her possessions inside the home. One way to explain it is that the policy would cover anything which fell out of the house if you were to pick it up and shake it. The business policy protects everything else including liability. These policies are very affordable, as there is a much less likely risk of a claim.

The reason I want to do this is because it allows me to have the home policy purely in the name of the trust. While the renter's policy will be in the name of my client, I have a bit more control over the information stored in that account. The provider will obviously know that my client lives in this home. However, I can place the address of a UPS box as the primary contact for the renter's policy. If the details of this policy are shared, sold, or lost, the associated address will likely be the UPS box. While a business account can also possess a UPS box for billing, there are many references to the real property address all throughout the policy. You may recall that I previously wrote that an SSN must be associated with the policy. This is absolutely true. Since I am purchasing the renter's policy through this office, and supplying a full name, DOB, and SSN of my client, the office now knows the true identity. The "soft pull" credit check for the renter's policy can be used to pacify the requirements for the trust policy. As the grantor of the trust, my client has a direct nexus, even if she is not the trustee.

As an extra layer of privacy, I proposed an additional request. I explained that my client is considering returning to her maiden name. I requested that the renter's policy be placed into this maiden name now, even though it is associated with her true DOB and SSN. The company will know her true name through the credit check, but the policy and annual bill will be in the maiden name. This is not going to fool an advanced private investigator, but it will make her a bit more difficult to find in the wake of a large data breach. Let's summarize the coverage.

- My client possesses a trust. She is the grantor but not the trustee. The property is protected with a business policy in the name of the trust. It covers the home, land, and liability of both. My client's name is not listed anywhere in this policy, and the trustee digitally signs the official policy, executing it at the time of closing. This bill is paid with a Privacy.com card associated with the trust's checking account.
- My client possesses a separate renter's policy which is in her real maiden name and SSN. It covers her belongings inside the home. The address for the policy and billing is her UPS box. The policy contents include the real address, which is not public record. This bill is automatically paid through a second Privacy.com debit card, connected to her personal checking account.

Is this bullet-proof? Not at all. The insurance company is the weak link. They know my client and her home address. This is not optimal, but is the closest we can get to our desired level of privacy. Two years after I executed this plan for my client, I am still unable to locate any official connection between her name and the address of her home. This is the best I can do for her situation. The irony of this scenario is that the combined cost of her trust policy and the renter's coverage is less than the policy quoted as a traditional full coverage home. The business policy even has twice the liability protection. This is mind boggling.

If you do not possess a Privacy.com account, a personal credit card could pay the renter's policy and a check in the name of the trust could pay the home coverage. The formalities of this are not too important, but I like to pay with separate accounts when possible. Your mileage will vary with this. I have presented this proposal to over thirty insurance companies in various states. My success rate is 45%. With enough determination, you can achieve your own success. I insist you be honest with the person with whom you are speaking. A policy is useless if you cannot file a claim due to inaccuracies within the application. Allow the local agent to make the policy work for your situation.

Utilities

The next hassle is dealing with the power and natural gas companies. Thanks to fraudsters that rack up large bills and then leave town, you and I must now provide access to our credit profiles in order to establish basic services. The default demands of these companies are to obtain a full name, DOB and SSN. This information will be verified with a consumer agency and attached to your profile. These services will then share this data with additional data mining companies. It is a vicious cycle. Over the past five years, I have had various levels of success using alias names and sob stories. Many of these techniques no longer work. If I claim I am not an American citizen with an SSN, I am required to send a photocopy of a passport. When I state I am the victim of identity theft, there is no longer any sympathy. When I offer to provide a deposit for services in lieu of an SSN and credit check, I am told this is no longer an option, and I may be required to provide a deposit regardless. With these rules in place, we must be more creative.

Similar to home insurance, I always establish utilities in advance of closing. You never want to be in a rush to turn on the power. You may give in and disclose your real information just to get past the process. I always start with a polite call to the utility company. Since I record all of these conversations (when legal within one-party states), I can provide an exact transcript of a recent attempt for a client.

"Hi. I have a closing date approaching for a home in [CITY]. The property is being purchased by an established trust, and there are not any occupants defined at this point. What are your options for establishing power in the name of a trust?"

This resulted in the expected response. The operator insisted that a DOB and SSN of the resident would need to be provided. If the trust is a registered business with an EIN, this will usually suffice instead of the SSN. None of these situations apply to us, so I continued with the following conversation.

"I see, thank you. I don't know the SSNs of the eventual occupants, and I don't believe the trust has an EIN due to tax filing requirements. The last property we purchased allowed us to place the bill into the trust name as long as we offered either a deposit or enrolled in autopay from a checking account in the name of the trust. Are these possibilities?"

This resulted in a hold time of five minutes while she contacted a supervisor. I had to eventually talk with this supervisor the next day, but it was a productive conversation. The supervisor confirmed that the utility can be opened in the name of the trust with several requirements. The power company would create an account for the trust the day of the call, but services would not be scheduled. The utility profile would need a checking account attached to it, and it must be enrolled in auto-pay. The checking account must be in the name of the trust. A debit card was not enough. After this was complete, the supervisor could manually approve the account after a scheduled small test withdrawal from the account. After this, a date could be provided to switch on the utilities. I completed all of these requirements without any issue. The supervisor was very kind about the situation, and more relaxed after she could see the checking account within the system. Every month, the bill is paid through this account. The power company does not know the name of my client. They receive their owed fees in a timely matter every month. There is no fraud. They know the generic name of the trust, which will also be on public record as the owner of this property. The trust checking account is not associated with any personal bank accounts. The bank knows that a monthly bill is paid to a specific utility, but does not know the exact address. The bank knows the identity of my client.

There is an obvious financial trail which could be followed with the proper court orders required. Without these court documents, the name and address of my client will not be connected. You should identify your own threat model, and ensure that you choose the most appropriate tactics. The alternative to this, if you do not have a checking account associated with the trust, is to attempt the use of auto-pay to a Privacy.com debit card. I always offer to pay a deposit to set them at ease, which is usually not required. Paying a large upfront deposit, which is usually the average monthly bill for three months, will often eliminate the requirement of a credit check. The success rate of this method is decreasing. In a recent worst-case scenario, the utility offered to bypass the credit check only if I submitted a deposit of an average year of use. My client had to give them over $2500 in order to stay private. I have had much better success by using a checking account in the name of the trust. I encourage you to identify all of your options before choosing the best route.

In 2022, I had a client who needed to activate electricity at a new anonymous home. The power company required an SSN or EIN without exception. We were forced to generate a new EIN with the IRS (explained later) as a Sole Proprietorship DBA (Doing Business As) a generic name such as "Property Ventures". We then provided this new business name and associated EIN to the power company without disclosing the client's name. There was a digital trail with the IRS, but the threat of public disclosure was low. Since there was no income to the EIN, there was no tax reporting required in this scenario. Always confirm your own tax reporting and DBA requirements within your city, county, state, and country. This is a last resort, but should work in most locations. It will keep your personal name from being publicly associated with your home. The DBA name will likely leak to various marketing databases, but will not be an immediate threat.

Once you have power established, the rest is easy. Often, the water and sewer companies will rely on your registration with the power company to confirm service. I usually recommend establishing auto-pay to a Privacy.com debit card. If there are fees associated with this, or you do not have that option, auto-pay to a checking account in the trust name should pacify their demands.

Overall, I prefer to establish all services in the name of the trust. Since some utilities are loosely connected to the city government, use of false aliases could approach criminal behavior. With a proper trust in place, you might not need any aliases. When electronic documents require signing, your trustee has the legal authority to comply. When these companies release your billing details privately and publicly, there will be minimal damage. The trust is already publicly connected to the property.

Internet Service

I believe that the most important utility or service which you can anonymize is your home internet connection. Possessing internet service at your home address in your real name jeopardizes your privacy on multiple levels. Many providers use their subscriber list for marketing and it often ends up in the hands of other companies. This will eventually make your home address public on the internet as associated with you. This is possible with any utility or service that is attached to your home address. However, your home internet account shares another layer of your life that you may not realize.

Internet service providers (ISPs) create the connection required for you to have internet access. In its simplest terms, a cable or phone company possesses a very large connection to the entire internet. It creates its own connections to its customers (you). This might be in the form of a cable modem connected to the main connection coming into your house. This allows you to connect to the entire internet through them. Therefore, the ISP can monitor your online activity. Other chapters explain how to mask this traffic with virtual private networks (VPNs) and other technologies. However, you cannot stop the ISP from seeing the amount of traffic that you are sending and receiving, the times of the day that you are online, and details of the devices which you are connecting to their system.

Those who use the technologies previously discussed in this book will likely be protected from the invasive habits of ISPs. However, people make mistakes. You might forget to enable your VPN or it might fail due to a software crash. You might have guests who use your internet without practicing secure browsing habits. Consider the following scenario.

Every day, numerous people receive a dreaded letter from their internet service provider. It states that on a specific date and time, your internet connection was used to download copyrighted digital material. This is usually in the form of movies or music. This practice usually occurs when law firms monitor data such as torrent files which are commonly used to share pirated media. They identify the IP address used for the download, contact the provider of the IP address, and demand to know the subscriber information. The providers often cooperate and share your details. You then receive a notice demanding several thousands of dollars in order to avoid a lawsuit. Not paying could, and often will, result in legal proceedings. There are numerous cases of people who have lost the lawsuit and have been ordered to pay much more than the original asking amount.

I am not encouraging the use of the internet to obtain files which you do not have the authority to possess. I also do not advocate fishing expeditions by greedy lawyers looking to take you down. I see another side of the problem. What if someone uses your Wi-Fi to commit these acts? What if malware or a virus conducts activities which are seen as infringing? I believe one solution to this issue is to simply have an anonymous internet connection. These methods will only work if you have gone to the extent of residing in an anonymous house as previously explained. If you have not, or are not going to that level, it does not hurt to apply these methods for a small layer of protection. The following is a true example from a client.

My client had recently moved into his new invisible home. He was renting, and nothing was associated with his real name. The electricity and water were included in the rent and associated with the landlord's name. However,

there was no internet access included with the rent. My client contacted the telephone company to take advantage of a deal for DSL internet service at a promotional rate of $24.99 per month for two years. He did not need anything faster than this access, and liked the price. He gave an alias name and the real address for the service and was quickly asked for a Social Security Number (SSN), date of birth, and previous address. He tried his best to convince the operator that he would not give this out, and she politely stated that their policy is to conduct a brief credit check before providing access. He gave up and terminated the call. He emailed me asking for guidance. While I had dealt with similar issues for myself and others in the past, it had been a while since I had tested my methods with all of the providers. In exchange for me helping him without any fees, he agreed to share his experiences here.

I first contacted the telephone company offering the DSL connection. Before giving any personal information to the operator, I politely asked about the signup policy and what type of credit check would be conducted. I was told twice that a "soft pull" would be conducted based on the SSN of the customer. This was to ensure that there were no outstanding bills from previous connections and to simply verify the identity of the customer. While telling my sad story of identity thefts, harassment, and threats to my life, I pleaded for a way to obtain service to no avail. Part of the issue here was that a two-year contract was required, and they wanted to be sure that they would get their money. There was nothing to gain here.

I searched for other service providers and found two possibilities: Charter Spectrum cable access and various satellite internet options. Due to speed and cost, I wanted to avoid the satellite option. I contacted Charter and verified the service connection to the residence. They had a high-speed connection of 60 Mbps offered at $59.99 per month. I assured them that I had never had Charter in the past, and asked if there was an introductory price similar to the DSL offer that I had been quoted. As usual, the representative came up with a lower offer. He acknowledged a new customer offer at $39.99 (taxes included) per month for up to one year. I accepted that and knew that my client could likely later negotiate that cost down through threats of canceling when the first year was finished.

I provided my client's address, an alias name that had already been established and associated with a secondary credit card, and requested automatic bill pay through the credit card. I was told that I could set up the automatic payment myself after the account had been established. This was even better. If I were to repeat this process today, I would use an alias name and a Privacy.com card. This gives my client more isolation from his true credit card account. I got to the end thinking things were too smooth when the personal questions arrived. He needed my SSN in order to complete the process.

I had dealt with Charter in the past and was able to bypass this requirement, so I started testing the situation. I first stated "Oh wow, I was not prepared for that. You see, I was recently the victim of identity theft and the police told me I was not allowed to give out my SSN until the investigation was complete". The operator was very sympathetic and placed me on hold briefly. He then asked for a date of birth in order to conduct the query. I continued to resist and stated "I think that would be the same as giving you my SSN. I will give you my credit card right now, can I just auto pay?". I was then greeted with something I did not expect. The operator stated "The system demands at least a year of birth; can you give me that?". I took a moment to evaluate the risk and provided a year of birth which was not accurate. This seemed odd to me because there is not much the operator could do with that limited information. However, it was enough to get to the next screen. He now needed an email address for the account details and monthly electronic billing. It is always important to have this alias email account ready before any calls are made. He finished the order and the call was terminated.

Three days later, Charter arrived at his house and installed the service. They provided a modem, and charged $29.99 for installation. My client had his secondary credit card ready, but he was never asked for it. Charter conducted the installation, activated the service, and left without collecting any form of payment. The next day he received an email notifying him of a payment due. He created a new account on the Charter website and provided his secondary credit card for the payment (Privacy.com is a better choice today). He then activated automatic payments to that card and enabled the paperless billing option. Today, he continues to receive internet service from Charter and pays his bills automatically through his secondary credit card. Charter does not know

his true name. He has committed no fraud. He is a loyal customer and will likely pay Charter for services for the rest of his time at this residence. Charter did not require any contract and he can cancel any time. I was pleasantly surprised.

I thought that this may be a fluke. Maybe I was lucky with that operator. I decided to test the system again. However, this time I would contact all of the providers. I decided to contact each major internet provider through two separate calls and document the results. My goal was to identify the personal information requirements for each provider in order to activate service to a residential home. The following were my findings. Please note that your experiences may differ.

I started with Comcast. I assumed that they would be the worst to deal with. This is probably due to years of negative publicity in reference to horrible customer support. They were actually quite pleasant. I stated on two calls with two different employees that I wanted internet service but would not provide an SSN. The first employee stated that an SSN was required for a "risk assessment". I inquired on ways to bypass this requirement and discovered that Comcast will eliminate this requirement and risk assessment if the customer pays a $50 deposit. The deposit would be returned after one year of paid service. The second employee also stated that an SSN was required for a "risk assessment" and that there was no way to bypass this. I mentioned the $50 deposit, and after a brief hold was told that the deposit would eliminate the requirement. I have had two clients since these conversations who have confirmed that Comcast will provide service to any name supplied as long as a credit card deposit of $50 was provided. I consider this a fair compromise. Comcast also did not require a contract of any specific length of service.

Your experiences may vary from mine. Overall, most internet service providers stated that an SSN and credit check were required for service at first. When pushed on alternative options, many acknowledged that this information was not required. I found that the following two questions gained the best results when talking with a sales representative. I encourage you to be persistent. Overall, the person you talk to wants to complete the sale.

- I was recently the victim of identity theft and was told to no longer disclose my SSN. Is there any way I can provide a deposit instead of giving you my personal details?
- I reviewed your website offer details and I will be paying automatically by credit card in order to forego giving you my SSN or DOB. Is this still your policy?

Mobile Internet Hotspots

In the past year, I have encountered many clients who struggled to obtain internet service anonymously. Some lived in rural areas with limited options, such as landline DSL. Most of these providers demand a true name, date of birth, SSN, and a soft credit pull. Other clients planned to travel constantly or live out of an RV for a while. In these rare situations, I have had better success with mobile internet hotspots over traditional wired internet connectivity. I have been able to register Verizon, T-Mobile, and AT&T mobile hotspots with pre-paid contactless access without providing any true identity. You will pay more for this luxury than traditional services and be limited on the amount of data. If you choose this option, know that video streaming may be an issue and can deplete your data quickly. I only recommend these when clients accept that email and web browsing is allowed, but large downloads may cause problems. If this is of interest to you, identify the best signals in your area and focus on the carriers with the strongest reception. Always obtain the most data you can afford. If desperate, your GrapheneOS or Apple iOS device can serve as a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot to multiple devices. Make sure you have a data plan which supports this decision.

SSN Alternatives

Whenever a utility service demands an SSN for a client, I often respond that the client is not a U.S. citizen (an actual scenario where this worked for a client is explained later). Sometimes, the utility will demand the equivalent number for that person's country, which is often referred to as a National ID Number. I am always prepared

for this. Most utilities will accept practically any number you give them, but some will use an online service to verify the number conforms to the country's standard. Canada uses the Social Insurance Number (SIN) system. The following three SINs will verify as valid, but will never be assigned to anyone.

903 841 278
991 598 558
902 280 171

The United Kingdom uses the National Insurance (NI) number, and the following three NIs will verify as valid, but will never be assigned to anyone.

SX 87 58 64 B
KR 11 23 28 A
RY 61 81 33 D

Mexico uses the CURP system which is an 18-character alphanumeric code. The first digit is from the first letter of the paternal surname; the second is the first internal vowel of the paternal surname; the third is the first letter of the maternal surname; and the fourth is the first letter of the given name. This is followed by the six numbers that are the person's date of birth in YYMMDD format; one letter describing the person's gender ("H" for male and "M" for female); two letters which are the abbreviation for the state where the person was born; the first consonant of the paternal surname; the first internal consonant of the maternal surname; the first internal consonant of the given name; a character to avoid duplicate CURPs; and finally, a character that is a checksum. an example may appear as "BAAQ800201HMNRLF03". However, do not use that number, as it may be associated with a real person.

By simply changing the date of birth to a date prior to 100 years and changing the seventeenth digit to "9", we should be able to avoid intruding on anyone alive or deceased. The following would pass structure validation for a Mexican CURP.

BAAR200201HNERLF93 (Male-Born Abroad)
MAAR200201MNERLF93 (Female-Born Abroad)

Amazon Orders and Issues

I devote an entire section to Amazon for two reasons. First, it is an immensely popular online retail establishment, even with privacy enthusiasts. Second, I encounter constant issues attempting anonymous purchases, as do many readers. I place orders through Amazon weekly and never jeopardize my privacy during the process. If you are already using Amazon and have an account created, I recommend that you stop using that account and create a new one in order to prevent further tracking of your purchases. You may be surprised to learn about the data shared with Amazon sellers, which is explained in a moment. The details which you provide within a new account are very important. Before discussing the appropriate methods, please consider an actual scenario.

A client had moved to a new rental house to escape a dangerous situation. She had nothing associated with her real name at the address. The utilities were still in the name of the landlord. She used a PO Box for her personal mail. She was doing everything right. She created a new Amazon account and provided the name of her landlord and her home address for shipping purposes. This way, her packages would arrive in the name of the property owner and she would stay invisible. She made sure that her name was not visible in any part of the order.

When prompted for payment, she used her real credit card in her name. She verified one last time that her name was not present anywhere within the actual order or shipping information. Her item, a pair of hiking shoes, arrived in the name of the landlord. Her real name was not referenced anywhere on the package. Within thirty days, she received a piece of mail that made her stomach drop. It was a catalog of hiking equipment addressed

to her real name at her address. The company that accepted the order through Amazon was given her name as attached to the credit card. Therefore, the company added her to their catalog delivery list.

All of her hard work was ruined from this one mistake. Within another thirty days, she started receiving other junk mail in her name. Within ninety days, she found her name associated with her address online. This was her only slip. The lesson to learn here is that you can never tie your real name to your address if you do not want that association public.

I want to tackle Amazon purchases in three phases. First, we should discuss the anonymous Amazon account created in an alias name and funded with Amazon gift cards purchased with cash. This is your best option for private purchases. Next, we should acknowledge placing orders within your real name and delivered to addresses not associated with your home. This is the easiest way to avoid Amazon's strict fraud triggers. Finally, we should consider ways to sanitize our accounts, regardless of the names used, and understand how Amazon shares data with third parties. While this section is devoted to Amazon, I apply the same principles to other online retail businesses such as Apple, BestBuy, and others.

Anonymous Amazon Orders

The following steps will mask your real identity from your Amazon purchases. These have changed drastically since the previous editions. Amazon constantly receives fraud attempts with stolen credit cards used for purchases. Therefore, the scrutiny on every new account is high. We must convince Amazon that we are a good customer with legal money to spend. That should be easy, but we look suspicious as privacy seekers. Consider creating a new Amazon account with the following information.

- **Name**: Use the name of which you want your packages addressed. This could be the landlord at your address, or a completely new alias associated with your home. I prefer to keep this generic but not suspicious, such as Angel Martinez.
- **Email Address**: You must provide an email address for your new Amazon account. I recommend using an address attached to a custom domain as previously explained, which is forwarded to your ProtonMail account. I previously recommended a protonmail.com address, but this is no longer the case. Unfortunately, Amazon views these as suspicious and as an indicator of fraud. Custom domains previously unused on Amazon also receive scrutiny, but do not carry over bad history. Email addresses associated with forwarding or masking services will always be blocked. This is the first fraud flag analyzed by Amazon.
- **Payment**: My first preference is to purchase an Amazon gift card with cash from a local store. This is the least invasive option. I never recommend an initial amount higher than $25. If you buy a $500 Amazon gift card from a grocery store with cash, and apply it to a brand-new account, it is likely to be suspended as suspicious. A $10 to $25 card is less suspicious to Amazon, and less risk to both Amazon and you.
- **Address**: Provide your shipping address as desired. This may be your actual home if you do not have a better place for deliveries. If you are ordering large items, it can be convenient to have them delivered directly to your house. My preference is to have all packages delivered to an Amazon locker if you have one nearby. I have used my real home addresses in the past, but only for large deliveries. Because the name on the shipment is not my real name, I do not see this as a huge privacy concern. I believe it helps establish that someone else lives at your residence, and provides great disinformation. You should scrutinize any option you choose and make sure that it is appropriate for your scenario.
- **Telephone**: If forced to provide a telephone number, provide a VOIP option as previously explained. Make sure it is a number which is not publicly associated to your true name.

Be sure to document all provided details within your password manager. If there is an issue with your account, or it is flagged as suspicious, you may be asked to confirm any details provided at the time of account creation.

In a perfect world, you now possess a new Amazon account in an alias name with a small amount of funding. You should be able to spend your $25 balance any way desired. Unfortunately, we do not live in this perfect world. In my experience, allowing the account to "mature" is your best option in order to avoid an account suspension. If you try to place an order right away for $25 worth of SIM cards, expect failure. The following is my strategy.

- Create an Amazon account while connected to local public Wi-Fi, such as a library, Starbucks, or McDonalds. Do not use a VPN. We want Amazon to know the general location of your account creation.
- Apply a $10 to $25 Amazon gift card to the account.
- Browse through various products and add a small digital item to your cart. Do not complete the purchase. I recommend adding a digital download, such as a single song. At the time of this writing, I added the song "Willow" by Taylor Swift at a price of $1.29. This further isolates my true music tastes from my new alias.
- In two days, visit Amazon again from the same public Wi-Fi without VPN and complete the purchase, deducting the amount from your gift card balance. This is typical behavior of a real customer, and not someone trying to steal from the company.

This purchase is very low risk to Amazon. If the funds were later deemed fraudulent, Amazon does not experience a loss of any physical product. After a week, your account should still be in good standing. Let's move on to phase two.

- Attempt the purchase of a small physical product while connected to the same public Wi-Fi without use of a VPN. This item can be sent to your home or an Amazon locker, based on your own threat model and preference.
- If 30 days go by without any issues, your account should now be ready for use.

This method should protect you from any association between your name, your purchases, and your home. You could likely use this new Amazon account for all of your purchases and have no problems. If you add Prime to the account, it usually further hardens the authenticity. My best advice is to always take it slow, keep the initial purchases low, and allow the account to mature as any other legitimate account would.

Once an account has aged a few weeks without issue, you could add a Privacy.com card as a payment source in order to avoid the need for future gift cards. That is what I do for clients. However, I always use a different billing address, such as a hotel. This is because I do not want the shipping address associated with the transaction. Providing a hotel billing address hides your shipping (home) address from any third parties who may have access to the billing data. This is always good practice any time you use a Privacy.com card since any provided billing information is authorized anyway. **Never use your true home address within any billing details associated with an online purchase.**

After your account is established and "happy", you should begin the process of connecting through a VPN. This action can trigger a fraud warning with Amazon, but this is rare if you followed the previous directions. I always connect my VPN through a server near the area where the account was established. If the account is locked, connecting through the original public Wi-Fi source should unlock the restriction. Once you can access the account from behind a VPN, you should never need to access the original Wi-Fi again. Be sure to always select the same general VPN location every time. If you typically connect to Amazon from a VPN server in Los Angeles, but log in one day from a New York server, expect trouble.

If you have credit from gift cards on your account and it is suspended due to suspected fraud, your options are limited. Contacting customer support will usually not help. The only solution I have found is to contact "Corporation Service Company", which is Amazon's registered arbitration agent. To begin an arbitration proceeding, you must send a letter requesting arbitration and describing your claim to their registered agent at the following address.

Corporation Service Company
300 Deschutes Way SW
Suite 304
Tumwater, WA 98501

A polite, well-worded letter explaining your situation will usually unlock the account and funds within three weeks. More details can be found at the following website.

https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=GNG9PXYZUMQT72QK

I offer one final consideration before you proceed to the next page. Amazon facilitates most of their deliveries with freelance drivers in your area. Their drivers take a picture of each package using a personal mobile device connected to Amazon through their Flex application. The image is sent unencrypted through a public-facing URL and can be accessed without a password. This app requires Wi-Fi and Bluetooth scanning be enabled at all times, and it collects the details of any radio frequency transmissions, including your home SSIDs.

I refuse to allow strangers to take photos of my home, packages, and shipping labels from their phones. Because of this, I order all items to an alias name and have them shipped to a local Amazon locker. I respect that this is not always an option for everyone. The following pages tackle some privacy considerations for traditional Amazon purchases.

Traditional Amazon Orders

Another option is to have packages delivered in your real name to your UPS box. This way, you can use a traditional credit card without risk of exposing your home address. I have done this when I need to purchase expensive items which are monitored closely for fraud, such as a new cell phone or laptop. The more items which are delivered to your public box address, the more you establish history in your name at that address. Consumer reporting services may pick this up, which can be beneficial.

The only time I discourage this activity is when high-risk clients need to hide their general location. If a person is running from an abusive relationship, they may not want anything in their name within 100 miles of their true home. Consider your own needs. If you desire this level of extreme privacy, I believe you should avoid any deliveries made directly to your home in any name, including an alias. This prevents any spillage of real payment information in association with the home.

For an extra layer of privacy, I currently ship most important packages to an LLC name similar to a real LLC that I listed on my registration form with my local shipping provider. This prevents me from associating my real name with the purchases, and the LLC is not connected to me through the state. Let's run through an example.

- Assume I need to purchase a new laptop. Amazon would never send this out to a new account without much activity, especially if it is funded by gift cards or masked debit cards. Further, I want to place the purchase on my credit card in order to possess purchase protections.
- I have previously opened a mail receiving account with a local shipping provider under my true name. I advised that I own a business called Financial Ventures LLC, and I may occasionally receive a package addressed to the business.
- I have previously ordered a business credit card from American Express which displays both my true name and my LLC name.
- I create a new Amazon account under the LLC name and add my business credit card to the account. I provide true billing information, which happens to be my PMB address.
- I complete the purchase and instruct Amazon to ship the item to the independent shipping receiver or UPS box in the LLC name. Upon arrival of the product, I pick it up without incident.

In this scenario, Amazon never knows my real name, but only my LLC name. They see I am using a real business credit card which has a low risk of fraud. Third-party vendors never see my name, and only possess a CMRA shipping address. The billing is my PMB, which I have never physically visited.

Amazon Account Sanitization and Data Sharing

Regardless of the type of Amazon account you possess, you should consider minor modifications which can keep your data as private and secure as possible. After logging in to your account, consider the following.

- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Under "Ordering and shopping preferences", click "Your Amazon profile".
- Click the button titled "Edit your public profile".
- Remove or modify any information desired.
- Click the "Edit privacy settings" tab.
- Uncheck everything in the section titled "What's public on your public profile".
- Enable "Hide all activity on your public profile".
- Enable "Hide sensitive activity".
- Uncheck "Allow customers to follow you".
- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Under "Ordering and shopping preferences", click "Manage your lists".
- Hover over the three dots next to "Send list to others", then select "Manage list".
- Ensure list is "Private" and select "Don't manage this list through Alexa".
- Repeat for all lists on this page.
- In the Amazon search bar, click "Browsing History".
- Click "Manage history", "Remove all items from view", then confirm.
- Change the toggle for "Turn browsing history on/off" to "Off".
- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Under "Communication and content", click "Advertising preferences".
- Select "Do not show me interest-based ads provided by Amazon" and click "Submit".
- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Under "Ordering and shopping preferences", click "Your payments".
- Expand any payment sources no longer used and select "Remove".
- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Click "Login & Security" and enable "Two-Step Verification".
- Click "Account and Lists" in the upper-right corner.
- Under "Ordering and shopping preferences", click "Your addresses".
- Remove any sensitive content.

Identify your own Amazon-related requirements for convenience versus privacy and security. I confess I rely on Amazon heavily, but I am not proud of it. Spending cash at a local store removes the headaches associated with the previous five pages.

Does all of this really matter? I believe so. Consider one final anecdote. In 2021, I placed a purchase for a small home appliance on Amazon. I provided an alias name and had the item shipped to an Amazon locker. The billing address was a hotel and the form of payment was a Privacy.com masked debit card. The item arrived, but was non-functioning. I contacted the manufacturer, but they refused to honor the warranty. I provided a negative review under my alias announcing the issue. This allowed me to vent frustration and sprinkle some disinformation on the internet. I then moved on.

A week later, the manufacturer emailed me at the email address associated with my alias Amazon account (which was not the address used for my previous contact). They apologized for the problem and offered to send me a replacement in exchange for removing the negative post. They also offered to send the item to the original locker address or my provided hotel billing address. In other words, Amazon shared my alias name, billing address, physical address, and alias email account with the seller, even though the purchase was delivered through Amazon warehouses. I have since learned that this is common practice. Any Amazon seller can obtain user details with a simple request.

As an author, I noticed someone selling counterfeit copies of the second edition of this book. I complained to Amazon, and they removed the items. I then politely asked Amazon for the name, address, and email contact for the counterfeit seller, expecting refusal to disclose such personal details. Instead, they immediately wrote back providing the full account details. This led to some very interesting conversations with the counterfeit sellers.

As an attempt to push this further, I requested the name and email address of a person who posted a negative review of this book in order to compensate them for their troubles. Amazon happily forwarded me the personal Gmail account of the reader. This is completely unacceptable. When someone criticizes you for your usage of aliases with online orders, share these stories.

I realize this section offers many options without enforcement of a specific strategy. You should determine what is best for you. I will break down my preferred Amazon payment and shipping strategies in order from most private to least private.

- Order: Alias Name > Payment: Gift Card > Shipment: Amazon Locker
- Order: Alias Business Name > Payment: Gift Card > Shipment: UPS Store
- Order: Alias Name > Payment: Gift Card > Shipment: Home
- Order: Alias Name > Payment: Privacy.com > Shipment: Home
- Order: Real Name > Payment: Credit Card > Shipment: Amazon Locker
- Order: Real Name > Payment: Credit Card > Shipment: UPS Store

Moving Services

You will likely be asked to provide a credit card as a deposit when you reserve a company for any type of high value service. This may include home maintenance, satellite television, or movers. Many of these will not accept prepaid cards and will insist on a hold of funds within the credit card account. For these situations, I always recommend using your secondary credit card in an alias name. The following example illustrates the importance of not using a card in your true name with home services.

A client was relocating to another state to escape an abusive ex and to take on a new job. She was renting a small apartment near her new employer which included all utilities. She knew not to attach her name to anything regarding her new address. She contacted a popular home moving company and scheduled them to arrive at her current home, pack her belongings into a moving truck, and deliver them to her new address. As you can imagine, this presented a unique situation. They rightfully needed her current address and new address. They also insisted on obtaining her name, credit card number, and a telephone number to contact her during delivery. She panicked and hung up without giving them any details. Then she called me.

If she had completed the order, there would be a very strong trail from her previous address to her new address. I suspect that within weeks, she would receive targeted advertising in her name at her new address offering typical services to a new resident. Many moving companies supplement their revenue by sharing customer databases with non-competing services which cater to new residents. This data could easily leak to online people search websites. I decided to help her by facilitating the entire moving process on her behalf.

I chose U-Haul as the most appropriate mover for her situation. Her relocation was substantial, and the mileage fees alone for a moving truck were outrageous. When adding the fee for two movers to facilitate the transfer, the quote was several thousands of dollars. I completed the order for the move in three isolated phases. For the sake of this scenario, assume that she was moving from Miami to St. Louis.

I scheduled U-Haul to deliver two moving U-box containers to her current home. These are large wooden crates which allow you to store belongings before being shipped by a semi-truck and trailer. U-Haul required a valid credit card so I provided my client's secondary credit card in an alias name. This order also included pickup of the full containers and storage at the Miami U-Haul headquarters. The boxes were delivered by the local Miami U-Haul provider closest to her home.

She had friends help her fill the containers and I called U-Haul to come and pick them up. They were transferred and stored at the Miami headquarters awaiting further instruction. Customers are allotted 30 days of included storage before additional fees are introduced. I called the Miami U-Haul and provided the order number and alias name. I requested that U-Haul deliver these containers to the St. Louis storage facility. I was given the rate for this service and a deposit was charged to the card on file.

A week later, the email address on file received a confirmation that the containers had arrived in St. Louis. They were stored there awaiting further orders. The storage fees were covered as part of the original contract. Through the U-Haul website, I identified a reputable moving company. I added their services to the current open contract and provided a destination address of a post office within the city near where she was moving. This was the last piece of information that was given to U-Haul. I authorized U-Haul to release the containers to the moving company.

I called the independent moving service that would be picking up her containers and delivering them to her new apartment. I provided the order number and her alias name. I stated that the original order had a placeholder address because I did not know the new address to where I was moving. I then gave this company her actual address over the phone and she met the movers there to direct them with the move. She possessed the release code that allowed the moving company to close the contract and be paid by U-Haul.

Out of curiosity, I input similar beginning and ending addresses within the U-Haul website moving calculator. My method was the exact same price as if I would have given U-Haul everything they needed in one step. In my method, U-Haul does not know her real name or her current address. For full disclosure, they know that she likely lives near St. Louis. There is very little value in this information to U-Haul. The independent moving company knows her new address, but they do not know her name or from where she moved. If her U-Haul account were to be breached, her address would appear to be a local post office.

I trained her to have small talk answers ready for the movers. She was to say that she is staying in St. Louis with her husband while he was assigned there by his employer and then returning to California soon. I later asked her how that went. She stated that she simply did not answer any of their questions and they stopped talking to her altogether. I liked working with her.

As you can see, every step of any relocation is full of potential vulnerabilities. One mistake can unravel all of your effort. Plan everything to the point of exhaustion. Attempt to find areas which may present hurdles. Run through every possible scenario and consider any ways in which your privacy may be in jeopardy. Again, this is a lot of work. However, the payoff at the end is worth all of the hassle.

Appliance Purchases

During a move, it is likely that you will need some major purchases delivered to your home. There is no room for error here, as most big-box stores collect and share data about all of their customers. When you purchase a refrigerator, washer, dryer, or other large item, free local shipping is often included. In order to complete the delivery, the store will require your home address, telephone number, and a name. The address must be accurate,

but you could provide a burner phone number and an alias name. However, the name provided must match the source of payment. If you use a real name or accurate credit card, you have just connected your true identity to your home address.

In previous books, I have mentioned the ability to make the purchase under an alias name with a secondary credit card, but I no longer have faith in the protection this provides. In 2017, I needed to purchase a replacement oven for a non-functioning unit. I had agreed to complete this task for my landlord as part of his willingness to allow me to stay there anonymously. I walked into a national chain appliance store and identified the model I desired. I had no way to transport it to my current rental unit. During checkout, I provided my alias name, which also appears on my secondary credit card. When the sales person swiped the card, he asked if any of the names on the screen were me. The first option was Michael Bazzell. Since I am always concerned about protecting my home address, I awkwardly canceled the order and left without completing the purchase. Fortunately, I had not yet provided the delivery address. This was a close call.

What happened was a careless mistake. On a previous visit to this chain at another location, I used my real credit card under my real name to make a small purchase. This entered me into the nationwide system. Since my alias secondary credit card possessed the same account number and expiration as my primary card in my name, the store knew both purchases were connected to the same card. The system queried the card number and prompted the sales associate to choose any applicable names of previous customers. Some stores do this with telephone numbers. While this may seem minor to your threat model, it was a serious violation to me. Today, I conduct these purchases quite differently.

I first visit the store to identify the exact appliances I desire. I make sure that my choices are in stock and ready for delivery. I choose businesses with powerful online stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot. I then leave and decide which level of privacy I desire for me or my client. I present two options here, displayed in order of most private to least.

If possible, I make the payment in store with cash. I then provide the real address for delivery and any name I choose. Some stores will not accept cash over a specific limit and will decline a large purchase. While the money displays "legal tender", private businesses have a right to refuse cash. My next option is prepaid credit cards. I purchase enough gift cards to cover the entire amount, and again provide the real address with an alias name. This has worked throughout most of 2017 and 2018. Lately, I encounter stores that require government identification in order to schedule a delivery. This is a deal-breaker for me. When I receive this level of verification, I move to the second option.

I make the purchase through the store's website using a Privacy.com debit card number. We lose a small amount of privacy here because there is a digital trail back to my bank. This is acceptable for most clients. After the online purchase is approved, I telephone the local store and schedule the delivery. Since I am not there in person, there is no way to enforce a check of identification. The delivery people could ask for it, but this has never happened. If it did, I would simply claim that I did not have one with me, as I was not told this would be a requirement.

Using Privacy.com debit cards online is not always possible. Beginning in late 2018, I noticed more online stores were declining debit card numbers generated by Privacy.com. This is because these numbers are clearly tagged as an anonymous payment type, similar to a prepaid card. When a merchant processes a payment with one of these cards, it may have rules that decline the purchase completely or if above a specific amount threshold. This has happened to me, but there is always a workaround.

I attempted to purchase a refrigerator from Home Depot through their online website. I knew it was in stock locally and I planned to have it delivered at no cost. I provided my real address, the name of John Wilson, and a VOIP telephone number assigned to my home. The purchase was immediately declined. I knew that the Privacy.com card I was using was valid and had not been used with any other merchants. The Privacy.com app

did not display any declined charges. A call to Home Depot customer support only revealed that the purchase was declined, with no further explanation.

I called the local store, and asked to speak to someone in the home appliance division. I explained that I tried to make a purchase online, but that it was declined. I told the employee that I contacted the bank that issued the debit card and was told there was no attempt to process the charge from Home Depot. I then asked if they could do this manually. The employee agreed and processed my order over the telephone. I provided the same Privacy.com card number, alias name, and actual home address. The charge was processed with no issues, and I could see the transaction within the application. The refrigerator was delivered two days later without incident, and I was never asked to display identification. The receipt was scanned into a PDF at the store and sent to my ProtonMail email address assigned to my home.

I should note here that a Privacy.com account has an initial purchase limit of $300 per week. This will not suffice for large purchases. Once you routinely make small successful purchases using this service, your limit will slowly rise. I have found that a call to their support can lift that limit higher. I have clients who are allowed to spend up to $2,500 weekly with a monthly limit of $10,000. It takes time to build to this level, so I suggest using the service long before it is needed for expensive purchases.

Overall, I never associate my true name with any delivery to my home address. This includes products paid for using a secondary credit card which could easily be tied back to me. In the first scenario (cash or prepaid cards), my weakest link is the surveillance footage of me in the store. If they demand government identification, this option cannot be made private and should be avoided. In the second scenario, the Privacy.com card is my threat. Privacy.com knows my name and that I purchased an item at a specific store, but does not know my address. The store knows I purchased with a Privacy.com card and my address, but does not know my name. The bank knows I spent money through Privacy.com. A court order to all three would reveal the connections. For most clients, that is not a violation of their threat model. For a rare handful, it is. Consider the following situation I had with a client.

In 2018, I helped a client who was an ex-wife of an FBI agent who had begun harassing her online and in real life. She worried that his access to premium data mining tools and government databases placed her at an increased risk. When she purchased her appliances with delivery to her new anonymous home, she ordered one item at a time, always paid cash, and politely declined to display any identification during each purchase. She is a focused, strong woman who can tolerate awkward moments and silence. Her cold stare magically bypassed the ID requirement each time. She is a ninja, so your mileage may vary.

Some clients express concern over the warranties which come with appliances. Large items often include a warranty card which must be mailed to the manufacturer. It asks for your name, address, and telephone number, along with a serial number of the appliance. My clients ask if they should use their real names since a warranty in an alias may create a situation where payment cannot be processed. My firm stance is that these cards should be avoided. They are not required for the warranty to be active, and seldom change any of the coverage. Your receipt from the purchase will satisfy any requirements, and the date on the delivery receipt defines when the warranty begins.

When I had a clothes dryer stop working within the warranty period, I simply called the local store where it was purchased and requested a warranty repair or return. The store was able to view my purchase history under the alias name and accurate address. The store created a service ticket, and a third-party repair company contacted me. They responded to my home the next day and repaired the machine. They already possessed my alias information because Home Depot shared it with them. This did not surprise or concern me, as it was an alias name. This is another example of how any details provided at the time of purchase can be shared without your knowledge. Your diligence with anonymous purchases will protect your home address from being publicly exposed.

Medical Services

This section presents quite a quandary. Until this point, I have encouraged you to hide your true identity during purchases in order to protect your personal information from being released publicly. Medical services can complicate this rather quickly. Your doctors need to know your true identity in order to update health records which could be vital to your life. Health insurance requires confirmation of your identity including photo identification and an SSN. We are often told by medical staff that HIPAA laws protect our information, but the countless healthcare breaches prove this line of thinking as incorrect. We know that any information provided during receipt of medical services is likely to be stored insecurely, shared intentionally, or leaked accidentally. Therefore, let's clean it up.

If you need emergency services, surgery, or typical care from a physician, I believe you should absolutely provide your true name and DOB. This will be used to modify patient records, and during any follow-up care. For me, the personal details stop there. I never provide my SSN, home address, personal email address, or telephone number in any circumstance. The following actual events should summarize my reasons.

In 2017, I visited a local optometrist for an eye checkup. I provided my real name and a slightly altered DOB. I refused all other details and paid with cash. The office insisted I provide a cell number as it was the system identifier. I supplied an old Google Voice number which was no longer used. Within 90 days, I began receiving marketing text messages related to eye care. Today, my true name is associated with that phone number within a marketing database titled "U.S. Consumers" provided by infousa.com. I can do nothing to remove it. Fortunately, the DOB and contact information does not jeopardize my privacy.

In 2018, I responded to a local urgent care facility due to suspected pneumonia after extensive international travel. I provided my true name and DOB on the patient paperwork. I supplied a VOIP telephone number, a CMRA mailing address, and a burner email address. I left the SSN line blank. When pushed for my SSN, I explained that I was paying cash and that I had not met my (high) deductible on my health insurance. I was treated, medicated, and released. In less than 90 days, I received an email to my burner account from "DrChrono" urging me to get a flu shot at the same urgent care facility where I was previously treated. It referenced a high number of flu-related cases which can lead to pneumonia. DrChrono is the software solution used by many urgent care facilities to collect and update patient information. I never agreed to provide my name, email, or location to this third party, yet it was shared. I still receive targeted advertising from that visit. Should I really care about this company knowing my medical history? I believe so. If you disagree, consider the following verbatim wording from their privacy policy.

"We use information, including Personal Information, for internal and service-related purposes and may provide it to third parties ... We may use and retain any data we collect to provide and improve our services ... We may share any information we receive with vendors and service providers ... If we are involved in a merger, acquisition, ... your information may be sold or transferred."

In other words, they can do anything they like with your medical data. Worse, the collection of data is more likely to be breached or leaked publicly. The next week, I responded to a local pulmonologist for follow-up to my issue. As expected, they demanded many personal details. I provided a unique email address and VOIP number as well as the same CMRA mailing address. I attempted to leave the SSN line blank, but I was challenged. I was informed that this was mandated by federal law (which is not accurate) and required from insurance providers (which is also not true). My line about my deductible was not getting me anywhere. The compromise I made was to supply my health insurance account number, which could be verified on my member card. The office staff hesitantly accepted this. In 2019, I was sent a notice from this office notifying me that the physician I had seen was retiring. I did not think much of this as he was not someone I planned to visit again. Three weeks later, I received promotional emails and text messages from other area doctors who could take over for any related medical needs I had. I assume that the original office sold their patient contact data to similar offices before shutting the doors permanently. This was likely a HIPAA violation.

If you are often forced to provide an SSN for medical treatment while paying with cash, you have an alternative option, which enters some grey area. You could apply for an EIN from the IRS. I have a client who has done this. He grew tired of the battle to exclude his SSN from new paperwork with every visit. He applied for a Sole Proprietor EIN from the IRS (explained later), which was approved instantly and included a confirmation letter from the IRS displaying this number. He now provides this EIN, which is the same number of digits as an SSN, on all of his forms. He also provides his insurance card which displays the unique number assigned to him for any claims. The medical offices have no idea that the number he provides on the SSN line is actually an EIN. Both pass validation. Since he owns that number, he is not committing fraud. However, there could be some issues with this.

If his insurance provider receives notification that treatment was conducted for a person with the EIN he supplied, the claims could be denied. Some medical services only include the insurance ID number within claims while other place priority on the SSN. If he were challenged by his insurance provider, he could provide proof of the ownership of the supplied EIN, and could say that he accidentally gave that instead of the SSN. I only tolerate this strategy for those with minor medical needs. Do not risk continuous treatment over SSN formalities such as this. Tread carefully, your health is more important than privacy measures.

HIPAA Disclosure Considerations

When we visit a doctor, we are bombarded with forms and releases. These offices know that most patients do not read or understand the documents. We simply sign the final page and hope for the best. Under HIPAA laws, your health care provider may share your information to the extent which you authorize the sharing. A health care provider may share relevant information if you give permission; you are present and do not object to sharing the information; or you are not present, and the provider determines based on professional judgment that it is in your best interest. This is a lot of power over the sharing of your medical data. Each office will present documents which request your approval to share your medical information when the office deems justified.

There are many legitimate reasons why a medical office would need to share your details. If you are sick and your family wants to discuss your care, you would need to allow sharing of your diagnosis. Doctors often communicate with pharmacies about your medication. However, this information can also be abused, especially when considering relationships to third parties. I encourage you to take a closer look into these forms and consider the following.

- You have a legal right to receive a paper copy of any HIPAA form. I always demand my own copy of anything I sign.
- Documents such as the "Disclosure of Personal Health Information (PHI)", "National Health Information Network (NHIN)" and "Health Information Exchange (HIE)" forms are optional. These acknowledge your informed consent to share your information. Per HIPAA law, you can decline signing these forms and medical treatment cannot be withheld.
- If you have already signed a form, you are permitted to revoke your signature.
- If an office has combined all documents into one long form, you can cross through any provisions for the HIPAA notice which you do not authorize. If desired, you can include wording similar to "I do not to agree to HIPAA notices due to disclosure language".
- Each U.S. state is a member of the Nationwide Health Information Network (NHIN). Your data is likely included within this program unless you choose to opt-out. You can request a "State HIE opt-out form" from your doctor. If you complete this form, your information can no longer be shared through this database.

There is a delicate balance here. Every time I have challenged the requirement to authorize release of my data, I see the eye-rolls. I can hear the annoyance within their voice. I get it. I am the difficult patient for the day. I believe this effort is justified, but you may disagree. Never avoid necessary medical treatment because an office does not understand HIPAA laws and is requiring you to sign away your rights. Choose wisely.

Store Memberships

I meet many clients who rely on store memberships for much of their shopping. These include places such as Costco and Sam's Club, both of which usually require a paid membership in order to buy items. The membership process is quite invasive. These businesses typically require your name, home address, cellular telephone number, personal email address, payment details, and a stored copy of a government issued ID. Even if you pay with cash, they demand a valid credit card number within their files. Some stores demand a new photo of you, which is kept forever.

My easy solution is to simply avoid these traps. I have not entered a store which required a membership in over twenty years. However, that may not work well for you. If you insist on shopping within these businesses, please consider the following.

- Most stores allow entry if you possess a gift card from the business. If you know someone with a membership to Costco, they can purchase gift cards within the store. You can enter and spend the balance of this card without an active membership. If purchasing with cash, there should be no trail.
- Most stores require automatic renewal of the membership. You can usually opt-out of this by contacting customer support. Otherwise, renewals keep your membership active, even if under a different credit card number. If you are issued a new card under the same account, most businesses are allowed to retrieve the new billing details. Switching the payment source to a masked debit card can prevent this. Disable any cards which should no longer be charged.
- If you have an active account, you can contact customer service and demand that your government issued ID number, such as a driver's license number, be removed from your profile. Any digital scans remain, but this may remove a unique identifier which will be shared with numerous third parties.
- You have the right to opt-out of marketing mailings, calls, texts and emails. A call to customer service should offer this option. Call each time you get bombarded with unsolicited communications.
- These businesses will not delete any stored information within your profile, but you can modify the details. Updating your contact information to a "burner" address, phone, and email may prevent abuse of your real information. A call to customer service should offer this option. Never ask to "remove" any details, as the customer support representative likely does not have that authority. Always refer to "updating" your record in order to continue to be a valued customer.

Anonymous Purchase Complications

I have experienced many failures while attempting anonymous purchases. Beginning in 2018, I started seeing a huge increase in blocked payments, especially if ordering physical products via the internet. When using a VPN connection, burner email address, alias name, and VOIP telephone number during an online order, I found many purchase attempts blocked by various fraud prevention strategies from the merchant. My orders were canceled without explanation. This happened even when using a legitimate payment source. Since then, I have documented the following most common traits of anonymous payments which seem to trigger fraud prevention systems.

- **VPN**: A VPN alone will usually not flag a payment as fraudulent. In my experience, there must be additional factors before this makes an order seem suspicious.
- **Name**: If using a legitimate credit card, the name must match perfectly. If using a secondary credit card, the alias name must also be exact. Your credit card company discloses to the merchant if the name is different than on the account.
- **Email**: If using a known temporary email provider (such as Mailinator) or masked service (such as 33Mail), this will cause scrutiny. In my experience, legitimate alias email options from ProtonMail and Fastmail will be accepted. Credit card providers do not always confirm registered email accounts with the merchant.

- **Address**: Providing a shipping address different than the billing address causes scrutiny. If the shipping address is a CMRA or PO Box, expect even more hesitation. Combine a UPS box with a billing address in another state, and you should expect a blocked payment and canceled order.
- **Telephone**: When you make a purchase with your credit card, you are asked for a telephone number. The merchant will be notified if that number does not match the number associated with the credit card account. Therefore, I attach secure Google Voice numbers to my credit cards associated with my real name and secondary alias names. I then provide the appropriate number on all orders.
- **Prepaid Cards**: I only use these for purchases inside physical stores. Online use requires registration and often an SSN. Online orders with a prepaid card will be blocked without proper registration.
- **Masked Cards**: Companies know when you pay with a masked card such as Privacy.com. Many online merchants will block purchases unless the billing name matches the shipping name, and the shipping address matches public people search records.

The following examples summarize actual successes and failures when ordering products through online merchants.

- I attempted to purchase several refurbished iPhones directly from Apple. I provided a legitimate Privacy.com card number, alias name, and UPS store address. The order was canceled due to "high risk". Talking with the Apple security team revealed that the suspicion was because the name provided did not specifically match the payment source or address. While Privacy.com allows you to use any name for purchases, merchants can block these payments due to lack of a confirmed name through public records and online databases.
- I attempted the same type of purchase through Gazelle. The order was canceled immediately. Fraud prevention personnel confirmed that the cancellation trigger was because the payment source was a masked debit card. They confirmed they would not accept any prepaid or masked card which were not registered to a real name, address, and SSN.
- I attempted to order several discounted new iPhones through BestBuy. I provided my secondary credit card in an alias name, a shipping address of a UPS store, a VOIP number, and an alias ProtonMail email address. The order was canceled because the telephone number did not match the number associated with the secondary credit card, and the delivery address was in a state different than the billing address.
- I attempted another purchase directly through Apple. I used my secondary credit card, exact alias name displayed on the card, exact billing address (PMB), a UPS store shipping address, and the VOIP number on file with the alias credit card. The order was accepted, but held for review due to the shipping location being a UPS store in a different state than the billing address (PMB). Apple demanded a call to me at the number on file with the credit card. I answered the call (forwarded to MySudo) and confirmed all aspects of the order. The phones shipped the next day.

The lessons learned are as follows:

- Many online merchants will not ship products when using masked or prepaid payment options. Calling a local store will usually bypass this restriction.
- Merchants will accept traditional secondary (alias) credit cards if all provided information matches records provided by your credit card company.
- Be prepared to accept a call at the number provided during purchase, and make sure that number is on file with your credit card provider.
- When an order is canceled, call support and challenge this annoyance. Often, orders are canceled due to suspicion of fraud, and the merchant assumes that a criminal will not challenge the decision. Contacting a human over the telephone often eases the level of concern for fraud. You can request that the card used be "whitelisted" for another order attempt. If approved, you can then repeat the purchase and hope for a better result.

Device-Specific Complications

When you connect to an online merchant, details about your connection are shared with the website provider. This can include information about your device such as the operating system, installed fonts, and browser configuration. Many fraud prevention systems analyze this data during the purchase in order to identify fraudulent orders. Unfortunately, it is easy for us to get caught-up in this dragnet. My research identifies the following complications.

- Placing an order from any Linux operating system with a hardened Firefox browser triggers fraud detection with numerous online retailers.
- Mobile operating systems such as iOS and Android appear less suspicious than typical operating systems such as Windows, Mac, and Linux.
- Purchases submitted through Android virtual machines almost always trigger order suspensions.
- Purchases submitted through Windows and Linux virtual machines often trigger order suspensions.
- Purchases submitted from browsers with a large amount of internet activity have a higher success rate than those placed from browsers with no personal usage.
- The stock Chrome browser is trusted more than any other options, including Firefox.
- Purchases submitted from Google Chromebooks or iPads appear less suspicious than all other options presented here.

Post-Purchase Considerations

Over the past few years, I have witnessed a concerning interaction between the merchant and customer after a purchase has been made. This is usually in the form of an unsolicited text message or email from the merchant asking for feedback about the purchase. These are extremely common in the service industry, including everything from home repairs to medical appointments. Consider the following two scenarios which jeopardized the privacy of my clients in 2019.

"Joan" purchased a WordPress plugin for her online business. This premium option allowed her online blog to easily accept credit card payment for a niche product she provided for sale. During checkout, she supplied her real name, credit card details, burner email account, and the PO Box address near her private home. Joan was not under any threat of physical violence, but desired a basic level of privacy. There was no public online documentation of the city and state where she resides (yet). Within minutes after the order, email messages began arriving about her purchase.

The first was a welcome message explaining use of the product and the required license key. Immediately following, she received an automated email from a sales representative requesting feedback about the purchase. She ignored this message. The next day, she received an email message asking if there was something wrong with the purchase. The wording insinuated that a confirmation was required in order to use this product, and specified that they had not heard from her since the purchase. She responded "Everything is working fine for me, No issues".

She immediately visited the website to make sure she could still log in to the portal, and noticed something inappropriate. On the home page of the site, a section titled "Happy Customers" displayed a scrolling list of people who had recently purchased this plugin along with a brief snippet of feedback. For Joan, it displayed her first and last name, city and state, along with "Everything is working fine for me, No issues". She was appalled and immediately contacted the company demanding removal of the content.

The response from the company was that this was standard marketing, and that she agreed to the use of her information. The employee provided a link to their privacy policy page, which indeed included wording about use of customer feedback on the site. Joan's approximate location was now publicly visible to the world. It was eventually overridden with more recent feedback.

"Mark" visited a new dentist for a routine exam. He was new to the area after he relocated to an anonymous home upon receiving numerous death threats and a violent physical attack. He chose a dentist in the town adjacent to his home, and used his real name to make the appointment. He provided a PO Box as an address, VOIP number for his cell, unique ProtonMail account for his email, and paid with cash. It is important to note that Mark's real first name is very unique, and there are only a handful of people in the country with that first name. This will work against him in a moment.

Days after the exam, Mark began receiving text messages from the dentist's office in reference to his visit. They were requesting feedback from him in an effort to provide the best experience possible for all patients. He ignored these, but they kept coming. They started with, "We would like your feedback", became more aggressive with, "We still need you to respond", and finally became invasive with, "Your input is required". Mark finally responded to the messages in order to make them stop. He submitted something very generic such as "Great visit". The messages finally stopped.

Several days later, Mark conducted his weekly search of his name on Google. He does this to identify any new threats toward his privacy. He used the "Past Week" option in the "Tools" section of Google in order to filter results to only those posted in the past week. The first result made his stomach drop. It was a review site for the dentist Mark had visited. One of the recent reviews was, "Great visit", and it was attributed to Mark's real first name and last initial. The page clearly identified the city and state where the office was located, and Mark was now publicly exposed online.

Some may think this is no big deal, but I feel different. The service requesting feedback from Mark never asked for consent to publish the information. This may have been included in the paperwork signed at the office, but Mark could not recall any wording associated with this action. Publishing the first name and last initial would be less invasive to a person like me (Michael B.), but Mark's real name is immediately distinguishable at over 15 characters. Anyone searching his name now has a great starting point to find his home, as very few people visit a dentist while on vacation.

Fortunately for Mark, I was able to have the feedback removed. I first contacted the dentist's office and made a polite request on his behalf. The office staff informed me that they do not have control over that data, and that they hire a third-party company to send those messages, collect the content, and publish to a dental review site. I contacted the business providing this service and repeated my request. I heard nothing back from them, and had my attorney draft a cease and desist letter to them demanding removal of the information or accept the risk of civil litigation. The content was removed the next day, but I never received an official response from the company. A letter from an attorney is most often a bluff, but usually not worth fighting. Paying an attorney $100 to send an empty threat is often the most successful strategy we can apply.

You have probably received similar messages from a merchant after a payment. With the popularity of review websites such as Yelp, TripAdvisor, and many others, businesses want to stay ahead of any negative reviews. By convincing happy customers to submit positive feedback, they often have a legal right to publish the content you provide. These positive reviews help drown out the negative feedback initiated by unhappy customers.

I believe there is never a reason for a privacy-conscious person to provide any type of review or feedback in any form. Whether directly to the merchant or on a third-party website, you are exposing potentially sensitive information when you volunteer any details about your purchase or experience. Furthermore, you have nothing to gain. The only party which benefits from your feedback is the merchant.

In most scenarios, merchants are hiring third-party companies to send these messages and collect the data. You have no control over the ways this data is abused. A breach, leak, or intentional sale of the data could expose you to numerous online people search websites. The simple solution is to never participate in this activity.

Customer Support Considerations

I am of an age which I recall contacting a company's customer support by picking up my landline phone and calling a toll-free 800 number which was immediately answered by a human. Those days are over. Many online companies no longer offer any type of telephone support, and a few have eliminated email contact options. The latest customer support protocol forces many customers to use a chat application embedded into the company's website. You must participate in this text-only support option if you want any chance at a remedy to your issue. There are many privacy and security concerns with this activity. Consider the following personal experiences.

- While chatting with a representative from Amazon, I could load all of my previous conversations with other customer support individuals. I also confirmed with the current representative that she could see every support conversation ever associated with the account. I was told this data cannot be deleted and will permanently be present within my profile. She also confirmed that future chat sessions will present all previous content to the next employee. I suspect they use this history to make decisions about refunds and exchanges, so be polite.
- While chatting with support from a financial software company called Banktivity, I was asked to send a screenshot of sensitive bank details through their "secure" portal. This data was stored within a publicly-available third-party file storage host which was immediately visible to anyone with the public URL. After I filed a complaint, customer service told me this was very secure and I should not be worried about the exposure. After seven demands over a 10-day period, I finally was able to force the company to remove the data from public view. Anything you upload through these chat portals is very likely exposed publicly if someone is able to identify the direct link. In this scenario, Google was indexing the domain used to store the sensitive data, so retrieval was simple. I encourage people to avoid any financial-aggregating services such as Banktivity, Mint, QuickBooks, etc. and never upload any sensitive files through these customer support options.
- Your comments within a customer chat service may be used against you. I have witnessed compliments from a customer be repeated on website landing pages attributed to the full name of the person. On the other end of the spectrum, I have witnessed clients' comments within chat windows be used to shame them. One client engaged in an argument about an order which became heated. The company sent out a Tweet with a screenshot of the communication in effort to shame my client. Overall, assume everything typed or spoken to any customer service representative will become public information. While this is unlikely with reputable companies, it helps us ensure that we are never caught off guard.
- I simply never engage in any customer service from my true name. I always use an alias for the order and any follow-up communication.

Virtual Currencies

You may question my reasons for excluding virtual currencies, also known as cryptocurrencies, such as Bitcoin, from the beginning of this chapter as a private payment option. First, I have found many services to be too complicated for most of my clients. Second, possessing truly anonymous digital currency can be quite complicated. Let's begin by defining virtual currency. It is a type of unregulated digital currency which is issued and usually controlled by its developers. It is used and accepted among members of specific virtual communities. The most popular, and most widely accepted, is Bitcoin. Next, we should acknowledge the typical route most people take to purchase this digital money.

Most people who own virtual currency purchased it through an exchange. You might create a profile, provide a credit card number, and purchase a specific amount of Bitcoin. The currency is placed into your "wallet" which is maintained at the exchange. You can spend this money anywhere which accepts Bitcoin. The merchant does not know your identity, and the Bitcoin is "anonymous". However, there are concerns with this strategy. First, the exchange will demand to know your true identity. You will be forced to upload government ID and third-party verification systems will confirm any inaccuracies. Next, the exchange will maintain a record of all purchases. A subpoena to them would disclose all of the activity associated with your name. After that, the publicly visible wallet identifiers disclose the exchange service you use. Finally, you are at the mercy of the

security practices of the exchange. Numerous companies have suffered data breaches which lost all of their customer's money. All of this takes away any privacy benefits of virtual currency. I believe all exchanges should be avoided if you want true anonymity.

I prefer to control my own locally-stored Bitcoin wallet. This can be done with **Electrum** (electrum.org), an open-source software application which stores, accepts, and transmits virtual currencies directly from your computer. Let's walk through installation and transmission of Bitcoin through Electrum. You can download the software from their official website. It natively supports Windows, Mac, Linux, and Android, and the installation is straightforward. Next, we need to create a wallet.

- In the Install Wizard, click the "Choose" button to identify the default directory.
- Click "Cancel" and enter the desired name of your wallet and click "Next".
- Choose a "Standard Wallet" and click "Next".
- Select "Create a new seed" and click "Next".
- Accept the default seed type and click "Next".
- Copy the words presented into a password manager for safe keeping and click "Next".
- Paste the words into the next screen to confirm receipt and click "Next".
- Choose a secure password, enter it, and store it in your password manager.
- Click "Next" and close the application window.
- If desired, move your wallet file to a more secure location.
- Open the application and ensure you can access your new wallet.

Congratulations, you now have a Bitcoin wallet. However, you have no Bitcoin. This is the hardest part. If you cannot buy virtual currencies from an exchange, how do you get any? Some people use Bitcoin ATM machines. You can insert cash and provide a Bitcoin address for deposit into your account. The disadvantages are a 5% to 10% fee for this service and the potential of making a mistake and losing any money. Furthermore, many people report machines requiring you to take a "selfie" while holding your ID, which I would never recommend. However, if you have a local ATM and want to experiment, here are the instructions.

- In the Electrum application, click the "Receive" button at the top of your wallet.
- Copy the receiving address, similar to "1IKIV7Anhsv15RXYS7X2HR2ijjMV7BzIsI".
- Enter a description of the transaction, such as "ATM" and click "Save".
- Click the barcode to enlarge and print the visible barcode.
- At a Bitcoin ATM, follow the prompts to scan your barcode or enter your Bitcoin address, enter the amount of purchase, insert your cash, and confirm your deposit.
- In a few moments, you should see a pending deposit within the Electrum app.

There are a couple of things to explain further. Electrum needs internet connectivity to connect to the Blockchain in order to update any transaction records. Many ATM machines demand a cellular telephone number in order to send a text message containing a code which needs to be entered into the ATM. You could use a VOIP number as explained earlier, but this now associates the transaction with that number. For this reason, I try to avoid ATM machines unless I need the funds available right away. The confirmed Bitcoin deposit can take hours to become available within your wallet.

My preferred way to acquire Bitcoin is from another individual. This can be accomplished in a couple of different ways. The best option is to provide a service which can be paid via Bitcoin. For several years, I provided an online training program which accepted Bitcoin. This helped generate my first few Bitcoin transactions and allowed me to build up my wallet of funds. If you have an online service that caters to privacy enthusiasts, accepting Bitcoin can benefit both you and the consumer.

Technology, hacker, and even Bitcoin-themed conferences are common in urban areas. These events usually include a Bitcoin party where virtual currency enthusiasts gather. One purpose of this interaction is to buy and sell Bitcoin. Many people will happily sell their Bitcoin for cash while buyers see this as a great opportunity to obtain fairly anonymous money. Be careful. Make sure there is a trusted mediator present to ensure the transaction goes through. It is important to have access to your wallet in order to verify the transaction. Ask other attendees about trusted sources and identify someone with whom you feel safe making an exchange. After attending a few events, you will get a feel for the reputable providers. The process within Electrum is identical, and you would give the seller the address or barcode.

Let's assume you now possess some Bitcoin. What should you do with it? For most of my clients, not much. Less than 5% of my clients possess any virtual currency. Of those, very few ever spend it. The most common uses for cryptocurrency are online services and exchanges. You can buy a VPN service, ProtonMail account, or online storage solution with Bitcoin without disclosing a true name or credit card. However, very few physical retail locations accept it. I keep Bitcoin available at all times in order to anonymously purchase these types of online services for clients. Paying via Bitcoin removes most identity verification demands. In order to spend Bitcoin stored in Electrum, the following should assist.

- Click the "Send" option at the top.
- Enter the Bitcoin address provided by the service you are purchasing.
- Provide a description and amount.
- Click the "Send" button.

Be careful with the amount. You can use various online conversion utilities to display the amount of Bitcoin in USD, or you can add USD as an option directly within Electrum. Navigate to Tools > Electrum Preferences > Fiat > Fiat Currency > USD in the software and add USD in the send, receive, and balance menus.

Any virtual currency you possess in this wallet is your responsibility. If you delete the file or lose access, you have lost any money inside it. It is estimated that 23% of all Bitcoin has been lost due to inaccessible wallets. Please do not become part of this statistic. Overall, most of my clients have no use for Bitcoin. I only recommend these actions if you truly NEED it. This is especially true if the volatility of Bitcoin is concerning to you. My first Bitcoin transaction was in 2013 at a rate of approximately $30 per Bitcoin. While writing the previous edition of this book, that same Bitcoin was valued at over $5,000. Today, it is over $50,000. Next year, it could be worthless. To be fair, values of the dollar and gold could also dive. I view Bitcoin as a tool, not an investment.

Two Gold Coins

While traveling internationally, I always keep two one-ounce gold coins in my possession. Cash may be king, but foreign currency during international travel may not carry much weight. However, gold is typically respected with global rates of value. I have found that two ounces of gold can get me out of any uncomfortable situation I may experience. At the time of this writing, two ounces of gold has an approximate value of $3,500 USD. When including various fees associated with sales, I would expect to be able to convert these coins into $3,000 worth of local currency at practically any destination. This would easily allow me to purchase airfare with cash in order to return home or wire money to a credit card in order to extend spending power. If I find myself in a corrupt part of the world, a gold coin can ensure me safe passage through an international checkpoint. That story is probably better suited for another book.

Prior to 2019, I always carried two American Eagle coins. My naive American thinking was that they would carry more weight than traditional gold bullion in other countries. Today, I carry a one-ounce official Canadian Maple Leaf and a one-ounce South American Krugerrand. The gold value is the same as an American Eagle, but the representation of countries may be better received based on my location. I typically avoid pushing any American values during international travel, and attempt to appear more Canadian than American when visiting many countries. You might consider lower weight coins, such as 1/4-ounce Krugerrands, but you will pay a higher price per ounce. You never want to expose these coins unless absolutely necessary during travel. This is why I

hide them well. Small hidden pockets sewn into the interior of backpacks work well. If my international travel is successful, I will have no need to remove them, so I prefer them to be very hard to retrieve.

Another benefit of possessing gold while traveling is the ability to carry large value within small packages. If I stash $35,000 worth of cash in my suitcase, this may raise eyebrows or trigger seizure of funds. A roll of ten gold coins has the same value, but appears less suspicious. It is also much easier to hide a roll of coins than a package of cash. If trying to be covert, placing bulk coins inside a standard paper bank coin roll can be convenient. The Canadian Maple Leaf coins are almost the exact same diameter as U.S. half dollars. A paper half-dollar roll discreetly hides 20 U.S. half-dollars or 18 gold one-ounce Maple Leaf coins. The label on the paper roll displays the value of the contents as $10, and appears less suspicious. I often gift-wrap my coin rolls so that I can say they are a gift if questioned. One client only carries his gold coins within plastic collector's cases and explains that he is a coin dealer if questioned. Evaluate your own threat model and ability to explain your possessions before relying on these techniques.

Summary

Is all this effort really worth it? For me, absolutely. I value the privacy benefits of a truly anonymous home. For my clients under threat of physical danger, of course. Their lives may depend on absolute invisibility. For you...well only you can answer that. I will leave you with one final scenario to end this chapter. The following happened to a close friend and colleague two days before I wrote this section.

"Mary" returned from vacation to discover a concerning series of emails. An internet stranger, whom I will refer to as "Jack" had been attempting to reach her through her LinkedIn profile. Jack was selling a guitar on the mobile app LetGo and had been contacted by a potential buyer. The buyer sent a check to Jack for the purchase amount from a legitimate company with no ties to Mary. However, the "from" address on the FedEx shipment of the check included Mary's full name and home address. It was made to appear that Mary was the person purchasing the guitar, and Jack now knew her full home details.

Jack assumed this was a scam, and suspected Mary may also be a victim. Mary assured Jack she knew nothing of this purchase, and Jack contacted the company identified on the check in order to confirm it was counterfeit. Mary may not technically be a victim, as she lost nothing, but her identity was used during the execution of a felony. The abuse of her name and home address as part of a scam bothered her. While not living completely anonymous, her operational security was strong, and she was much more private than the average person. She wanted to know why she was selected, and how the suspect found her home details. When Mary contacted me to look into this, I did not suspect a traditional people search website. She is not listed in those, especially under her home address. Since I possess numerous data breaches as part of my online investigations service, I went straight for those. A search of her name, which is quite unique, led me to the HauteLook breach discovered in 2019. HauteLook had 28 million unique accounts breached in August of 2018, including full names, home addresses, genders, dates of birth, and password hashes. This data was sold in underground criminal communities. I confirmed that her full name and home address in the HauteLook breach matched the information provided about her on the FedEx label.

Mary had never heard of HauteLook, but confirmed the email address on file in the breach was her personal Yahoo account. I asked if she ever shopped at Nordstrom, which she confirmed. Nordstrom owns HauteLook, and HauteLook fulfills online orders placed through Nordstrom's website. This was likely the connection. In other words, all of the details she provided for an order through Nordstrom were available to criminals, and likely being abused to make scam attempts seem more credible. There is nothing Mary can do to remove herself from this breached data. She can only change her habits from this point forward. Her experience worsened a few days later. Mary received a $4,000 invoice from FedEx demanding she pay the shipping fees for the numerous fraudulent shipments made in her name. The offender(s) created an account in Mary's name at FedEx, and opened a line of credit by providing her full name, address, and date of birth (all available in the HauteLook breach). This account was used to send multiple checks via overnight shipping without expense to the criminals. This was now full identity theft.

If she had used an alias name during her online orders, she would be less exposed. If she had the shipment sent to a CMRA or PO Box, her home address would not be abused. If she had done both, an internet stranger would not have been able to contact her. While his intentions were good, I see many internet victims which wrongly believe people such as Mary are part of the scam. I have investigated crimes where one victim attacked another, suspecting foul play. If we cannot be found, we have very little to worry about. If she had established a credit freeze on herself, FedEx may have declined the line of credit in her name. A credit freeze is vital for all Americans, and I explain the entire process in a later chapter. I want to make it clear that I do not place fault on Mary. We have all made privacy mistakes, including myself. I recall the days where I ordered packages to my home in my real name. None of us have always executed the most private strategies. We all start somewhere. Will this encourage you to start being more private today?

International Considerations: Every day, someone contacts me about anonymous payment strategies outside of America. As a U.S. citizen, working in the U.S., and helping mostly American clients, I simply do not have much experience with masked payment services in other countries. If your country does not offer secondary credit cards or virtual options such as Privacy.com, I believe your best option is to possess a business credit card. Most international banks will issue cards in a business name for numerous "employees", and will only require the detailed information of the business owner (you). The bank will know every detail of each transaction, but the merchants which accept the card are shown only a business and employee name (alias). Please use the details presented here to create your own solutions. Some readers have reported that **Revolut** (revolut.com) offers virtual cards in alias names, but this requires a $10 monthly fee and confirmed identity.

I hope this chapter helps you dive into the world of anonymous payments. Once mastered, these strategies will prevent information leakage, and will keep you off various public people search websites. Remember, it only takes one mistake to unravel all of your efforts toward anonymity. Merchants have a financial motivation to share your information with other merchants and service providers. Marketing and advertising are more difficult thanks to our tendencies to skip commercials, block online ads, and refusal to answer telemarketing calls. Companies now rely on your data in order to make a buck. You can combat this with anonymous purchases, and by never associating your real name with your home address.

Typical Client Configuration

Private payment options are vital for my clients. The easiest way to unravel the efforts of an anonymous home is to pay bills and make purchases with your true name. The following is my checklist for most clients.

- Possess enough cash to facilitate any daily purchases which accept it.
- Purchase prepaid gift cards for in-person purchases which refuse cash.
- Establish a Privacy.com account for masked online and in-person purchases.
- Obtain a secondary credit card for transactions which require a real credit card, such as a hotel visit or expensive online purchases.
- Establish a checking account in a trust name for utility payments.
- If desired, establish a checking account in an LLC name for utility payments.
- Establish all utility services in the name of a trust or LLC.
- Identify nearby Amazon Lockers and create accounts associated with these locations.
- If Amazon Lockers are not available, obtain an account at a local mail receiving agency which can accept packages in any name.
- If deliveries must be made to your home, conduct all transactions in an alias name with appropriate masked payment.
- When traveling, consider foreign currency, virtual currencies, and gold coins in the event of an emergency.

Overall, whenever possible, never provide a true name with any purchases.

CHAPTER TWELVE
EMPLOYMENT

Private employment is easy, as long as you are always paid in cash and never provide your name to your employer. If you are in this situation, your work is likely illegal, at least in the opinion of the IRS. There is no such thing as complete privacy in terms of employment in America, but there are several things we can do to minimize our exposure. This chapter will present many ideas, starting with the least private to the most. None of this is to avoid taxes or skirt financial institution reporting requirements. All of these tactics are legal, and only designed to provide privacy protection from the public. First, you should ask yourself if private employment is important to your overall privacy strategy. Consider the following.

In 1997, a woman who was a friend of mine from 5th grade tried to rekindle a friendship with me. I had not spoken to her in several years, and was not very close to her when we were children. Her initial attempt to contact me was through social engineering. She telephoned my grandfather (listed in the phonebook) late at night and insisted there was an emergency. She asked for my number (a landline), which was unpublished. My grandfather provided my number to my apartment and she began calling me daily. Her voicemails featured incoherent giggling and rambling, and it was obvious there was some mental instability. I ignored the calls.

Within a week, I started to receive voicemail messages from her on my pager (yes, I'm old). My grandfather did not have that number, as it was issued by the local police department where I was employed. I knew that the number was displayed on a call-out sheet which was widely distributed around the city. To this day, I have no idea who released the number, but it was likely another telephone attack. I continued to avoid the calls.

In the summer of 1997, I was working a patrol shift around 9 pm. I received a call for a holdup alarm at a local fast-food restaurant, which would be closing at that time. I raced to the scene and encountered this woman. She was an employee there, and pressed the alarm because she knew I would respond. My dispatcher had previously disclosed my shift and assignment to her over the telephone, after she identified herself as my sister. I called for another unit and she was charged with activating a false alarm. The arresting officer was a close friend of mine who had a heartfelt conversation with her about talking with a professional to seek help. She was later hospitalized with extreme schizophrenia. I do not know where she is today. My point with this story is that your fellow employees will fall for social engineering attacks. While trying to be helpful, they will disclose your home address, telephone number, work hours, and vacation times to anyone who has the talent to present a pretext or ruse. Anything you share with your employer is fair game, so let's choose how we provide sensitive details.

Traditional Employment

Let's start with traditional employment. When you apply for practically any job in America, you will be asked for your name, address, DOB, and SSN. Lately, some companies do not ask for an SSN until an offer of employment is made to you. My recommendation is to never provide an SSN unless an offer is made. If required on an application, I would enter "upon employment offer". This lets the potential employer know that you are willing to cooperate with tax reporting requirements, but do not want to provide your SSN when unnecessary. This prevents accidental exposure of your SSN when these applications are lost, leaked, or sold. They may require your SSN for a background screening, which is acceptable prior to employment if you feel the job offer will soon follow.

If you receive an offer of employment, you will be required to provide these details. This is likely for two reasons. First, most companies do a minimal background check through third-party services such as The Work Number, yet another Equifax product. Your potential employer will disclose all of the details you provided on the application, including your home address, to these services. Any information that a company did not already have about you, such as your new apartment address, will be added to your consumer profile and shared.

This is a very common way in which these data mining companies keep such accurate records on us. I would display concerning portions of Equifax's privacy policy here, but it does not matter. The 2017 breach of over 150 million people's full Equifax profiles eliminates any protections cited in their privacy policies. The data is now in the wild.

Second, your name, address, DOB, and SSN are required for legal payment, and will be included on an IRS form W-9. This allows the IRS to monitor your wages and ensure that you are reporting the proper taxes. I would have previously said that this data is private from public view, but the widely reported IRS breach in 2016 assures us this is not the case. Today, I can visit a handful of shady websites and query names from this breach. The free report displays full address history, and a small fee will provide me your DOB and SSN. There is no way to erase this damage.

This is a grim view to begin a chapter about employment privacy. However, I believe we have options to safeguard our information the best we can. First, I would never provide my home address on any application or W-9 form. This should only be your PO Box, UPS Box, or PMB address. Your employer likely does not care much about where you live, unless the job has residency requirements, such as a police officer. The IRS does not object to the use of a mail box address. They just want their money. The majority of potential employers never require to know where you truly reside.

Next, I would have a credit freeze in place before submitting any application or tax form. This will be discussed later, but it basically locks down your credit from unauthorized queries. Companies such as Equifax can bypass this since they own the data. However, smaller companies that are hired to conduct background checks will not always be able to peer into your credit if you have a freeze in place. If you expect you will be releasing your SSN to unknown third parties during your job hunt and eventual employment, you must assume it will be handled carelessly. The credit freeze gives you major protections if and when a malicious actor stumbles across your DOB and SSN.

Once you are hired, there are likely to be more invasive requests. Many companies maintain a contact list of all employees which includes names, home addresses, personal telephone numbers, birthdays, and other unnecessary information. Expect these to be compromised and become public information. If pushed for a personal cell number, provide a MySudo or other VOIP number. If asked for a home address, insist on only displaying the PO Box or UPS Box previously provided. If questioned about this, claim you are moving very soon and will provide the new address once you have everything moved in. Conveniently forget to update this.

There are many careers where this does not work. Police officers, fire fighters, elected officials, and other government employees must disclose their true home addresses. This is usually to satisfy residency requirements set forth in outdated municipal laws. My first suggestion is to obey the residency requirement. If you must live within 20 miles of the police department where you work, meet this demand. Then explain your privacy concern to the proper personnel and request that your true address is not documented on any internal forms. This is a difficult task, and you may be met with great resistance. I know many people that have "shared" a low-cost vacant apartment in order to provide that address to their departments. I cannot recommend this. I can only say it has been done. If you are a public official, you have likely already given up much of your right to privacy.

My best advice for employees within traditional employment scenarios is to always challenge any privacy invasions. For many years, one of my clients accepted a condition of his employment at a police department which required him to purchase a landline telephone number and make it available to all employees of the city which he worked. When asked if he could provide a VOIP number instead, he was denied. After years of compliance, he asked to see the policy which enforced this annoyance. He discovered that a strict policy did not exist, and was allowed to terminate his landline and provide a VOIP number for daily abuse. He then challenged the requirement to share his home address with all city employees. This led to a discovery that no policy ever existed for this demand either. It was something everyone accepted without asking for details of the requirement. Today, he only provides a local PO Box address on the public roster. When you are faced with invasive demands from your employer, consider a polite request to learn more about the policies which enforce them.

Employee Identification Requirements

My first "real" job was at a local hospital. All employees were forced to wear employee credentials which included full name and a photograph. During my first day, a human resources representative captured my photo with a Polaroid camera, physically cut the photo to the appropriate size, and laminated it within my "name badge" while I witnessed the entire process. Things were much simpler back then, and I saw no privacy invasion with this mandate. Today, things are much different. Many companies capture a digital photo with a dedicated employee identification system. The digital image is either stored internally at the company or shared to a third-party credential maintenance system. In either situation, leakage is possible. My bigger concern is the abuses which I have witnessed, such as the following.

- A technology-related company created Gravatar accounts for every employee's email address and uploaded images to each. Every outgoing email now possesses the face of the employees served as an icon in the sender field. Since the company owns the domain, employees have no authority to modify or remove this image.
- A telecommunications company uploaded the photos of employees to their website and associated each with full names. Today, several archives are available to the public. These employees can never completely remove these images, as they have been scraped by dozens of archiving projects. Once on the internet, it is there forever.
- Another technology company forced all employees to participate in a Slack-style online communications platform. The company attached images of employees to the profiles, which were scraped by various online people search websites. Today, these public search sites display photos of the employees next to home address and telephone details.
- A police department shared the photos of all employees with the local newspaper. Today, whenever a police officer is mentioned in an investigation, the newspaper includes the photo of that person. The Associated Press has replicated many of the articles (and photos) nationwide. These photos are present on hundreds of websites which can never be removed.
- A financial company created caricatures of employees based on the identification photos and placed them online. Most images displayed enhancements of physical features that most would not want highlighted. These cartoon versions humiliated employees by magnifying big noses, acne, thick glasses, and in one unfortunate image a facial scar received after childhood physical abuse. These images were later posted to social networks by "friends" of the employees. The comments attached to the posts were crude and demeaning.

All of these scenarios happened without consent from the employees. This type of exposure may be outside of your threat model. However, I urge you to consider any future vulnerabilities. If you are ever charged with a crime or misdemeanor traffic offense, media outlets will try to find the most unflattering photo available. If a fellow employee becomes upset and seeks revenge against you, these photos can be abused on social networks and other online sites.

I recently had a client contact me after her head from her employee identification image was Photoshopped into pornography and posted online. We know that people can be cruel and there are endless ways to abuse digital images, but what can we do about it? Employers likely require images of employees, and the systems to store this data usually possess no security. I have no magic solutions, but I do offer a few considerations, in order of most advised to least.

- Have an honest discussion with your employer. Explain that you have specific reasons to protect your privacy, and you respectfully request that your image not be captured and stored by the company. Explain the vulnerabilities mentioned previously and identify how you may be negatively impacted by abuse of the images. If appropriate, cite any previous harassment or stalking issues which you have faced. Recent labor shortages have placed more power than ever before in the hands of the employee.

- Request to review any policies which require photographs of employees. Additionally, request details about the storage, sharing, ownership, and online publication of the images. You will likely find out that such policies do not exist. If they do, scrutinize them for loopholes. You will likely learn that nothing is done to protect the images from online attacks. You could ask to postpone any employee photos until the protection policies are in place. This may generate unwanted attention, so approach cautiously.
- If appropriate, explain that you have a religious objection to captured images. Some have referenced the second of the ten commandments, which partially reads "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything". A few religious denominations, such as the Amish and Old Order Mennonites, often refuse to have their photographs taken due to this wording. Expect eye-rolls if you go this route. You may become known as a difficult employee which could cause other issues. Always choose your battles wisely.

As a new employee, you may not want to become too forceful with your requests. Please consider any consequences before execution. Seasoned employees may have an easier time refusing employee photos as they may possess more job security. I present this section simply to create awareness of the issues surrounding employee photos. Your results may vary.

Company Parking Permits

In 2019, I began witnessing a new privacy invasion from employers. Businesses began demanding full vehicle details of every employee, all of which are commonly stored within a third-party verification system, and of course shared with other companies. In 2020, the make, model, color, VIN, registration, and insurance details were requested from one of my clients. She had conducted a full privacy reboot and did not want her vehicle associated with her true name. When she questioned the necessity of these details, the employer only stated it was a new policy. We later discovered that the details were being provided to a third-party parking management company. The employer had outsourced the parking garage to another business. The parking company which requested the details of my client's vehicle also associates the following information to the employee's profile.

- Date and time of each entry into the garage (When she arrives to work)
- Date and time of each exit from the garage (When she leaves work)
- Length of stay (The number of hours she worked)
- Average length of stay (The average hours she works)
- Daily average length of stay (The days she works less than others)
- Photograph of each entry (A daily image of her driving the vehicle)
- Photograph of each exit (Another daily image of her driving the vehicle)
- OCR text of the license plate (Searchable log of all usage by her vehicle)

To add insult to injury, the privacy policy of this provider clearly states they can share or sell any information with any third parties solely at their discretion. Similar to the previous section, there are no fool-proof strategies to prevent the collection of these details. Most of these scenarios include a physical parking permit which grants access to the parking areas. The details of the vehicle are not necessary in order to enter the parking areas, but usually gathered for record keeping. My client informed her employer that she was currently driving a rental vehicle and would disclose her true vehicle information once she received it back from repair. She "forgot" to update the record and continued to park her true vehicle in the garage without any repercussion. However, a few months later, the company again demanded the details of her vehicle. The next day, she arrived to work in a rental vehicle and provided the make, model, color, VIN, and registration. Her employer was content and shared the details with the parking company. She returned the rental and continued using her true vehicle the next day. She cannot prevent the system from tracking the usage of her parking pass or capturing images of her activity. However, the system does not have any record of her VIN or registration. This protects the identity of the owner of the vehicle. Her magnetic plates, as previously explained, are removed the moment she leaves the public roadway and enters the private property. This is legal, as there are no vehicle registration requirements on private property. Is this overkill? Probably. However, she enjoys the rebellion and benefits of privacy.

Final Employee Considerations

Many careers require a government license. These include hair stylists, Ham radio operators, nurses, veterinarians, and many other professions. The details of these licenses are public record. If you are skeptical, navigate to www.myfloridalicense.com/wl11.asp and type in any generic name. The results include full license details such as name, home address, telephone number, license acquisition date, expiration, and profession. If you require a specific license for your employment, only provide a PO Box, VOIP telephone number, and burner email address. This information will be abused.

Some careers have more exposure than others. I am consistently contacted by celebrities and politicians seeking more privacy. While I can provide anonymous lodging and alias payment sources, I cannot remove them from the spotlight. There is nothing I can do to make Tom Hanks completely invisible (but I am willing to try if he should call me). You should consider the overall exposure of the type of employment you are seeking. If you have a public presence, you risk exposure in newspapers or the local television news. If you work for a private company inside of a building all day, your risk is minimal. Most of my clients just want to fade into the background with the most minimal amount of attention possible. Overall, traditional employment will always expose your name, DOB, and SSN. In most scenarios, you can keep your home address and cellular number private. The rule is to always assume that any details provided at any time during the employment process will become public information. If we go in with this attitude, any damaging exposure should be minimal.

Consider a few more tips in regard to working inside an employer-owned building. Much of this may seem redundant from Chapter Three. Previously, I explained ways to protect yourself digitally while in your own home and within spaces which you have control. When at work, you are much more vulnerable. I believe you are more prone to eavesdropping attacks. The following is a short list of tactics which should be executed while at work.

- Cover webcams on any employer-owned computers and mobile devices.
- Insert microphone plugs into employer-owned computers and mobile devices.
- Never use personal devices for work-related tasks and vice versa.
- Never use your work email for personal communication and vice versa.
- Never use your work cell phone for personal communication and vice versa.
- Never connect to personal email accounts from employer networks or computers.
- Never connect personal devices to employer-provided Wi-Fi or Bluetooth.
- Never connect personal devices to USB ports of employer-owned computers.
- Faraday bags should be used for personal devices to block wireless scanning in offices.
- Refrain from sharing details of your employment within social networks (LinkedIn).
- Request your birthday (DOB) be eliminated from celebratory email blasts.

Self-Employment

Contrary to traditional employment, self-employment can provide many advantages in regard to privacy and digital security. If done properly, you will never need to disclose your DOB, SSN, or home address to any entity. You can be paid through an LLC which possesses a valid EIN from the IRS, which is much more private with less risk of public exposure. Your first task would be to identify the type of work you desire.

There are countless career choices for the self-employed, and I am not here to guide you into any specific direction. I have had clients who possessed their own home-based businesses, conducted on-site training and consulting, and ran various online stores. Only you can decide what type of business fits best with your personality and experience. My goal is to guide you through the process of making your choice legal and private. Your first task is to establish the legal infrastructure for your business. This was previously discussed as a privacy tactic for asset ownership. The process for establishing a business which anticipates income is very similar. The LLC documents previously mentioned can be used for your new venture. However, there are many considerations for the public filing of your new business.

During the previous legal infrastructure chapter, the goal was complete privacy. I discussed the New Mexico LLC which could shield the true owner of an LLC from public view. In my opinion, this level of privacy is not vital for a business which will be used to generate income. You will be required to disclose your true identity to the IRS and any financial institution which you use for payments and distributions. If you will be conducting any type of consultation, training, or other services, your name is likely to be associated with the business in some form. Therefore, I do not strive to hide the identity of the owner of a business.

The first step is to establish your LLC in the state which you reside. For a small number of readers, that may be the state where you established nomad domicile, such as South Dakota. For most of you, it will be the state where you own a home or possess a driver's license. Every state has their own rules, and you should spend some time reviewing the state's business entities website. There are also many local businesses which will assist you with establishing the LLC (at a substantial cost). If you have made it this far into the book, I have no doubt that you can do this yourself. At a minimum, the state will want your name, address, email address, and telephone number. The address you provide can be a PO Box or UPS Box, the email can be a ProtonMail account designed specifically for business use, and the telephone number can be any VOIP service you use. As with the previous lessons, everything you provide will become public record.

Nomad Business Registration

In order to possess extreme privacy, you might consider the nomad residency route discussed earlier. If you do, you have the ability to legally establish a publicly invisible LLC which can be used to generate income. The IRS will know you are connected, but this method provides many privacy strategies unavailable to traditional employment. The following scenario assumes you are a legal nomad resident of South Dakota and you possess a PMB and government identification from that state. I explain other options afterward.

The first task is to choose the name of your new LLC. This needs to be something that is not already in use in the state. I prefer generic names which could describe anything such as Ventures Unlimited LLC or Consulting Group LLC. Conduct a search at the following website. While you are there, take a look at a typical completed application, which is visible on the business details page.

https://sosenterprise.sd.gov/BusinessServices/Business/FilingSearch.aspx

Next, you should decide which address you will use for the LLC. While you could use the South Dakota address provided by your personal PMB provider, you may choose another option. For extreme privacy, I prefer to use a unique address for my business. This creates another layer of privacy and does not expose my "home" address publicly. Similar to the New Mexico example in a previous chapter, a South Dakota LLC requires you to possess a registered agent within the state. For most clients, I use Americas Mailbox as the business PMB, just as I did for the personal ghost address. I am reluctant to promote Americas Mailbox for nomad business registration, but I do not have any better options. I have had several problems with their service over the years. Missing mail has been an issue and their customer support staff are rarely helpful. On one occasion, I received an LLC renewal reminder from the state five months after it arrived. However, their new scanning feature allows me to cautiously approach their service again for this purpose.

The procedure for establishing a business PMB at Americas Mailbox is the same as previously mentioned. If you are combining your personal and business PMB usage, you only need one address. This is what I do for most clients. Be sure to select the scanning feature and the registered agent service when you create the account. This will add a minimal fee to your annual plan, but will keep you legal with the state. Contact the service and ask which name you should provide as your registered agent. You will need that for the state application process. You will be required to submit a USPS form confirming your identity as previously explained. You can use your Americas Mailbox address on this form. Be sure to list your LLC name as a confirmed recipient on this form. I also include my Contract Officer's name, as explained momentarily.

Once you have confirmed your PMB with registered agent service, the next task is to apply for an LLC with the state. This is done online, and the result is immediate. In previous years, applications required physically mailing the documents and waiting for a confirmation. The entire process now takes less than ten minutes. This is extremely beneficial. Some states, such as Washington, require months of processing before an LLC is approved. Navigate to https://sosenterprise.sd.gov/BusinessServices/Business/RegistrationInstr.aspx. The site will walk you through the process, prompting you to make decisions along the way. Avoid completing any "optional" fields. The application process is split into twelve categories. The following provides notes on each.

- **Business Name**: The name you selected after confirming it has not been taken.
- **Addresses**: Any address information should be your new PMB.
- **Agent**: Select the "Non-Commercial" option and enter the name of your agent provided by your PMB. Conduct a search and choose the appropriate option.
- **Organizer(s)**: You can select an individual or a company for this. South Dakota allows you to specify your own LLC as the organizer, which I find interesting. If you would rather assign an individual, you can add your own name or another "nominee". I have a close friend with a very generic name such as John Wilson. I pay him a small annual fee to be my "Contract Officer", and he has the authority to "Organize" my business. His address is not required.
- **Detail**: Choose "Perpetual" in order to set no specific expiration date.
- **Manager(s)**: Select the "Member-Managed" option and "No".
- **Beneficial Owner(s)**: Optional field to be avoided.
- **Additional Articles**: Optional field to be avoided.
- **Recipient**: Optional field to be avoided.
- **Confirmation**: Make sure everything looks right.
- **Signature**: This is a digital input and no "wet" signature is required. The name you provide will be public record. I ask my Contract Officer to be the authorized signee.
- **Payment**: You can pay with a credit card, prepaid card, or Privacy.com card, depending on your desired level of privacy.

After successful payment, you will immediately receive a digital copy of your Articles of Organization and Certificate of Organization. You now possess an official and legal LLC in the state of South Dakota. If you are not a nomad in that state, you should consider creating an LLC within the state of your residence (or domicile). The steps should be similar, but each state possesses its own nuances. Some states can be very invasive and demand to know the full details of LLC ownership. If using the LLC for income, this is not a huge concern, as the business will be associated with you anyhow. My only mandate would be to never disclose your true physical address within any registration documents. It will become online public information within days.

Traditional Business Registration

I assume that most readers are not nomads of South Dakota. Those readers might need to create an LLC in their own state in order to possess the privacy protections which are explained in a moment. I cannot explain the LLC creation process for every state, but I can offer some general guidance.

- Income-aggressive states such as California demand $800 per year for every LLC registered within the state. This is regardless of income. It also demands full ownership of the LLC be publicly available online. For most California residents, I do not recommend an LLC for self-employment. The Sole Proprietor option will be explained momentarily, and should be considered.
- Nomads who want to conduct business within income-aggressive states must register the company as a "Foreign LLC" within the state. This is usually not required for online businesses, but if you plan to step foot within California or New York during the course of your business, expect to pay them their share. Failure to do so will result in numerous penalties and additional fees.

- Once you register your LLC, you are likely responsible for annual renewals and tax reporting within that state. Even if you make no income, you may be required to disclose that within an annual tax return. Failure to do so can result in financial penalties and termination of the LLC.
- Any time you register your LLC through a third-party service, such as Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) or various U.S. government portals, you risk online exposure. When possible, avoid these services. When forced to apply, provide details which can become public without much concern.
- If you have registered an LLC and have no intention to use it in the future, you should file a request to legally "dissolve" the company. This prevents annual reporting after the final year of operation.
- Revisit the information about the Corporate Transparency Act which I previously explained. Most states are going to demand to know the true owners of an LLC and will pass this on to the federal government. I do not find this to be a problem, as we will register our LLC's with the IRS for use during self-employment. Remember that an LLC used for income is never intended to be "anonymous".

If maintaining an LLC with your state while meeting all documentation, regulation, and tax reporting requirements seems overwhelming, consider becoming a Sole Proprietor, as explained next. It provides less liability protection than an LLC (which is currently minimal for sole member companies anyway), but can be accomplished with minimal effort.

Sole Proprietorship

Self-employed people who possess an LLC with EIN have some great privacy protections. Instead of providing a personal name and SSN to customers, they can supply the LLC name and EIN. This is not limited to official LLCs. Any individual can conduct business as a sole proprietor and provide a fictitious "Doing Busines As" (DBA) name. You can also obtain an EIN without the need to pay annual LLC fees within aggressive states. Before I explain the process, let's define the typical reader who may want to conduct business as a sole proprietor.

- You are a self-employed individual (not a partnership).
- You do not have any employees.
- You do not want to provide your name and SSN when conducting business.
- You want to be paid in the name of a business.
- You want to open a banking account in the business name.
- You want to avoid annual LLC fees and filing requirements.
- You desire simplicity within your self-employed strategy.

If ALL of these apply to you, a sole proprietorship may be ideal. In most states, government documentation is not required in order to be a sole proprietor. Any individual can simply claim to be self-employed with this status. The IRS does not demand filing, as your income can pass through your individual tax return. However, those becoming a sole proprietor for privacy reasons must take additional steps.

First, you should choose a business name. In most states, you may use your own given name or an assumed business or trade name. Choose a business name which is not similar to another registered business. Conduct a search within your state's corporation registry website and with your local county clerk's office. After you have picked a name, such as "Privacy Solution Services", you must file an "Assumed" or "Fictitious" business name registration with your state. This can usually be completed within your local county's offices and will require a small fee. Finally, you should obtain an Employer Identification Number (EIN) from the IRS, as explained next. This is not a federal requirement, but will be necessary for our needs.

You can now operate under the name of your business without the need to possess a complicated LLC. Your official business might be something similar to "Michael Bazzell, DBA Privacy Solution Services", but you can identify yourself to customers simply as "Privacy Solution Services". With an EIN, you can open a banking account with this name and print only the business name on checks. You can provide the EIN instead of your

SSN to customers. Note that you possess no lability protection as a sole proprietor, but the protections to single member LLCs are weak anyway. This is the easiest privacy strategy to protect your name and SSN as a self-employed individual. Contact your state for full details.

IRS Registration (EIN)

If you plan to ever generate income in the name of the LLC or sole proprietorship, or open a business checking account, you will need an EIN from the IRS. You can bypass this if you plan to funnel income directly through your own SSN, but that defeats the point of the business as the wall between your identity and your income. Obtaining an EIN is simple and immediate at https://sa.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp.

You can complete the application any time from Monday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Eastern Time. The process will demand your full name, address (PMB), and SSN. There is no legal way to facilitate an EIN without making this connection. Fortunately, this data will not be (intentionally) released to the public. I believe an EIN is vital for private employment. It allows me to truly segregate my personal information from the various public disclosures that are associated with accepting payment. Every time a client or customer requires a tax form, I can keep my SSN private. If I need to complete registration through a third-party vendor, my name can stay out of most paperwork and invoicing. Most importantly, I can now create a business checking account for deposits and payments. This new account can continue the public isolation from my true identity.

Business Bank Accounts

Banks in America must follow strict government regulation in terms of opening new accounts. "Know Your Customer", alternatively known as know your client or simply KYC, is the process of a business verifying the identity of its clients and assessing potential risks of illegal intentions for the business relationship. If you wish to open a new bank account in your business name, you simply must disclose your true identity and association. Consistent with previous instruction, I always recommend seeking locally-owned banks and credit unions instead of large chains. They will have less requirements and offer better privacy. When you open a new account under an LLC, you will need the following.

Government Identification
LLC Articles of Organization
LLC Certificate of Organization
IRS EIN Confirmation

In rare scenarios, they may wish to view your LLC Operating Agreement. I have allowed this, but I do not allow a copy to be made. This agreement contains sensitive details such as your shares of the company and specific organization of members (if applicable). As long as you are forthright with your true name and proof of PMB address, you should have no issues opening a new account. You will be asked for a deposit into the account, which then allows you to use typical checking features. As before, I always request as many "temporary" checks as the institution will allow upon creating the account. I also request that a mailing address is absent and that only the business name appears on them.

Credit Card Processing

In my experience, many potential clients or customers will want to pay you with credit cards. This can be very simple with popular privacy abusers such as PayPal, but I never recommend them. PayPal currently shares your data with over 600 third-party companies, and appears amateur on an invoice. Instead, consider better options. I recommend Stripe or Square for all credit card processing. They are not perfect solutions, but they possess much cleaner privacy policies than PayPal or other payment collection options.

Stripe will require your full name, SSN, DOB, business name, and EIN. This is required per the KYC demands as previously mentioned. Once you are approved, you can insist on the EIN receiving the tax forms (if required).

The true power of Stripe is the ability to embed its software into your website, but that is probably overkill for most small business owners. Most of my clients who own small businesses simply send electronic invoices straight from the Stripe dashboard on their website. The recipient can pay via any credit card, and you receive the funds within a couple of days. Stripe will want to know where the funds should be deposited, and I recommend the business checking account previously mentioned.

Square is almost identical in regard to account creation requirements. The additional benefit of Square is that they will issue you a credit card reader, which allows you to physically accept credit cards through any mobile device. Both options will charge you a fee of approximately 3% of each transaction.

Virtual Currency

As previously stated, cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin can provide a great layer of anonymity. If you provide a service of interest to those in the virtual currency world, you should be prepared to accept Bitcoin. Use the techniques previously discussed to create and configure your own Bitcoin wallet. Advertise that you accept Bitcoin, either through a website or in the physical world. Consider my adoption of Bitcoin.

From 2013 through 2020, I offered online training courses. 99% of the purchases were made with a credit card on my site through Stripe. However, I also advertised that I accepted Bitcoin. Over those years, I slowly built a wallet full of Bitcoin without the need to create an account through an exchange. I now have funding in this wallet to pay for various online services. I still needed the credit card transactions in order to keep my business afloat, but the incoming Bitcoin provided a strategy to obtain it anonymously.

Contractor Considerations

When you begin conducting business with larger organizations, you will find many of them have their own vendor registration requirements. These can be a deal-breaker for me. Some are minimal and only require the information that you have already made public via the steps previously mentioned. However, some are extremely invasive, and I will present a few scenarios here.

Overall, government vendor portals are the worst privacy offenders. In 2012, I was hired to teach a course for a military organization. They required me to be registered in the General Services Administration System for Award Management (GSA SAM) website at SAM.gov in order to receive payment. I was naive and assumed that my data would be protected. I provided my full name, actual physical address, and my personal email account. This became public data and was immediately shared with hundreds of other businesses. I began receiving unsolicited offers to help grow my business and learn how to navigate federal contracts (for a fee, of course). Today, I still receive email from these outfits, even after I completely removed my registration.

Many companies will require you to be registered in the Dun & Bradstreet (D&B) database in order to collect payment for services. This private organization has somehow become the minimum standard requirement for private and government contracts. At least once a month, we must turn down a potential client because they demand we share our data with D&B. While their privacy policy is riddled with concern, a single paragraph sums it up:

"Dun & Bradstreet shares information with third-party service providers, such as credit card processors, auditors, attorneys, consultants, live help/chat providers and contractors, in order to support Dun & Bradstreet's Internet websites and business operations…We may also disclose the information as required or appropriate in order to protect our website, business operations or legal rights, or in connection with a sale or merger involving Dun & Bradstreet assets or businesses…From time to time, Dun & Bradstreet compiles online and offline transaction and registration information for internal analyses, such as market research, quality assurance, customer experience, and operational benchmarking initiatives."

In other words, they can share your details with anyone. Even worse, D&B has already had one known breach that exposed the profiles of over 33 million businesses and owners. Why should this matter when the business details are already public? The reason is that D&B requires much more invasive information in order to have the privilege of them selling your data. This includes the following.

- Full name of owner (not just the business name)
- Physical address of owner (no PO Box or PMB allowed)
- Telephone number (no VOIP allowed)
- Employee details

I applied for, and received, a DUNS number from D&B in 2013. During a regular reminder in 2016 to verify my company information, I was prompted to enter a valid physical address. I had my PMB on file, which was now being rejected. I attempted to enter a handful of business addresses, all of which were denied. Without my true home address, I could no longer possess a valid registration. I happily deleted my profile, and I have not had one since.

Local municipalities are also reckless with your information. In 2015, I was contracted by the city of Reno to conduct an OSINT training course. The course was canceled after they could not locate a venue, but the contract was published to their website. It displayed my name, PMB, full details of the event, and my signature. I had to make several requests to redact my address and signature. After much hesitation, they finally modified the online document. Again, you must assume that every detail provided to a client will be made public.

The purpose of a private business entity is to shield you from personal data exposure. If you have created your own LLC properly, you are prepared to conduct legal business and accept payment while never disclosing personal information. Consider the following typical invasive procedures, each of which include the public information which you can provide without risk.

W-9 Form: As a sole member LLC, or partnership LLC, companies are required to submit proper tax reporting to the IRS if you are paid more than $600 yearly. Legitimate companies will require you to submit an IRS W-9 form. You only need to disclose your business name, EIN from the IRS, PMB address, and an illegible signature. The IRS can later verify your actual income with your reported earnings. Your name does not need to appear on the W-9 itself, as the EIN is associated with your SSN behind the scenes.

Vendor Paperwork: If you conduct work for large organizations, they will demand you be entered into their third-party vendor systems. These are notorious for leaking details into public records. You can provide only the business name, PMB address, business ProtonMail email account, burner telephone number, and IRS EIN. If they insist on a contact name and signature, you can appoint anyone as a nominee for this. My good friend with the extremely generic name mentioned earlier is paid a very small annual fee to be the official contact and signature on many of my contracts. He is my "Contracting Officer" and often serves as the public face (name) within any publicly exposed documents.

Payment Records: Many government entities are required to publicly disclose all payments to third parties. You may see these notices on local newspapers or on websites. This data is collected and aggregated by various data mining companies. When this happens, I prefer my LLC to be listed instead of my name. Your LLC prevents personal exposure.

The weakest link here is the IRS. They can connect you to your LLC through the EIN. I do not see this as a threat for most people. I would much rather provide my EIN to strangers than my SSN. Hiding my SSN protects me from rampant tax return fraud. Supplying a business name instead of my real name to business clients prevents an easy lookup on various people search sites. When the details of my business become public, my name is not present on the vendor forms.

If you possess a nomad residency and South Dakota LLC, you can safely share business details and remain private. The address provided within the various documents required by your customers is not a risk. It displays a physical address you have never visited. That PMB service does not know where you live. The EIN provided cannot be abused as much as an SSN. A DOB should never be required, and the creation date of the LLC can be provided when demanded. You possess a great shield that protects your personal information.

This may all seem invasive for a book about extreme privacy. Remember, this LLC is only required if you plan to generate income under a business name and do not want to publicly disclose your personal details. In order to better explain how all of these steps can help us achieve better privacy and security, please consider the following true scenarios from my own LLC experiences.

- I was asked to submit a W-9 in order to be paid for an on-site consultation. My W-9 displays my business name, business PMB, and EIN. My name and SSN do not appear. This is now kept on file at an accounting desk which likely possesses minimal security. If it leaks, I really do not mind. The PMB address is not my personal PMB address, and I have never physically been inside either.
- A government entity publicly posted all payments on their website. My business name and the amount I was paid is present today. Searching my name will never reveal this information. Searching the name of the LLC reveals my organizer, but not me. One would need to connect all of these details together in order to identify the payments made to me, which is not possible with publicly-available information.
- A company required me to comply with their vendor registration demands. The data provided was shared with an employment verification service and added to their own database. Neither system possesses my name, SSN, DOB, or personal address. The data being shared and re-sold does not compromise me personally.
- I needed to make a payment from my business checking account. I do not possess a credit card in the LLC name. I created a Privacy.com account and associated it with my business checking. I now use masked debit card numbers to make purchases without risk of personal exposure.
- I presented a keynote at a large conference. My speaking agency only supplied my business details and contact information during my registration. A complete roster of all attendees and presenters was given away, including names, home addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, and social network profiles. My entry contained no sensitive details and I have no personal exposure.
- I provided training at a BlackHat event in Las Vegas. Only my business details were given for payment, which were eventually shared with all the vendors at the event. My name was not present on any of the promotional instructor details. The address provided is a mail drop with no public association to me. The email account provided was a masked service which I disabled immediately after payment. I now receive no unsolicited communication about the event.
- The state where I registered my LLC knows the business name, but not my name. The address on file is a PMB with no public association to me. Searching my name within the state website reveals no records. Searching my business name does not reveal my name or personal PMB address. I have isolation between my personal and business details.
- The IRS knows my true name and that I own the business. The addresses on file are both PMBs. This data is not (intentionally) public, but would not be damaging if a breach or leak occurred. Identity theft criminals usually focus on personal tax profiles instead of business filings.
- My bank and credit card processors know my true name and that I own the business. They do not know a true physical address for me nor my personal PMB address. A search warrant to multiple organizations would be required to expose the relationship. This is extremely unlikely and outside of my threat model.

I openly provide my accountant with all income, expenses, and tax documents. I legally comply with all state and federal tax reporting requirements. The IRS takes their share and is happy. The state in which I physically reside gets its cut when I file my state tax return, using a local PO Box as my physical address. I obey all tax laws and have no fear of an audit.

Whether you choose traditional employment or decide to become self-employed, there are many privacy strategies ready for you. You must be diligent whenever personal details are requested. Always expect that any information provided to governments or clients will become publicly available and permanently archived online.

Data Protection

I offer one final consideration for those who decide to become self-employed. It is extremely likely that you will need to store data about your customers. While online cloud-based storage is convenient, it is risky. Please apply the same privacy and security protocols toward your clients which you would demand yourself. This is not only ethical; it may save you from a lawsuit.

We hear about data breaches every day. Months later, we hear about large financial settlements to the victims (customers) of these attacks. Assume that anything you place online could be copied, stolen, traded, and sold. This can be devastating for your business's reputation (and bank account).

My company never stores any customer data online. This includes contracts, waivers, and custom strategies. Documents are sent securely through E2EE communications services with ephemeral expiration enabled, and deleted immediately from the service after receipt. Every customer is assigned their own VeraCrypt container stored on an internal server located on-premises, which is protected by a unique password. An employee cannot access this data unless authorized with the password assigned to their client. This container never touches the internet and is never copied to another computer. If this container would accidentally or intentionally leak online, it would be useless data without the password. If a client requests removal of all data about them, we can simply delete the container and purge it from our on-site backups without accessing the content.

This strategy is not only designed for the benefit of the client, but it also protects me from dealing with data breaches. I would never consider an online server, virtual cloud server, Amazon bucket, OneDrive account, Google Drive system, or Dropbox-style solution for the sensitive content trusted to me by my clients. I ask you to consider the same.

Summary

Every employment situation is unique, and I have no typical client configuration to present to you. Please use the strategies presented here as an initial guide toward creating your own employment playbook.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN
PETS

My dog has two aliases. Please continue reading and let me explain before you dismiss this chapter as pure paranoia. My German Shepherd is named Riley. His aliases include Kosmo and Lightning. Surprisingly, obtaining and maintaining a pet anonymously takes a lot of effort. Paying cash to a home-based puppy breeder is easy, but every pet related encounter past the original purchase is extremely invasive. The shelters offering rescued pets are funded by pet marketing companies, veterinarians, and pet supply organizations. Many counties share vaccination records with third parties. In all of these scenarios, your personal information as a pet owner is valuable, and abused.

In 2018, I had a client who completed my entire program and possessed a completely invisible home. She had no connection from her real name to her home or the area where she lived. She was running from an extremely abusive person, and her ability to live safely required her to stay off radar completely. After settling in, she wanted to adopt a dog from the local shelter. Since the shelter was constantly pushing dogs and always overcrowded, she assumed this would be an easy task to complete anonymously. She showed up, looked around, and fell in love with a young mixed-breed dog. She played a bit, went for a walk, and was determined to take the dog home that day. She approached an employee at the shelter and shared her intent. The employee handed her an application for adoption, and it all went downhill quickly.

Obviously, the application wanted a full name, address, telephone number, and all other basic details. My client was a pro with this, and had an alias name ready to go. However, she was immediately stopped in her tracks. The shelter demanded to view, photocopy and maintain the copy of her state issued identification. Furthermore, they reserved the right to visit the home for an inspection. The final nail in the coffin was demanding the right to share all submitted details with third parties including pet insurance companies, lost pet services, and social networks. She was a bit devastated. She left alone without a companion, and contacted me requesting assistance. The following details may be received with anger or skepticism. As an animal owner and advocate for adoption from shelters, I stand by my actions. As long as the animal is given a loving home, I have no objection to bending the rules a bit in order to maintain privacy. You will learn how standard pet adoption with your real information populates public databases within months and exposes your details for the world to collect.

My client lived in a popular urban area, and I had a meeting with another person in that area when this client reached out about this problem. I was able to meet this client at the shelter in order to get a feel for the operation. It was similar to every other animal shelter I had seen, and was very similar to the shelter from which I obtained Riley. It possessed overworked and caring staff with strict rules in order to prevent animals from going to abusive homes. I obtained an adoption application and confirmed everything my client had told me. The shelter was on top of their game.

I walked around, played the role of a potential customer, and made small talk with a handful of employees. I executed the best social engineering attempts of my capability, and struck out non-stop. I failed with each of these pretexts.

"I really value my privacy, and I simply do not want to provide a copy of my license. I am open to a home visit, but I have been the victim of identity theft several times and refuse to add to that mess."

"I am a full time Canadian citizen, so I only have a passport. It is illegal to copy a Canadian passport. Can I offer anything else?"

"I don't drive, and have not had a state ID for many years. What else can I show you? A utility bill or cell phone statement?"

There was no budging. If I could not provide government identification and proof of residency, they would not release an animal to me. If I refused to sign the waiver to share data with third parties, I could not adopt a pet. This is actually very common, and I was not surprised. My client and I left the shelter and began discussing our strategy.

At first, my client was open to just releasing her real name and address, and trusting that it would not be made public. After all, who would an animal shelter give the data to that would have any real impact? You might be surprised. This shelter released the entire application to the following organizations, which then used the data as explained.

24PetWatch: This service provides a free portal for shelters to use for microchip identification. When the shelter gives you the animal, they update the microchip pet record with services such as 24PetWatch. For the shelter, this is a great deal. They get free microchips, readers, and the ability to update records nationally. However, 24PetWatch gets even more benefit. They get your personal details and the pet information. This is then used for marketing, as 24PetWatch offers many premium services such as pet insurance. Should you care that services like these have your name and home address? Let's take a look at excerpts from their privacy policy:

- "By registering as a user with 24PetWatch you consent to Pethealth Inc., its subsidiaries, affiliates, trademarks, brands, and partners contacting you and collecting, using and disclosing your personal information for its own use and/or to any of our service providers."
- "We may need to disclose the personal information we collect to affiliates, subsidiaries, partners, successors and other service providers or agents who perform various functions for us."
- "We may also use this personal information to assess your future needs and to offer the products and services selected by us that may best meet those needs, from affiliates, reputable organizations with which we have strategic alliances or ourselves."

In other words, they can share, trade, or sell your details to any company or outfit they choose. This can then make its way to data breaches and marketing databases. Eventually, you can expect to see your details within data mining companies and people search websites.

Local Veterinarians: Most shelters have relationships with local veterinarians. These relationships help the shelters obtain services such as spaying and neutering at a severely discounted rate, if not free. In return, shelters often share all of the adoption details with the vets in order for the vets to obtain new customers. The result is often unsolicited mail to the name and address on file and occasional sharing of this data with third-party affiliates. In this case, one vet automatically enrolls you with their patient portal VetScene.

VetScene: This is a portal often used by veterinarians in order to have better communications with their patients. Ultimately, it is a way to bombard you with mailed offers of premium services and reminders of upcoming appointments. The fees to VetScene from the veterinarian are often justified due to the influx of new money spent on services and otherwise avoided vaccines and appointments. Their privacy policy contained the usual suspects, such as implied consent to share all details with third parties.

I hope that you are now convinced that providing your personal information to an animal shelter will definitely expose you to numerous third-party data companies. This may be acceptable to you, and I hold no judgement. Since you have made it this far in the book, I must assume that you do not want to consent to this exposure. In order to protect the identity and location of my client, we executed the following strategy.

The first step was to volunteer. When I requested the adoption application, I also requested a volunteer application. Since most shelters are desperate for volunteers, they do not always scrutinize these applications. While the shelter definitely wanted the same details as for an adoption, they did not demand identification to volunteer. My client completed the volunteer application with her alias name and real address, and provided a VOIP burner telephone number as a contact option. She gave the completed application to the shelter and scheduled her volunteer training session for the following week.

She began volunteering twice weekly at the shelter. She walked dogs, helped at public events, and most importantly made friends with the staff. The relationships she started to develop turned her from a potential customer to a friendly volunteer who could be trusted. The dog that she wanted had already been adopted, but this gave her an opportunity to learn more about the shelter, their privacy policies, and be around numerous potential lifelong pets.

Three weeks into her volunteer journey, the original dog that she wanted was returned to the shelter. The family that adopted it could not tolerate the energy and was not able to provide the patience and discipline required to raise a happy dog. My client contacted me right away and said she wanted to jump on the opportunity. She admitted that she did not possess any friendships that would waive the adoption requirements, but that she was a trusted volunteer. Since this shelter was always full, I advised her to offer to foster the animal. Many shelters will happily send animals home with fosters in order to free space in cramped shelters. They usually provide food, kennels, and toys.

She drove back to the shelter and commented to a head employee that the place seemed more crowded than usual. She then asked what happens when they have no room for more animals. The employee explained the foster program and advised that they would reach out to fosters on file and beg for help. My client jumped on that opening and stated that she desired to be a foster. Of course, there was another application for that, but the employee did not ask for ID since my client was a registered volunteer with a record on file at the shelter. My client took her future dog home that day.

This was a big achievement. The dog was in her house. The shelter only knows my client by an alias name, and they know her true address. I advised her to do her job for a few days, enjoy the bonding, and ensure that the dog was a good fit. During her next volunteer assignment on a weekend when specific staff were present (the staff that she had bonded with the most), she advised them that she would like to adopt the dog she was fostering. This immediately presented the adoption application, which she completed with her alias name. The employee asked for an ID, which my client stated "I don't have it today, but I can bring it on Tuesday when we go to the Adoption Event". This was fine with the employee, and the rest of the application was executed. My client now owned the dog. At the next volunteer event, which was located at a local pet supply chain, the day was too busy for anyone to remember to obtain a copy of her ID. To this day, she still volunteers at the shelter, and no one has ever mentioned a need to copy her ID.

You may be reading this in disgust. I have encouraged a client to lie to an animal shelter. I can only offer the following. She hurt no one. She is an amazing and loving dog owner. Without the ability to stay private, she would not have obtained a pet from a shelter. Her actions were not in vain. The following events have occurred to her since the adoption.

- She has received over a dozen pieces of unsolicited mail at her home address in the name of the alias she only used with the shelter. These continue to expand as these companies share data with partner organizations.
- The email address that she provided on the adoption application now receives pet related spam daily. Advertisements for insurance, vaccinations, food, and safety gadgets flood that account, which she no longer checks.
- The telephone number she provided on the application was shared with a local veterinarian which has added it to a SMS text campaign. Every week, she receives unsolicited tips and reminders to arrange for various pet services (at a cost of course). She can terminate that VOIP number or simply turn off notifications for it.
- Her alias name and address appear in a premium database owned by Experian, which is searchable by anyone. More details can be found at www.experian.com/small-business/pet-owners.jsp. My client is not concerned, as the entry is not associated with her real name.

- 24PetWatch has updated their records to include her alias name and address within their database, which is accessible to thousands of people including practically every veterinary office in the country. If someone were to scan her pet's microchip, a social engineering pretext to a veterinary office could yield her name and address. Therefore, I advised that she update the record again. This time, she should use her same alias name but change the address to the shelter's location. If the dog is lost, the shelter will be notified. They have her alias name, address, and number on file to contact her. While unlikely, this could prevent an advanced attack if someone identified her alias name and address (and dog).

The next hurdles will be ongoing "maintenance". Pets need continuous vaccines and licenses. When you obtain an animal from a shelter, the animal is almost always spayed or neutered, current on rabies and other vaccines, and "legal" in the county. Once you take possession, you are responsible for the continued medical care and licensing. Most counties in the United States have a legal requirement to maintain yearly rabies vaccinations. Part of this requirement is to register your pet with the county and pay a yearly fee when you provide proof of vaccination. Usually, your veterinarian will submit all of this for you as part of your visit for a rabies shot. You have a couple of options here, and I will list them in order of preference.

If you have already established yourself under an alias name with a local veterinarian, let them do the work. Show up for your yearly appointment, pay the fee for the visit and the vaccination, and pay the additional fee for them to file this with the county. They likely have rabies tags from the county on site and can issue your tag the same day. Part of this action will include them passing along your information to the county. To be fair, this will include your alias name and real address. If YOU sent this information to the county, it could be considered an illegal act. If THEY submit this data to the county, the act is a little less grey. Only you can decide if this is appropriate, but know that animal registration data is public record.

If you purchase and administer your own rabies and other vaccinations, you can submit any required paperwork to the county. The county is really only looking to enforce rabies vaccinations and is not likely on a data hunt about the owner of the pet. Do not lie on this form, as it is a government document. In my experience, placing the name of the animal in the line that is meant for your name suffices, as long as you also include the address, proof of vaccination, and the yearly fee. In that case, you have not provided false information, you simply excluded your name and instead provided that pet's name.

You may be shaking your head at this, but it matters if you have a need to stay truly private. In 2017, I had a client with a crazy stalker who knew everything about her. She relocated into an anonymous home, but obviously kept her pet. The crazy stalker contacted animal control in the county where he suspected she was staying, stated that he found a dog with a collar and tag with a very specific name, and hoped to return the animal. The county found only two pets on file with that unique name and provided the address for both of them. One was my client. It only takes a small mistake to ruin all of your hard work.

Another hurdle is boarding an animal. I am lucky that I have a trusted neighbor who takes my dog in when I travel. He has twelve acres of fenced land and Riley runs with his dogs the entire time I am gone. However, I have had to board him once when the neighbor was unavailable. Gone are the days of dropping off the dog, leaving some cash, and picking it up later without many questions. Practically every professional boarding company will want proof of vaccines, veterinary records, and your personal information.

I chose a local outfit which had great reviews and visited it with Riley. Since it was my first time there, I had to complete an application and sign consent allowing the sharing of any data to third-party entities. It is almost impossible to escape this throughout our daily grind. I provided my alias name and an alias hotel address. I keep redacted copies of Riley's records for events such as this, and they accepted that as proof of rabies, Bordetella, and other vaccines. I purposely redact the name and address of the vet, as that should never be shared. That did not fly in this scenario. They demanded to know the name of the vet and stated that they would contact the office to obtain their own copies of Riley's records.

The problem here was that my vet does not know the name Riley and possesses yet another alias address. Since the vet office did not obtain my record from the shelter, they do not have my real home address. This can become difficult to manage quickly. Thinking as fast as I could, I provided my veterinary office information and told her that Riley is likely listed under Kosmo. I blamed this inaccuracy on me getting him from a shelter and they sent over the paperwork to the vet from when he entered the shelter. Not my perfect execution, but not too damaging either. She retrieved the records from the vet, including the alias address I had given them, and Riley entered a temporary home while I visited a client.

The outcome of this experience included several undesired communications. I received spam email messages from the boarding provider to my alias email provided to the veterinarian, which they obtained from the records sent over. I received unwanted SMS text messages on the burner number provided to them reminding me that they had new obedience classes. I probably received physical mail in my alias name at the random hotel addresses provided to the vet and the boarding service. I anticipated that my contact information would eventually be leaked to other related companies. When it did, there was not much concern, as they did not have my name and true address. In 2020, I received an email from a previously unknown vet in the same city as the boarder. The email confirmed Riley was due for updated vaccinations, as determined by the records sold to this vet by the boarder, which were copied from my original vet. Animals have no privacy either.

For the record, I no longer use boarders, as I find having close relationships with friendly neighbors with dogs is much more beneficial. They do not ask questions, demand ID, or want to see vet records. My dog is much happier when I return, and I have found that a surprise 50-pound bag of the neighbor's desired dog food left on his porch enables future stays.

In 2020, I encountered a new privacy issue in regard to pet care. My dog needed an expensive long-term prescription which is also available for humans. My vet encouraged me to have the prescription filled at Walmart, as it would be much cheaper. After learning the substantial price difference from an expensive pet brand medication versus a generic option from Walmart, I was convinced to take the prescription and have it filled on my own. Walmart agreed to fill the prescription within the local store's pharmacy, but demanded to photocopy my government-issued photo identification. I walked out empty-handed. However, Walmart, Chewy, and other providers offer online prescription orders with delivery directly to you. Identification is not required for online prescriptions, aliases can be used, and private forms of payment are accepted. However, there are other issues. The following happened to my client mentioned previously in this chapter.

Her vet directed her to a third-party supplier called VetSource for her monthly medications required for her pet. The vet even provided a discount code in order to save money on the first order. She went to the site, added her medications to the cart, and proceeded to check out. The service already knew the identity of her vet since she used a referral link from the vet's website, and VetSource informed her that they would need to verify her prescription with the vet before the order could be placed. She had used an alias name and true address with the Vet, but intended to use her real name and credit card for medications which would be shipped to a UPS box. She felt stuck. Any name and address on this order would be shared with her vet, and the order would probably be declined. In this scenario, she decided to use her real address and alias name for the order. The vet already knew this address since the adoption records displayed it. The vet confirmed the order and quarterly packages arrive automatically, being charged to a Privacy.com account.

I present this situation as the reason we must always have a solid plan before executing any privacy strategies. During the first visit to the vet, know the name and address which you will be using. This will be on file forever. If you need to have home deliveries of medication or the ability of home visits, plan for that. For most clients, I recommend providing an alias name, actual home address, and a masked form of payment. This can be a service such as Privacy.com or a prepaid credit card. Today, I keep both a Privacy.com number and a prepaid gift card for use only with my vet. **There are many benefits of your pet publicly belonging to your true home address (but not your name).** If the pet is lost, return can be made quickly. This also serves as some decent disinformation, as explained in a later chapter.

In most situations where you are obtaining any type of in-person service for your dog, cash payment should be acceptable. I never use a personal credit card, even a secondary alias card, for anything associated with my dog. You may still be wondering why my dog has alias names. It was unintentional at first. When I adopted my dog, he had a temporary name of Lightning. This was given to him when he arrived at the shelter because no one knew his real name and he was a bit wild. When I adopted him, I had no reason to advise the shelter that I would not be using that name, especially since he did not respond in any way to it, and that I had started calling him Riley. To this day, the shelter believes his name is Lightning.

Out of paranoia, I did not choose a veterinarian from the suggested list provided at the adoption. I sought my own option and took "Riley/Lightning" in for the next round of vaccinations and a checkup. On the new patient application, I provided the name as Kosmo. I do not know why. It just happened. I guess it is just habit. I was not using my real name, why expose his? I projected feelings of approval for this behavior from Riley, and my vet calls him Kosmo to this day. This was all fine, until it was not.

While at a local dog park, I encountered an employee from the shelter where I obtained Riley. We talked briefly while our dogs played, and then my vet showed up. He asked how Kosmo was doing, which seemed to surprise the shelter employee who had been calling him Lightning for the past 30 minutes without any correction from me. In an awkward tone, I called out "Let's go Riley!", and we left, likely adding more confusion. Maybe an alias for a dog is overkill.

This brings up another consideration. What information do you place on a pet tag? In previous years, I would say it really does not matter. Today, I have a firm opinion on this. I believe a pet tag should only have one piece of information on it. It should only include a reliable telephone number which can reach you at all times. I use a MySudo number for this, but you may have other VOIP options. Most tags have a pet name, owner name, address, phone number, and email. The following explains my reasons to exclude most of these details.

- **Pet name**: Why is this necessary? Will that determine whether a person that found your animal will call you? I do not believe so. This also prevents you from ever giving a stranger a wrong name for your pet.
- **Owner name**: This one is obvious. Any name I provide would be fake anyway. Anyone that finds my pet will not know me. Again, this locks you into a specific alias name when you are out with your animal.
- **Address**: If you are comfortable with exposing your home address without a name, this is not a huge issue. My reservation is during the creation of the tag. You have likely seen machines at pet stores which allow you to create your own custom tag. These are very affordable and provide an immediate result. They also share those details with affiliate companies. Think about the potential. If you owned thousands of machines in big pet stores that made pet tags, and you obtained the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the owners, you would have some valuable data. Pet supply and insurance companies devour this data and bombard users with unsolicited offers. I do not want to share my home address, regardless of alias name.
- **Email**: Aside from the previous reason, email addresses are more prone to spam. I also suspect that anyone who found my pet would rather call and may not bother sending an email. Additionally, burner email addresses could expire when not used and you may not receive the message. You are also trusting the ability to avoid typos from the finder.

For these reasons, my dog's tag has only a telephone number. I find that to be sufficient. Do you need to provide an alias name to associate with your pet(s)? Only you can answer that. I hope that this chapter has provided some insight from my experiences, and exposes the data leakage that happens when you possess an animal. My final thought to close this chapter is that numerous entities want a piece of the action in regard to your pet. Pay the legally required licensing (county/city fees), provide the legally required care (rabies and other immunizations), and stay out of scope from anyone tasked with holding people accountable. Play by the rules, but never provide more personal details than necessary. Surprisingly, minimal information disclosure is required, but we tend to give in to marketing tricks.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN
DEATH CONSIDERATIONS

Spoiler alert: we are all going to die. For some, our privacy shenanigans may not matter after we are gone. For others, including myself, our death may be the opportunity to apply one final privacy strategy. Most of my clients are not concerned with keeping death details private, but we should all consider our families' needs once we leave. Anything we can do now to ease the decisions surrounding our passing will be welcomed by those faced with the responsibility. This chapter was previously presented as a section of another chapter, but I have moved it to its own chapter for two reasons. First, it is one of the topics of this book which applies to all of us. Second, it may be the most valuable thing you can do for your family. If you have followed the writings in this book, you have probably made things difficult for your next of kin. What happens when they cannot prove ownership of a trust or LLC? You might risk your assets becoming property of the government. Let's prepare now so that we can have comfort knowing our plans will be honored later.

This chapter is presented in two main parts. The first is documentation. We will create a Final Arrangements document outlining our desires once we pass, which will help our loved ones make decisions about our final resting place and death notification which we would approve. Next, we will create a Living Will which will provide our family specific healthcare instructions in the event we cannot communicate them ourselves. Finally, we will create a traditional Will which provides catch-all coverage of our assets which were not documented within a living trust as previously explained. The second part of this chapter is notification and explanation. All of your efforts to hide your assets from public view may cause a big problem if your family cannot locate the essential paperwork proving ownership by your estate. If you have done things well, your home and vehicles are not publicly associated with your name. It is vital that you possess all necessary paperwork and documentation and that your family knows what to do with it when you pass. We will create detailed instructions and make sure our families know where to find it. Let's start with a simple document about your final arrangements.

Final Arrangements Document

Most states do not have any specific laws about the validity of a Final Arrangements Document, also known as an End of Life plan, Final Wishes Planner, or combination of any of these terms. Typically, this is a document outlining your final desires related to your funeral, public death announcements, disposition of your body, and service details. This may not be considered a legal document, but it can be extremely helpful to those planning your funeral and death announcements. First, let's consider why we may desire such a document.

People search websites scrape online obituaries for deceased family member's details. They then populate the newly discovered data into their invasive systems. Consider the following demonstration. You are a very private person and your mother passes. A traditional obituary will publicly display your full name, spouse's name, actual city of residence, children's names, and relationships to all siblings, nieces, nephews, etc. People search websites devour this data and append your profile. Within weeks, you are listed within dozens of websites which accurately identify your location and family members. If this bothers you, a Final Arrangements Document can protect your relatives when you pass.

Please note this document is not publicly filed with any government entity. A Notary signature is not required, but witness signatures are vital. I also encourage you to explain this document and your wishes to immediate family. You do not want someone challenging the validity of this document. I have witnessed funerals which were conducted in a completely opposite manner as the deceased intended due to arguments among the children. The following presents a sample document with fictional information. This can be modified in any way desired to meet your own demands. I present this only as a guide. For some, this may remain a single-page directive. Others may incorporate elaborate details. Most readers will rely on this document in order to prevent personal details from being shared publicly through death announcements and obituaries. It also specifically outlines a desire to prevent personal information from being shared through social networks.

Final Arrangements Document for John Wilson

I, John Wilson, currently of Los Angeles, CA, being of sound mind, willfully and voluntarily declare that these are my final wishes as to the disposition of my body after my death and any services or memorialization to be held in my name. This document is not intended to be interpreted as my Last Will and Testament.

APPOINTEE: I request that Jane Wilson be in charge of executing my last wishes.

DEATH ANNOUNCEMENT: I wish to have a death notice submitted only to the LA Times. My death notice should include my date of birth as January 1, 1980 and my birthplace as Los Angeles. It should not include the names or locations of any family members as respect toward their privacy. I do not wish any details of my funeral or other services be included in my death notice. I request my death notice to exclude any residential, hobby, or employment history. I request that any death announcements be omitted from any social networks or online forums, including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat.

ORGAN DONATION: I wish to donate my organs upon death and am a registered organ donor in the state of California.

DISPOSITION OF BODY: Upon my death, I wish my body to be cremated. I wish for my ashes to be scattered as desired by Jane Wilson.

SERVICES: Upon my death, I wish to have a private memorial service to commemorate my life. I would like it to be held at the Elks Lodge, located in Torrance, California, if possible.

FINANCING & EXECUTION: I have set aside funds to cover my expenses which are located in my safe. I request that Jane Wilson follow the spirit of these wishes as well as she can and within the limits of any applicable law.

_____	_____
John Wilson	Date
_____	_____
Witness Name	Witness Name
_____	_____
Witness Address	Witness Address
_____	_____
Witness Signature	Witness Signature
_____	_____
Date	Date

Notary (Optional):

Living Will (Instructions for Health Care)

A Living Will does not outline your desires for distribution of assets after you die. Instead, it is a legal document which explains medical directives while you are alive. This document likely exceeds the scope of this book, and has very little relationship to privacy. However, it fits well within this chapter and can provide value to those already making end of life decisions. First, consider a few reasons why you may need a Living Will.

- **It Protects You When You Cannot Communicate**: The biggest advantage of having a Living Will is that it protects you in a future situation during which you no longer can communicate your wishes. Otherwise, medical professionals in charge of treating you have the authority to choose your treatment on your behalf once you are in a state in which you cannot communicate what you want to be done.

- **It Prevents Arguments Between Family Members**: Medical care decisions can cause a lot of trouble among family members. If they disagree on what should be done, it can cause relationship-ending arguments. With a Living Will, it will be your choice and no one else's. This should help eliminate any argument or debate as to what should happen to you.

- **It Gives You Control Over Medical Treatments**: A Living Will provides you complete authority over which medical treatments and procedures take place in a situation where you are unable to communicate. In this specific situation, a Living Will legally demands doctors to fulfill your wishes and removes the decision from them.

- **It Reduces Potentially Unwanted Medical Bills for Your Family**: In the situation that you get into a coma or vegetative state, a Living Will determines healthcare action. Some people would rather die than live an additional 20 years on life-support. This is usually due to the enormous medical bills for which their family will have to pay while you are in that condition. If you do not want to see something like this happen, you need a Living Will that specifies exactly what you would like to happen in a given situation.

- **It Provides Peace of Mind**: Living Wills are designed to give you the control to prevent more bad things from happening in already tragic situations. You may want to know that your family, as well as yourself, will be taken care of properly in such a situation.

- **It Should be Notarized**: If your family might argue over your care, you should have your Living Will notarized. That can aid in any legal battles over your healthcare. It can also eliminate any validity concerns which are presented by opposing family members.

I encourage you to be proactive while considering your desires for end of life decisions. Do not surrender control over what happens to you under bad circumstances. The following document contains the basic language of a Living Will. You can also find numerous templates online which contain more detailed information. Choose a document most appropriate for your desires.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR HEALTH CARE

END-OF-LIFE DECISIONS: I direct that my health care providers and others involved in my care provide, withhold, or withdraw treatment in accordance with the following:

____ Choice Not To Prolong Life: I do not want my life to be prolonged if (i) I have an incurable and irreversible condition that will result in my death in a relatively short time, (ii) I become unconscious and, to a reasonable degree medical certainty, I will not regain consciousness or (iii) the likely risks and burdens of treatment could outweigh the expected benefits, OR

____ Choice To Prolong Life: I want my life to be prolonged as long as possible within the limits of generally accepted health-care standards.

ARTIFICIAL NUTRITION AND HYDRATION: If I have selected the above choice NOT to prolong life under specified conditions, I also specify that I ____ do or ____ do not want artificial nutrition and hydration provided to me.

RELIEF FROM PAIN: I direct that treatment for easing pain or discomfort be provided at all times, even if it hastens my death.

EFFECT OF COPY: A copy of this form has the same effect as the original.

REVOCATION: I understand that I may revoke this OPTIONAL ADVANCE HEALTH CARE DIRECTIVE at any time, and that if I revoke it, I should promptly notify my supervising health-care provider and any health-care institution where I am receiving care and any others to whom I have given copies of this document. I understand that I may revoke the designation of an agent only by a signed writing or by personally informing the supervising health-care provider.

_____	_____
John Wilson	Date
_____	_____
Witness Name	Witness Name
_____	_____
Witness Address	Witness Address
_____	_____
Witness Signature	Witness Signature
_____	_____
Date	Date

Notary:

Traditional Will

In previous chapters, I explained the privacy strategies when using a trust to hold assets. During the discussion about living trusts, I explained that they have more power than a traditional Will because a trust does not go through probate. However, I do believe that everyone should also possess a traditional Will. It can be a "catch-all" document to address any concerns with assets which were not included in any trust.

A traditional Will does not necessarily offer much privacy benefit. My goal within this section is to identify additional unconventional details which can be beneficial to a privacy enthusiast. While a Will should not become public information, you should be cautious of its contents. During the probate process, practically anyone can claim they should be able to see the Will in order to potentially protest the validity. This is not common, especially with close families, but something we should consider. I have never seen the details of a Will become part of a people search site, so we can (and should) include family member details.

The following example includes common language used within a Will. You should consult an attorney before executing your own Will, especially if you possess substantial assets. In order to keep within the scope of this book, I will only emphasize the items included in section (7) titled Special Requests. This area allows you to enter any details which would normally be absent from a Will. Since this is a legal document, as defined by the Will laws of your state, it may hold more power than any previous documents we have created. Specifically, consider my reason for including the following items.

(7.1) I direct that my Final Arrangements Document be executed upon my death.
(7.2) I direct that details of this document are not to be shared publicly or online.

The first item (7.1) provides some legal coverage for the Final Arrangements Document we previously created. This is likely not necessary, but may give cooperating family members leverage over those who wish to defy your desires within that document. The second option (7.2) is fairly vague and may have no consequences if ignored. However, having your desires to keep this information private, while visible to the entire listing of beneficiaries, may ensure that your requests are executed properly.

Some may question the need for a separate Final Arrangements Document, which was explained previously as a way to handle your funeral and public details, instead of simply including those details within a traditional Will. There are two reasons a single document is inappropriate. First, a Will is often viewed and executed weeks or months after death. The details are often ignored until after the funeral, which eliminates any chance of the end of life desires being granted. Second, a Will must go through probate and can be contested. I believe these documents should be separate.

Before proceeding with your own traditional Will, consider some legal aspects about witnesses. Many states demand that two witnesses must sign, and neither can be a beneficiary within the Will. This proves you had unbiased witnesses. Make sure to include mailing addresses for each witness in case they are needed to verify your state of mind at the time of signing. While some states allow the Notary to count as one witness, others do not. Never take a chance. Always have two witnesses which have no other association with the Will sign in front of the Notary with you. This requires you all three to be at the same place at the same time, but this could help prevent any disputes about the authenticity of the document.

The following is a sample of a traditional Will.

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of JOHN WILSON

(1) Declaration: I hereby declare that this is my last Will and testament and that I hereby revoke, cancel and annul all Wills previously made by me. I declare that I am of legal age to make this Will and of sound mind and that this last Will and testament expresses my wishes without undue influence or duress.

(2) Family Details: I am married to JANE WILSON, hereinafter referred to as my spouse.

(3) Appointment of Executors:

(3.1) I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint JANE WILSON (SPOUSE) as Executor or if this Executor is unable or unwilling to serve then I appoint MICHAEL WILSON (SON) as alternate Executor.

(3.2) I hereby give and grant the Executor all powers and authority as are required or allowed in law, and especially that of assumption.
(3.3) Pending the distribution of my estate, my Executors shall have authority to carry on any business, venture or partnership in which I may have any interest at the time of my death. My Executors shall have full and absolute power in his/her discretion to insure, repair, improve or to sell all or any assets of my estate. My Executors shall have authority to engage the services of attorneys, accountants and other advisors as he/she may deem necessary to assist with the execution of this last Will and testament and to pay reasonable compensation for their services from my estate.

(4) Bequests: I leave my entire estate to my spouse, JANE WILSON.

(5) Remaining Property and Residual Estate: I bequeath the remainder of my estate, property and effects, whether movable or immovable, wheresoever situated and of whatsoever nature to my spouse JANE WILSON.

(6) Alternate Beneficiaries: Should my spouse not survive me by thirty (30) days then I bequeath the remainder of my estate, property and effects, whether movable or immovable, wheresoever situated and of whatsoever nature to:

Name: MICHAEL WILSON (SON)
Bequest: 50% of remaining estate.

Name: AMY WILSON (DAUGHTER)
Bequest: 50% of remaining estate.

(6.1) Should any of the beneficiaries named in (6) not survive me by 30 (thirty) days I direct that the non-surviving person's share goes to the remaining beneficiary.

(7) Special Requests:

(7.1) I direct that my Final Arrangements Document be executed upon my death.

(7.2) I direct that details of this document are not to be shared publicly or online.

(8) General:

(8.1) Words signifying one gender shall include the others and words signifying the singular shall include the plural and vice versa where appropriate.

(8.2) Should any provision of this Will be judged by an appropriate court of law as invalid it shall not affect any of the remaining provisions whatsoever.

(8.3) If any beneficiary under this Will contests or attacks any of its provisions, any share or interest in my estate given to that contesting beneficiary is revoked and shall be disposed of in the same manner provided herein as if that contesting beneficiary had predeceased me.

(8.4) This document shall be governed by the laws in the State of California.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I hereby set my hand on this 7th day of July, 2020 in the presence of the undersigned witnesses.

_____

JOHN WILSON

As witnesses we declare that we are of sound mind and of legal age to witness a Will and that to the best of our knowledge JOHN WILSON is of legal age to make a Will, appears to be of sound mind and signed this Will willingly and free of undue influence or duress. We declare that he signed this Will in our presence as we signed as witnesses in the presence of each other, all being present at the same time. Under penalty of perjury, we declare these statements to be true and correct on this 7th day of July, 2020.

_____	_____
Witness Name	Witness Name
_____	_____
Witness Address	Witness Address
_____	_____
Witness Signature	Witness Signature
_____	_____
Date	Date

Notary:

After-Death Document Access

Now that you have created and executed your desired death-related documents, where will you store them? As privacy enthusiasts, we tend to hide things very well. This can backfire on you after you die. If your documents are hidden behind a wall, all of your estate might linger in probate for years. While this entire book has focused on extreme privacy tactics, we should all consider loosening our strategies when it comes to after-death plans. We want our family to easily locate our documentation to ease the burden of our death. The first consideration is storage of important documents. This will be a personal choice with numerous options, but I will share my own strategies. This is especially important if both you and your spouse die together.

My original (signed and notarized) final arrangements document, living will, traditional will, living trust (Chapter Seven), and property trusts (Chapter Seven) are all located in my home within a large gun safe bolted into concrete. These documents contain "wet" signatures and could be required to prove the validity of the content. When I die, it will be vital for my family to access these documents. I also want digital scanned copies available to my family in the event my home is destroyed or there is a dispute about the documents. This is where my "Death Packets" enter the game.

These packets are prepared once you have all documentation secured and executed. The original documents are scanned into digital PDF files and then placed together into a large envelope for secure storage within a safe. This could be a safe deposit box at a bank, but I prefer to store these documents in my home for immediate access. These originals are accompanied by a letter to my family. This letter provides a general summary of any financial accounts and other important items which will need their attention. I also provide details about my privacy strategies which could cause complications. This includes the name of the trust which owns the home and any details about utility payments. I want my family to be able to easily continue anonymous payments which will be required while my estate is settled. I do not want them to experience power being terminated at my house due to non-payment or contact with a customer service representative who sees no account associated with my name or bank. I spell out my entire game plan. Remember, you will be dead whenever anyone reads it.

Next, I print the scanned copies of these documents. These are not official originals with fresh signatures, but they do help support the originals once they are located. I place these into legal paper envelopes, then clear plastic evidence bags with a permanent seal. It is impossible to open these without signs of intrusion. I have used clear bags made by Bank Supplies (https://amzn.to/3mX8mKa) with success. I have two close family members who each get a copy of this packet. The exterior states that it should not be opened unless my death has been confirmed. I provide an updated packet once annually which replaces the old version. Sometimes my replacement packet is identical to the previous, but my annual collection of the old packet removes temptation to open the contents since any entry will be obvious.

These packets include everything required to identify any of my assets and post-death desires. I even include the combination to my safe where the original documents can be found. Each sealed packet also receives a USB drive which contains digital copies of all documents. This could be valuable in the event my paper documents are no longer legible. I believe it is vital to discuss all of this with your family now. I have informed my family about my trusts and wills, including my overall desires for my estate. I always finish the conversation with "hopefully, I will die broke, spending my money on margaritas on a beach somewhere, and none of this will matter" in order to ease the emotions surrounding death.

Next, consider your banking accounts. Many of them are already classified as Payable On Death (POD) and can avoid probate. Make sure you have provided your desired beneficiaries to the financial institutions. Once your beneficiaries provide a death certificate, they can access your funds and proceed with the distribution of your estate. Having immediate access to your funds will greatly decrease any hurdles surrounding an anonymous estate. Finally, consider hiring an attorney to assist with all of this. Many estate attorneys will store your documentation and ease the process of your death. I have a friend who is an estate attorney. I do not have him store my documents, but he knows that my family will be contacting him upon my death seeking assistance with my documentation. I make sure that his business card is present within every death packet.

After-Death Digital Information Access

Another consideration in regard to death is the accessibility of your data. When you die, the passwords known only to you also die. This may eliminate the ability to access your documents, media, accounts, communications, and anything else you have protected. For some, this may be intentional. You may not want anyone to be able to access this information, even after your death. For others, it is vital to allow a spouse or other family member complete access to your digital life. This could also apply if you are alive but mentally incapacitated.

Imagine that you control all of the online accounts related to your house, banks, utilities, and aliases within a password manager. You die and your spouse cannot access these details in order to continue payments and maintain your privacy strategy. This can be devastating, especially if nothing is in your true family name. For most clients, I recommend an after-death data access strategy. If you created any of the documents previously discussed in this chapter, you should attach a separate document explaining any components of your digital privacy strategy which would be needed after your death. This should include the following.

- Passwords required to access any online accounts associated with your home.
- Detailed alias names used for any services or utilities associated with your home.
- Detailed payment processes for any services or utilities associated with your home.
- Detailed access instructions for any financial accounts.
- Detailed access instructions for secured containers (safes).
- Detailed access instructions for any virtual currencies stored digitally.
- Additional digital copies of any trusts, Wills, and financial records.

Next, you should consider keeping important accounts active. If you have a premium email subscription, it must remain funded in order to keep the account alive. It may not matter that your spouse has all of your passwords if your account has been disabled. Enabling auto-pay to a valid credit or debit card may get you through a couple of years past your death, but the expiration on the funding source is a valid concern. Some providers allow you to add funds to an account before expiration and any renewals simply withdraw from that source.

If you adopt a custom email domain strategy, you might want to ensure that the domain does not expire after your death. Fortunately, most domain registrars allow you to renew for multiple years. I keep my primary email domain renewed for ten years at all times. Even when it has eight years remaining, I can top it off to the full ten years. If your domain expires, you have two issues. First, your email is no longer forwarded and your family may not be able to monitor monthly messages for answers about accounts and services. Next, any password resets or account verification emails will not be forwarded to your email provider. This can prevent access to various accounts and block your family members from proving they have authorization to act on your behalf. Losing access to email can be a catastrophe.

If you possess virtual currency, especially funds which are not held at an exchange, you should prepare your heirs now. If you keep Bitcoin within an Electrum (or hardware wallet), as previously explained, it will be lost forever unless someone knows how to access the funds. Consider the tutorials in Chapter Three and create your own rescue plan for your next of kin.

These are only a few considerations. Think about what information will be needed when you die. Making this content easily available may seem risky. What if this data gets into the wrong hands? This is a very valid concern. You should be creative and cautious in how you disseminate these details. Some may include written information in the same death packet which includes their legal documents. I take it to another extreme.

I created a text document which includes every detail needed to reconstruct my complicated digital life and understand my use of aliases, trusts, and LLCs. It is encrypted within a VeraCrypt container and copied onto USB devices held by my two beneficiaries. My attorney possesses a password which is to be given to each beneficiary only upon my death. The beneficiary can use that password, followed by the serial number of the

USB drive, to unlock each VeraCrypt database. The serial number is visible on the device itself and included in a text file on the drive. This way, the attorney has no access to the data, and each beneficiary requires cooperation of the attorney in order to access the content of the data they hold. Since each beneficiary has the ability to access the data without the other, there is a bit of redundancy in my plan in case one should lose the data or precede me in death. Every few years, I update the content on each USB drive in order to stay current. It makes for an awkward visit.

You should also consider all of your digital media. Copies of your personal photos and videos may be lost forever when you die. When my grandparents died, we found dozens of physical photo albums which were priceless. All of them were scanned into digital form and distributed to each family member. The originals were split between the families. This is a very archaic situation which will become more rare as time passes. If all of your digital media is secured in an encrypted container, those memories may be lost forever. Make plans to include instructions to locate all photos and videos now. Make sure your family understands the ways in which they can access this data.

Aside from being able to pay the utilities, your spouse or other family might need to continue registration of vehicles, payment of insurance premiums, or funding of accounts. Make sure you leave instructions which explain the easiest way to do all of this. If your family needs to sell your home, they will need access to everything surrounding the owner details and accounts. The anonymous lifestyle can be fun for us while we are alive, but it can be torture for a family that has no knowledge of your antics. Consider the following client experience.

In 2020, the spouse of a deceased client contacted me out of desperation. Her husband had titled the home in the name of a trust and all utilities were automatically paid out of an LLC checking account. When she decided to sell the home, she realized she had never seen the trust details. She had no idea of the identity of the trustee used during the purchase. She could likely retrieve a certification of trust from the county or title company, but this would never suffice for the documents required during closing.

I was able to provide the last known signed and notarized documents which I had helped her husband create at the time of purchase. This is one reason I securely store copies of all client documents offline. We were able to determine that she had the authority as the Grantor in the event of her husband's death. This allowed her to reassign herself as trustee and complete the sale. Without it, I do not know what would have happened. Make sure that you have a way to deliver all important documents to your family after death.

If you want to provide another layer of assistance to your family upon your death, you might want to leave them detailed instructions for dealing with death reporting requirements. This can make a tough time less difficult. The following are only a few considerations. Look back at the steps you have taken to become more private and attempt to virtually unwind your actions within documentation for your loved ones.

- **Death Notification to Credit Bureaus**: Your family should send your certified death certificate, name, DOB, SSN, and date of death to each of the three main credit bureaus. This may help prevent fraud.
- **Mail Forwarding**: Your family should forward your mail to their own address to prevent missed mail. If you use a PMB which cannot be forwarded, they should monitor incoming mail and keep the plan paid in full.
- **Account Closure**: Your family should close all online accounts which are no longer needed. This could prevent abuse and removes unnecessary information from being exposed.

I hope this chapter has generated some ideas on how you will tackle your own death preparation. Any steps taken now will be greatly appreciated by others after you are gone.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
REQUESTS, FREEZES, & REMOVALS

The first edition of my book ***Hiding From The Internet*** was basically an early (and now outdated) version of this chapter. In 2011, I began tracking the various online services which exposed our personal details and then identified the best possible solutions to remove the data. Over the past decade, I have maintained a free public list of these resources, which has now been copied and redistributed by numerous organizations as their own. This has created great awareness of the issue of personal data exposure, but many online businesses now use these free resources as marketing for their unnecessary products. The content presented here should eliminate the need to pay expensive fees for online protection services. This chapter tackles the following three areas of interest.

Data Requests: Companies which collect and sell personal data about you are required to provide these credit and consumer reports to you at no charge. We will work through the biggest privacy invaders and request any data which they store about us. We will then scrutinize the content in order to determine our next actions.

Credit Freezes: We will freeze our credit profiles within numerous companies. This will eliminate much of the unauthorized access to our information and prevent criminals from taking over our identity.

Online Data Removals: Once we know what is available about us, we will force people search websites to remove our publicly-available information. This prevents people from easily finding our home addresses.

All of our clients receive an annual packet containing a tailored version of the details within this chapter. We encourage them to revisit their credit and consumer profiles every year with new requests for any stored data. We then ask them to ensure their freezes are still in place appropriately. Finally, we request they conduct searches across the most popular people search website to ensure there is no new exposure. Some hire us to do the work, but most prefer to do it themselves. We always encourage understanding these processes instead of hiring any company (including mine) to monitor your online world for you. I believe this entire chapter should be revisited once yearly. Monitor my website (inteltechniques.com) for any updates.

If you are new to all of this, it is important that you conduct the steps mentioned throughout this chapter in the order in which they are presented. If you freeze your credit first and then ask for copies of your reports, the freeze might hinder your request. If you begin removing all of your online information before seeing your consumer profiles, you may not know what information is publicly available during the verification processes. If you freeze your credit after you have sanitized your online information, the credit bureaus may present numerous hurdles in order to verify your identity. There is an optimal path through all of this.

If you have already completed some of these steps from reading previous editions, that does not mean you cannot pick up in other areas. While working through these steps in a specific order is ideal, it does not excuse you from finding areas which can be improved. If you have already removed much of your information from the internet, you likely already know that online services will be more scrutinous about any personal data requests or verification of your identity. This is a good thing, and proof that you are making a difference with your online exposure.

Before I discuss the techniques which will protect you, you should take a good look at your current credit report. This will identify all of your current open accounts and may identify any problems or fraudulent activity. There are several websites that offer a free credit report. Most of these will try to convince you to sign up for premium offers and never offer an actual free credit report. The only official government-supported and truly free credit report website is at annualcreditreport.com. This website allows you to view your credit report, without any fee, once yearly from each of the three largest credit bureaus. This means that you actually can get three free credit reports every year. Instead of viewing all three reports at the same time, create a schedule to spread out the viewings. I recommend the following.

First, I recommend obtaining your credit report from Equifax at **annualcreditreport.com**. The entire process can be completed online and results are immediate. If you do not want to submit the request online, you can download the PDF form from **annualcreditreport.com/manualRequestForm.action** and mail the submission. This credit report should identify any unknown lines of credit which could have been created without your authorization.

Next, consider closing any unused open credit accounts. The only exception would be whichever account has been opened the longest. If you have an unused account that has been open for ten years without any problems, you may consider leaving that account open. This will help your credit score, whereas closing your oldest account could decrease your score. Closing other unused accounts will provide fewer options for fraud. If you possess a credit line with a local bank that is never used, and that bank experiences an intrusion into their system, you may be victimized for weeks without knowing. The fewer open accounts you have will result in fewer opportunities for financial fraud. Personally, my priority would be to close any specialty store accounts that you may have opened because of a sales discount, a free promotional item, or a pushy sales person.

Analyze your entire credit report for any errors. Occasional typos are common, and should not create panic. When I first viewed my own report, it appeared that someone else was using my social security number. I was immediately concerned and began to contact the credit bureaus. I quickly discovered that the "suspect" was someone with an SSN almost identical to mine, and someone had mistyped a number at some point. This will happen, and it is not an indication of fraud. You should focus on the open accounts. If you see that you possess a line of credit at an unfamiliar bank, then you should be concerned. If you discover anything suspicious, contact the credit bureau and financial institution to report the potential fraud. They all have a fraud division that will assist with identifying the problem and resolving it. Each situation will be unique and one vague example here would not necessarily apply to you.

You should also contact any financial institution that hosts any fraudulent account and notify them of the issue. You will be mailed paperwork to validate that the account was not opened by you. The process of closing the account will move quickly after that. If you do discover fraud on your credit report, I recommend that you immediately request your report from the other two credit bureaus. This may identify additional fraud that was not listed on the first bureau's report. If you do not discover fraud, I suggest that you wait a few months before you view the next report (Experian), and then another few months before you request the final report (TransUnion). This allows you to continuously monitor your credit throughout the year. A year after your first report request, you can demand a new copy from Equifax. Keeping an eye on your credit report is one of the most important tips that I mention in my public speaking appearances.

After you have requested your first report from Equifax, and before you later request a report from Experian, consider completing requests for the "minor" credit agencies as explained next. These are smaller credit reporting entities which may not possess a full credit profile associated with your name, but their popularity is growing. This is especially important if you have experienced fraud within the major credit agencies.

Data Requests (Credit Reports-Minor)

Minor credit reporting agencies are not represented on annualcreditreport.com. You will need to visit each service if you would like a copy of their profile of your credit. This is not difficult, but it can be time consuming. At the time of this writing, there are six additional agencies which are being considered during your application for credit (or someone else pretending to be you). I believe you should identify the data included within each and correct any errors which could impact your overall credit profile. In a moment, we will freeze all of these options. While the following services do not all have access to the data within the "major" bureaus, the top three (Equifax, Experian, and Transunion) often maintain access to each of these. The following should help identify the most appropriate way to retrieve and scrutinize your data from each.

Service: Chex
Type of Report: Credit Report (Financial History)
Request Link: chexsystems.com
Contact: 800-428-9623
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: CoreLogic Credco
Type of Report: Credit Report
Request Link: None
Contact: 800-637-2422
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Innovis
Type of Report: Credit Report (Verification Details)
Request Link: https://www.innovis.com/
Contact: 800-540-2505
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: LexisNexis
Type of Report: Credit Report
Request Link: https://consumer.risk.lexisnexis.com/request
Contact: 888-497-0011
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: MicroBilt Connect
Type of Report: Credit Report (Payment History)
Request Link: https://microbiltconnect.com/consumer-affairs
Contact: 888-222-7621
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: NCTUE
Type of Report: Credit Report (Utility History)
Request Link: None
Contact: 866-349-5185
Notes: Call to request your report.

Once you receive your reports, review them for any errors. An inaccurate missed payment can be devastating to your credit score. This will also help you understand the details which these companies already know about you. When you attempt a credit freeze later, they will ask you many questions to prove your identity. You never want to give them any details which they do not already have. These reports can serve as a guide to the information which can safely be surrendered during various freeze and removal requests. If none of these reports have your current address, then you know to keep that private. If they all do, there is no harm providing it.

There is a fine line between the previous "minor" credit reporting agencies and the following consumer reporting organizations. Some may place them all within one category, but I see a difference. The previous options will have more influence toward approval for lines of credit, while the following aim to know more about you as a person. These services will be used to screen potential employment candidates, rental occupants, and insurance beneficiaries. I will not spend any time explaining each service as I have previously. You can conduct your own research if desired. I will simply provide the details required to request your full consumer report from each organization, and display a generic category of each service.

I do not believe everyone needs a report from all of these services. If you are not employed and do not plan on seeking employment, the employment screening options may offer you very little. However, you may just want to know what they know (and will sell). If you have never rented a home, those options may be of little interest. Choose the services which might have the most impact on your life. For most clients, I focus on financial and medical histories. Very few clients care about criminal background checks, but you might.

Note that I always include a telephone number as a contact method for these types of requests, unlike the email addresses associated with removal requests presented later. This is because calling about your report will always work better than email. Email always works better for removals, as explained later. Note that some of these services will demand a photocopy of your identification. I always send a copy of my passport with my face redacted when absolutely required and I truly want to see the information they hold about me. I often skip the services within this section which require an ID unless I really need the information. While writing this chapter, I was met with great resistance while requesting a specific consumer report. The following may help guide you through your own hurdles.

I contacted Early Warning in order to retrieve my consumer report. I completed the online process and waited. Two days later, I received a voicemail from a representative (which can be heard on episode 249 of my podcast). I was advised that the redacted passport which I included would not suffice. I was told they would need to see my face within the document. This made no sense to me as they do not know what I look like to verify the authenticity of the document. I called them and began my plea. I told them "my employer's policy prohibits employees from submitting any online photos due to the sensitivity of our work". This is technically true. I am self-employed and I encourage my employees (including myself) to remain private online. I was told that an unredacted ID was required.

I politely requested that they send me a verification link through Intellicheck (intellicheck.com) instead of demanding a full ID scan. The representative was happy to comply. Intellicheck is a verification company which assists organizations with ensuring they are communicating with an authorized person. The person I was talking with texted me a unique Intellicheck link which would expire soon. I opened the link from a mobile device which sent me to a web page asking to capture the back of my driver's license for verification. When I did this, the site focused on the barcode on my license and confirmed that it matched the information requested by the representative from Early Warning. While on the call, she could see the verification and proceeded to process my request. I received the report a few days later. While I would never go through this for every consumer report, I do believe checking Early Warning annually is important for the reasons previously explained within Chapter Ten when discussing bank accounts for home purchases.

In this scenario, I saw no harm in taking a photo of the back of my ID. There was no image or clearly identifiable information. All of the details embedded into the barcode were already available to both Early Warning and Intellicheck. I was no further exposed than through my original request. As time passes and companies become more invasive, expect more requirements to scan identification cards through third-party services.

The following is my current list of resources which may possess a consumer report associated with every U.S. citizen. Consider which of these (if any) should be queried to see your own data. Check my website for updates.

Service: A-Plus Property
Type of Report: Insurance Screening
Request Link: https://fcra.verisk.com/#/
Contact: 800-627-3487
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Accurate Background
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://www.accurate.com/my-background-check/
Contact: 800-784-3911
Notes: Filing online requires an account, calling does not.

Service: ADP Screening
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://www.adpselect.com/login/
Contact: 800-367-5933
Notes: Click "Applicant Resources" and complete the request.

Service: AmRent
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 888-898-6196
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: AppFolio
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://www.appfolio.com/consumer
Contact: 866-359-3630
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Asurint
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://www.asurint.com/candidates/request-a-copy
Contact: 800-906-2034
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Background Checks
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 866-265-6602
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: CCC Verify
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 855-901-3099
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Certegy
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://www.askcertegy.com/FACT.jsp
Contact: 800-237-3826
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Checkr
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://candidate.checkr.com/view#login
Contact: 844-824-3257
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: CIC
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://www.cicreports.com/consumer-assistance/
Contact: 888-316-4242
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Cisive
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://www.cisive.com/request-a-copy-of-my-report
Contact: 855-881-0716
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Clarity Services
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://consumers.clarityservices.com/reports
Contact: 866-390-3118
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: CoreLogic Rental Property Solutions
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 888-333-2413
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: CoreLogic Teletrack
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: corelogic.com/support/teletrack-consumer-assistance
Contact: 800-729-6981
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: CrossCheck
Type of Report: : Financial History
Request Link: https://www.cross-check.com/consumers-check-writers
Contact: 800-843-0760
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: DataX
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://consumers.dataxltd.com/annualCreditReport
Contact: 800-295-4790
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: DISA
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://disaworks.disa.com/#/background-request/request-copy
Contact: 281-673-2400
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Drivers History
Type of Report: Insurance Screening
Request Link: https://www.drivershistory.com/support/fcra-disclosure-statement
Contact: 855-694-1555
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Early Warning
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://www.earlywarning.com/consumer-information
Contact: 800-745-1560
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: EmpInfo
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 800-274-9694
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Experian RentBureau
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://www.experian.com/rentbureau/rental-payment
Contact: 877-704-4519
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: FactorTrust
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://www.factortrust.com/consumer/ReportRequest.aspx
Contact: 844-773-3321
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: First Advantage
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://fadv.com/candidates/free-report/
Contact: 800-845-6004
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: GIS / HireRight
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://ows01.hireright.com/consumer_request/mvc_controller?event=DEFAULT&create=true
Contact: 866-265-4917
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Global Payments
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://www.globalpayments.com/about-us/contact-us/facta
Contact: 800-638-4600 x410
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Info Cubic
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://infocubic.com/resources/applicant-resources
Contact: 303-220-0169
Notes: Call or complete online form to request your report.

Service: Insurance Information Exchange
Type of Report: Insurance Screening
Request Link: https://www.verisk.com/siteassets/iix/downloads/fcrarelease.pdf
Contact: 800-683-8553
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: IntelliCorp
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://consumer.intellicorp.net/
Contact: 866-202-1436
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: MIB
Type of Report: Medical History
Request Link: https://www.mib.com/request_your_record.html
Contact: 866-692-6901
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Milliman IntelliScript
Type of Report: Medical History
Request Link: https://www.rxhistories.com/for-consumers/
Contact: 877-211-4816
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: NCC
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://www.nccreports.com/index.php?request
Contact: 800-421-2168
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: OPENonline
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://services.openonline.com/Pages/Compliance/RequestInformation.aspx
Contact: 888-381-5656
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: People Facts
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://peoplefacts.com/get-your-report/
Contact: 800-600-8999
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Pre-Employ
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 800-300-1821 extension 139
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Real Page
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://www.realpage.com/support/consumer/
Contact: 866-934-1124
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: RentGrow
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://www.rentgrow.com/learn-now/
Contact: 800-898-1351
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Retail Equation
Type of Report: Shopping Return History
Request Link: None
Contact: 800-652-2331
Notes: Call and request a Return Activity Report based on DL number.

Service: SafeRent
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: https://saferentsolutions.com/request/
Contact: 888-333-2413
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: Screening Reports
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 866-389-4042
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Social Intelligence
Type of Report: Employment Screening/Social Networks
Request Link: https://www.socialintel.com/privacy-policy/
Contact: 888-748-3281
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Sterling
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 888-889-5248
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: TALX
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: https://employees.theworknumber.com/employment-data-report
Contact: 866-604-6570
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: TaxCreditCo / uConfirm
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 855-931-2792
Notes: Call to request your DSAR report.

Service: TeleCheck
Type of Report: Financial History
Request Link: https://getassistance.telecheck.com/consumer-file-report/
Contact: 800-366-2425
Notes: Complete the online request.

Service: TransUnion Rental Screening
Type of Report: Rental Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 866-775-0961
Notes: Call to request your report.

Service: Truework
Type of Report: Employment Screening/Income Verification
Request Link: https://app.truework.com/letter
Contact: 833-878-3967
Notes: Complete online form only if your employer has an account.

Service: Universal Background Screening
Type of Report: Employment Screening
Request Link: None
Contact: 877-263-8033
Notes: Call to request your report.

If you find anything inaccurate within these reports, you can dispute the details with each provider.

Credit Freezes

Over the past fifteen years, I have conducted numerous presentations about digital crime to global audiences. The one question that I am asked more than any other during these events is "Should I purchase an identity protection service such as Lifelock?". While this is a personal decision, I always disclose that I do not subscribe to any of these types of services. A more effective solution is a credit freeze. This service is easy, free, and reversible. A credit freeze, also known as a credit report freeze, credit report lock down, credit lock down, credit lock, or a security freeze, allows an individual to control how a U.S. consumer reporting agency is able to sell their data. The credit freeze locks the data at the consumer reporting agency until an individual authorizes permission for the release of the data.

I have had a credit freeze for several years, and do not require expensive identity protection. I believe that those who have a credit freeze in place should not worry about their identity being stolen. Furthermore, I think that a credit freeze is better than the best identity monitoring product that will ever exist. I believe that every U.S. citizen should consider one. I will explain the submission process in a moment, but we should first understand the reasons this is so effective.

If criminals want to get your money quickly and easily, they will target your debit and credit cards. Before the popularity of the internet, this required physical access to your wallet or purse. A victim would know right away that a card should be canceled and the damage would be minimal if caught early. A criminal would risk capture by attempting charges on the cards in person. Today, possession of your cards is not necessary. The internet has created a new avenue to obtain and spend your money by allowing immediate lines of credit in someone else's name. This may occur without any indication of problems on your end. This section will present the tools that you need to protect your credit and make you practically invulnerable to identity theft.

Basically, if your information stored by the credit reporting bureaus is not available, no institution will allow the creation of a new account with your identity. This means no credit cards, bank accounts, or loans will be approved. In many cases if someone tries to use your identity but cannot open any new services, they will find someone else to exploit. I can think of no better motivation to freeze your credit than knowing that no one can open new lines of credit in your name. This does NOT affect your current accounts or credit score.

A credit freeze also provides a great layer of privacy protection. If companies cannot gain access to your credit report, they cannot identify you as a pre-approved credit recipient. This will eliminate many offers mailed to your home. This will also remove you from various databases identifying you as a good credit card candidate. Credit freezes are extremely easy today thanks to state laws that mandate the credit bureaus' cooperation. This section will walk you through the process. Be sure to properly store any PINs provided to you (usually sent via mail) after the successful freezes. You may need these to un-freeze your credit if desired. Lately, Equifax and others no longer issue a PIN, and rely solely on responses to historical financial questions in order to lift a freeze. If you do not receive a PIN, do not worry.

Now that credit reports and freezes are free due to a new federal law, which can be researched at https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/2155, I feel it is time to execute credit freezes in all possible locations. First, submit a credit freeze at the three "major" credit bureaus via their online submission, telephone, or postal mail options displayed within the following resources. I typically recommend clients begin with the online submission process and move to telephone or postal mail applications if anything is declined (which is common).

Credit Reports-Major

Equifax
Online: https://www.equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services/credit-freeze/
By Phone: 800-685-1111
By Mail: Equifax Security Freeze, PO Box 105788, Atlanta, Georgia 30348-5788

Experian
Online: https://www.experian.com/freeze/center.html
By Phone: 888-397-3742
By Mail: Experian Security Freeze, PO Box 9554, Allen, TX 75013

TransUnion
Online: https://service.transunion.com/dss/orderStep1_form.page
By Phone: 888-909-8872
By Mail: TransUnion LLC, PO Box 2000, Chester, PA 19016

Freezing your credit within these three bureaus will stop 90% of fraudulent identity takeover, but we can do better. The following were previously explained when we requested credit reports from the "minor" providers. The following steps allow you to freeze your credit profiles in order to prevent abuse.

Credit Reports-Minor

Chex
Online: https://www.chexsystems.com/web/chexsystems/consumerdebit/page/securityfreeze/placefreeze/
By Phone: 800-887-7652
By Mail: Chex Systems, Inc. Attn: Security Freeze, 7805 Hudson Road, Suite 100, Woodbury, MN 55125

CoreLogic Credco: Freeze Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion to block sharing by CredCo

Innovis
Online: https://www.innovis.com/personal/securityFreeze
By Phone: 800-540-2505
By Mail: Innovis Consumer Assistance, PO Box 26, Pittsburgh, PA, 15230-0026

LexisNexis
Online: https://consumer.risk.lexisnexis.com/freeze
By Phone: 800-456-1244
By Mail: LexisNexis Consumer Center, Attn: Security Freeze, PO Box 105108, Atlanta, GA 30348-5108

MicroBilt Connect
Online: https://www.microbilt.com/us/consumer-affairs (Select your state and follow the directions)
By Phone: 888-222-7621
By Mail: MicroBilt/Connect, Attn: Consumer Affairs Department, PO Box 440693, Kennesaw, GA 30160

NCTUE
Online: https://www.nctue.com/Consumers
By Phone: 866-349-5355
By Mail: NCTUE Security Freeze, PO Box 105561, Atlanta, GA 30348

After you have received confirmation that these credit bureaus have placed a freeze on your credit, navigate back to https://www.annualcreditreport.com and request your free credit report from Experian. This report should acknowledge that a freeze is successfully in place. In a few months, repeat the process for Transunion. You are allowed one free report from each of the three providers every year. I cannot stress the importance of credit freezes enough. Anyone with an SSN should submit one right away to all possible options. The new federal law also mandates that any child with an SSN under the age of 16 can also have a free credit freeze. I highly recommend locking down the credit of the entire family.

If you completed the process of requesting your consumer reports, consider freezing anything which you find invasive. Some of those services allow a data freeze while others do not. Companies such as Clarity Services, DataX, First Advantage, Real Page, SafeRent, and TALX are very transparent about the freeze process, while others do not disclose any public information. If you identify sensitive information which you do not want shared with others within a consumer report, call that company and identify your options.

Several readers have been impacted by the huge breach at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Many of you have now received an official notification if your records were part of the breach. If you have ever held a clearance, or applied for one, you are likely a victim. The response from OPM is to offer temporary free credit monitoring. Unfortunately, if you already have a credit freeze in place, you cannot participate in the free coverage. Why? Your credit freeze is blocking the legitimate service from monitoring your activity. I believe that this speaks volumes about the effectiveness of a credit freeze. Aside from hackers, credit monitoring companies cannot see the details of a frozen account. I urge you to never remove a credit freeze in order to allow any free credit monitoring.

Many of these third-party credit monitoring services also induce people to provide even more information than was leaked in the original breach. For example, ID Experts (the company that OPM has paid $133 million to offer credit monitoring for the 21.5 million Americans affected by its breach) offers the ability to "monitor thousands of websites, chat rooms, forums and networks, and alerts you if your personal information is being bought or sold online". However, in order to use this service, users are encouraged to provide bank account and credit card data, passport and medical ID numbers, as well as telephone numbers and driver's license information. I can see no reasonable purpose for ever giving any company more personal information in order to protect that same data. What happens when they get breached? On a personal note, I was a victim of the OPM breach. I am not worried. I have credit freezes in place, and they have been tested. I have no automated credit monitoring. Am I still vulnerable? Of course, we all are. However, I am a much more difficult target.

Fraud Alerts

In previous editions of this book, I only placed emphasis on the credit freeze, and did not explain a credit fraud alert. This was intentional, as a freeze is much more powerful than an alert. A freeze prohibits a hard credit check while an alert simply asks a creditor to dig deeper into any requests. In other words, a freeze stops unauthorized credit pulls while a fraud alert slows them down. In 2020, I began recommending both credit freezes and fraud alerts if you want true protection from unauthorized credit accounts. This is because credit bureaus are slowly removing some of the protections of the credit freeze due to widespread adoption and the elimination of fees. Basically, people are freezing their credit in record numbers, which is causing headaches to the credit industry.

All three major credit bureaus offer fraud alerts without any charge. However, choosing the best option is not always clear. Each bureau offers an initial 1-year alert, extended 7-year alert, or 1-year active duty military alert. My preference is always the extended 7-year option, but there are requirements to qualify. In order to obtain the 7-year protection, you must be the victim of "fraud" and must submit proof of this claim. Traditionally, this would be a police report of identity theft. However, I am aware of many people who cited various popular data breaches and submitted letters of notification from the breached companies. If you possess a police report of identity theft, this is always preferred. If not, I believe you should attempt a fraud alert by providing whatever

documentation you have which supports fraud potential toward your credit. Once you have identified the documentation you will be sending, navigate to the following websites and select the 7-year extended fraud alert.

https://www.equifax.com/personal/credit-report-services/credit-fraud-alerts/
https://www.experian.com/fraud/center.html
https://www.transunion.com/fraud-alerts

Follow the directions for each provider and wait for a mailed letter confirming activation of the alerts. Any time you seek a new line of credit, the credit bureau will apply more scrutiny toward your application, regardless of releasing a credit freeze. In early 2020, I applied for a new credit card as a test of my own security. The following details should explain why a fraud alert is necessary along with a credit freeze.

I have possessed a fraud alert through Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion since 2011. I renewed the alert in 2018. I always assumed it was unnecessary since I also possessed a credit freeze within all listed credit bureaus, but I like to push things whenever I can. I decided to apply for a new business credit card and knew the freeze would be a roadblock. I applied online for the card I wanted and expected a notice stating I had been declined, which happened right away. I was advised to place a call to customer support.

During the call, I was informed that my application had been declined due to the credit freeze. I intentionally applied with a freeze in place in order to test the security of the freeze itself. It passed the first test. The customer support employee told me I would need to release my freeze through Equifax in order to complete the application process. I played along, but also played dumb. I was directed to the Equifax credit freeze website which allowed an option to lift the freeze temporarily. However, I do not prefer this option during a credit card application.

Instead, I chose the option to grant a creditor a one-time code in order to access my credit report. This allows me to complete the application process without lifting the entire freeze for anyone else to abuse. It also prevents me from ensuring the re-freeze was properly executed. After selecting this option, I was presented a typical screen asking for personal details. I was also presented a field to enter my PIN assigned by Equifax during the credit freeze process. I was surprised to see an option to continue without providing a PIN.

While I knew my PIN, I selected the button that stated I did not know it. The customer support specialist confirmed that I would not need my PIN for this process. After providing my full name, physical address, DOB, and SSN, I was presented four "security questions" to verify my identity. These included selecting a known phone number, physical address, and previous employer from multiple choices. Afterward, I was presented a code to give to the credit card processor.

I want to pause here and vent my frustration. I placed a credit freeze in order to prevent anyone else from opening lines of credit in my name. I was mailed a PIN which would be required in order to lift the freeze. Instead, I was able to remove the freeze by supplying public information. My name, address, DOB, and SSN are available within numerous data breaches which are in the hands of criminals. The PIN was the only piece that was truly private, but it was bypassed by simply stating I did not possess it. The follow-up questions could have also been answered with publicly available data. The system is flawed. This is where a fraud alert can be beneficial.

After I gave the access code to the support representative, he was able to access my credit report. However, he could not complete the application due to my fraud alert with Equifax. This required him to verify additional information about me. He first asked me to identify the telephone number which I had attached to the fraud alert. I referenced my password manager which maintained these details and I provided the Google Voice number I had used during the fraud alert process. He confirmed it was correct. He then notified me that he would need to call me at that number.

We terminated the call, I logged in to my Yubikey-protected Google account, and answered the new incoming call to my "trusted" number. I again confirmed my name, address, DOB, and SSN over this new call, and the application was approved. Immediately after the call ended, I received a text message from a former colleague at the government building at which I previously worked. He told me that the credit card company had called asking for me, and thought I should know. Apparently, my old office number was also included on the "approved numbers" list.

I now believe that a credit freeze + fraud alert combination is the most protective solution in regard to preventing unauthorized access to your credit report. The freeze prevents a hard pull on your credit, but it can be defeated by a determined adversary. The fraud alert adds additional layers and should demand a phone call to a predetermined number. Possessing both should deter a common criminal looking for an easy score.

Credit Opt-Out

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), the consumer credit reporting companies are permitted to include your name on lists used by creditors or insurers to make firm offers of credit or insurance that are not initiated by you. These are the pre-approved credit and insurance offers that you receive in the mail. They are often physically stolen by street criminals and submitted to receive a credit card in your name at their address. The FCRA also provides you the right to opt-out, which prevents consumer credit reporting companies from providing your credit file information to businesses. Through the website optoutprescreen.com, you may request to opt-out from receiving such offers for five years. If you want to opt-out permanently, you can print a form that you must send through postal mail. If you choose to opt-out, you will no longer be included in offer lists provided by consumer credit reporting companies. The process is easy.

Online Removals

In the unfortunate scenario where you locate accurate personal information on a website, such as your name and home address, do not panic. I maintain a continuously-updated workbook of data removal (opt-out) options on my website at **https://inteltechniques.com/EP**. You will find updated digital versions of the entire workbook there and a static offline copy within the next several pages. These present hundreds of invasive websites and the options for requesting removal of exposed information. The removal process of your information is usually easy, with a few exceptions. Most services will offer you a website to request removal of your details. These direct links are often hidden within fine print or rarely visited pages. My goal in this workbook is to take the research out of the removal process and simply tell you where to start. Each removal summary will display several pieces of information about each service that I have identified. The following structure outlines the data which is displayed throughout this content.

Service: The name of the service and website
Removal Link: The direct link for online removal, if available
Contact: Any email addresses that will reach an employee responsible for removal
Notes: Any special instructions

All resources are listed in alphabetical order for easy reference. The data supplied in the email address field could be used for unsuccessful removal attempts. If the official removal process for that service does not meet your needs, I recommend sending an email to the company. I have tried to locate email addresses of employees that appear to be responsible for removal requests. I suggest the following message be sent from the anonymous email address that you created earlier.

I have been unsuccessful in removing my personal information from your website. Per the information provided from your privacy policy, please remove the following from your service.

Full Name (As appears on their service)
Physical Address (As appears on their service)
Telephone Number (ONLY if it appears on their service)
Email Address (ONLY if it appears on their service)

I have found the "Most bang for your buck" removals to be Spokeo, Radaris, Whitepages, Intelius, BeenVerified, Acxiom, Infotracer, LexisNexis, and TruePeopleSearch. Removal from these services will trickle down to many of the smaller sites mentioned on the following pages. I recommend that people start with these first, wait about one week, and then start to tackle the remaining sites.

If a service asks for a photo ID or "selfie", just upload a random image generated at thispersondoesnotexist.com. They usually do not look at the picture because most verification is automated. If you want to see the typical details stored about you at the main data mining services, request your own LexisNexis data report at https://consumer.risk.lexisnexis.com/request.

The following removal options were accurate as of January 2022. Updated content may be available on my website via the free workbook on the Resources tab. These are mostly targeted toward U.S. people, but a few services apply internationally. The following is a collection of the most asked questions (with my answers) from my clients in reference to online data removal.

- **How do I know what data the sites have?** Most sites allow you to search for your own details and see the results. Some demand a fee for this while others refuse to show you anything. My solution is to assume that the data available within other public websites is also stored within the difficult sites.
- **How long will it take?** Some people have completed their data removal in ten hours. Others need a week or two to complete the process. Ultimately, it depends on the amount of data out there.
- **What if I am blocked because of a VPN?** Many people search websites are now blocking VPN connections due to scraping abuse. When I cannot connect to a site from behind my VPN, I delay that removal until I am at a local Wi-Fi connection. I then briefly disable my VPN and complete the process on this public network.
- **What if they do not respond?** When a site refuses to respond to my removal request, I begin repeating the removal demands to their web host and domain registrar. These hosting companies then translate my complaint and I become a nuisance. Typically, a few emails to their host results in removal.
- **Do I have to complete every site?** No. However, this defeats the purpose. If you remove your details from 99% of the websites, I only need that leftover resource to identify your home address.
- **How often should I revisit?** I recommend searching your details every six months.
- **Should I remove my family?** If your household members have online information associated with your true details, I recommend removing them. When I am investigating a person who has removed their details from the internet, I always switch my focus to their family members. This usually results in the data needed.
- **Should I hire a company to do it?** No. Never. There are now dozens of companies using this book as a guide to remove online data for inflated fees. They will never remove everything. At best, they will tackle the easy options. At worst, they will provide a false sense of security while pushing missed websites to the first page of Google results.
- **Will this impact a security clearance?** Typically, no. Government background checks rely on non-public resources, and these types of websites are seldomly used.
- **Is there any point anymore?** This is a great question. Online data removal is a constant game of cat-and-mouse. When you remove your data from ten sites, a new service pops up. It will take constant effort, but is quite satisfying.

Service: 411 - https://411.com
Removal Link: https://www.whitepages.com/suppression-requests
Contact: support@whitepages.com
Notes: Submit the URL of the entry you want to remove. The process will call asking for a PIN to confirm the removal.

Service: 411 Info - https://411.info
Removal Link: https://411.info/manage/
Contact: support@411.info, admin@411.info
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Absolute People Search - https://absolutepeoplesearch.com/
Removal Link: https://absolutepeoplesearch.com/optout
Contact: https://absolutepeoplesearch.com/contact-us
Notes: Complete online removal submission.

Service: Acxiom - https://www.acxiom.com
Removal Link: https://isapps.acxiom.com/optout/optout.aspx
Contact: consumeradvo@acxiom.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Addresses - https://addresses.com
Removal Link: https://www.intelius.com/opt-out/submit/
Contact: support@addresses.com, support@mailer.intelius.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Address Search - https://addresssearch.com
Removal Link: https://addresssearch.com/remove-info.php
Contact: support@addresssearch.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Advanced Background Checks - https://advancedbackgroundchecks.com
Removal Link: https://www.advancedbackgroundchecks.com/removal
Contact: https://www.advancedbackgroundchecks.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Advanced People Search - https://www.advanced-people-search.com/
Removal Link: https://www.advanced-people-search.com/static/view/optout/
Contact: https://www.advanced-people-search.com/static/view/contact/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: All Area Codes - https://www.allareacodes.com/
Removal Link: https://www.allareacodes.com/remove_name.htm
Contact: https://www.allareacodes.com/contact_us.htm
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: All People - https://allpeople.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: webmaster@allpeople.com
Notes: Select profile, click on "Edit List", then choose "Remove Listing".

Service: America Phonebook - http://www.americaphonebook.com
Removal Link: http://www.americaphonebook.com/contact.php
Contact: lookupuk@gmail.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Anywho - https://anywho.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: ypcsupport@yp.com, press@yp.com
Notes: Select profile and choose "Remove Listing".

Service: Ancestry - https://ancestry.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@ancestry.com, customersolutions@ancestry.com
Notes: Send message to both email addresses requesting specific information removal.

Service: Archives - https://archives.com
Removal Link: https://archives.com/optout
Contact: privacy@archives.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Arivify - https://www.arivify.com/
Removal Link: https://www.arivify.com/removal
Contact: hello@arivify.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Arrest Facts - https://arrestfacts.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: https://arrestfacts.com/page/contact
Notes: Click "Information Control" on any record and follow removal instructions.

Service: Azerch - https://www.azerch.com
Removal Link: https://www.azerch.com/Policies/Privacy
Contact: https://www.azerch.com/Contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Background Alert - https://www.backgroundalert.com
Removal Link: https://www.backgroundalert.com/optout/
Contact: customerservice@backgroundalert.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Background Check - https://backgroundcheck.run/
Removal Link: https://backgroundcheck.run/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://backgroundcheck.run/pg/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Background Checkers - https://www.backgroundcheckers.net
Removal Link: https://www.backgroundcheckers.net/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.backgroundcheckers.net/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Been Verified - https://www.beenverified.com
Removal Link: https://www.beenverified.com/faq/opt-out/
Contact: privacy@beenverified.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: BlockShopper - https://blockshopper.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: scarlett@blockshopper.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. Must cite special circumstances and expect resistance.

Service: Buzzfile - https://buzzfile.com
Removal Link: http://www.buzzfile.com/Company/Remove
Contact: info@buzzfile.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Call Revealer - https://cellrevealer.com
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: support@cellrevealer.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process. Click the link to the right of an entry.

Service: Call Truth - https://www.calltruth.com
Removal Link: https://www.calltruth.com/opt_out.php
Contact: https://www.calltruth.com/contact.php
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Caller Smart - https://www.callersmart.com
Removal Link: https://www.callersmart.com/opt-out
Contact: https://www.callersmart.com/contact
Notes: Email submission bypasses account creation requirement.

Service: Callyo - https://callyo.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: callyo.support@motorolasolutions.com
Notes: Email demanding removal of information associated with your number.

Service: Cars Owners - https://carsowners.net
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://carsowners.net/feedback
Notes: Email through the website requesting removal.

Service: Catalog Choice - https://catalogchoice.org
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@catalogchoice.org
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Centeda - https://centeda.com/
Removal Link: https://centeda.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://centeda.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Check People - https://www.checkpeople.com
Removal Link: https://www.checkpeople.com/opt-out
Contact: support@checkpeople.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Check Secrets - https://www.checksecrets.com/
Removal Link: https://www.checksecrets.com/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.checksecrets.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Check Them - https://www.checkthem.com
Removal Link: https://www.checkthem.com/optout/
Contact: support@checkthem.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Checkr - https://checkr.com
Removal Link: https://candidate.checkr.com/privacy/delete
Contact: https://help.checkr.com/hc/en-us/requests/new
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: City-Data - https://www.city-data.com
Removal Link: https://www.city-data.com/privacy-form.php?w=usget
Contact: others@city-data.com, legal@city-data.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: ClickSearch - https://clicksearch.us/
Removal Link: https://clicksearch.us/optout
Contact: https://clicksearch.us/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Clustr Maps - https://clustrmaps.com/p/
Removal Link: https://clustrmaps.com/bl/opt-out
Contact: https://clustrmaps.com/bl/contacts
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Complete Investigation Services - http://www.cisworldwide.com/search
Removal Link: http://www.cisworldwide.com/search/index.php?xpath=lp_optout
Contact: support@cisnationwide.com
Notes: Fax required documents to 888-446-1229.

Service: Confidential Phone Lookup - https://www.confidentialphonelookup.com
Removal Link: Highlight entry and click "Do Not Display"
Contact: https://www.confidentialphonelookup.com/contact/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Contact Out - https://contactout.com
Removal Link: https://contactout.com/optout
Contact: support@contactout.com
Notes: Send email with removal request or complete online request.

Service: Connected Investors - https://connectedinvestors.com
Removal Link: https://connectedinvestors.com/content/do-not-sell
Contact: support@connectedinvestors.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Corporation Wiki - https://www.corporationwiki.com
Removal Link: https://www.corporationwiki.com/profiles/public
Contact: admin@corporationwiki.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Councilon - https://councilon.com/
Removal Link: https://councilon.com/ex/control/privacy
Contact: https://councilon.com/cms/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Cyber Background Checks - https://www.cyberbackgroundchecks.com
Removal Link: https://www.cyberbackgroundchecks.com/removal
Contact: https://www.cyberbackgroundchecks.com/contact
Notes: Send email with removal request or submit online.

Service: Data Axle - https://www.data-axle.com
Removal Link: https://www.data-axle.com/do-not-sell-my-data/
Contact: privacyteam@data-axle.com
Notes: Use removal link and fill out required parts of form.

Service: DataVeria - https://dataveria.com/
Removal Link: https://dataveria.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://dataveria.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: DataChk - https://www.datacheckinc.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://www.datacheckinc.com/contact/
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: DelvePoint - https://www.delvepoint.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: customerservice@delvepoint.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: DexKnows - https://www.dexknows.com/
Removal Link: https://tinyurl.com/dexknowscom
Contact: https://corporate.thryv.com/contact-us/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: DirectMail - https://directmail.com
Removal Link: https://www.directmail.com/mail_preference/
Contact: donotmaillist@directmail.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: DMA Choice - https://dmachoice.org
Removal Link: https://www.ims-dm.com/cgi/dncc.php | https://www.ims-dm.com/cgi/optoutemps.php
Contact: ethics@the-dma.org
Notes: Follow instructions on removal link.

Service: Epsilon-Main - https://epsilon.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: optout@epsilon.com
Notes: Send email with "Removal" as the subject. Include name and address.

Service: Epsilon-Abacus - https://epsilon.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: abacusoptout@epsilon.com
Notes: Send email with "Removal" as the subject. Include name and address.

Service: Epsilon-CFD - https://epsilon.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: dataoptout1@epsilon.com
Notes: Send email with "Removal" as the subject. Include name and address.

Service: Epsilon-Shopper - https://epsilon.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: contactus@shoppers-voice.com
Notes: Send email with "Removal" as the subject. Include name and address.

Service: Fama - https://fama.io/
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacy@fama.io
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: FamilySearch - https://www.familysearch.org
Removal Link: None
Contact: DataPrivacyOfficer@ldschurch.org
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Family Tree Now - https://familytreenow.com
Removal Link: https://www.familytreenow.com/optout
Contact: https://www.familytreenow.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Fast People Search - https://fastpeoplesearch.com
Removal Link: https://www.fastpeoplesearch.com/removal
Contact: https://www.fastpeoplesearch.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Fax VIN - https://www.faxvin.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://www.faxvin.com/company/contact
Notes: Email through website to request removal.

Service: Find People Search - https://findpeoplesearch.com
Removal Link: https://findpeoplesearch.com/customerservice/
Contact: support@ findpeoplesearch.com
Notes: Email submission will complete the process.

Service: Free Background Checks - https://freebackgroundcheck.us
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacy@infopay.com
Notes: Email submission will complete the process.

Service: Free People Directory - https://www.freepeopledirectory.com
Removal Link: https://www.freepeopledirectory.com/optout
Contact: https://www.freepeopledirectory.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process. Uses Spokeo for phone search.

Service: Free Phone Tracer - https://www.freephonetracer.com/
Removal Link: https://www.beenverified.com/app/optout/search
Contact: privacy@ freephonetracer.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Free Public Profile - https://www.freepublicprofile.com/
Removal Link: https://www.freepublicprofile.com/Removal
Contact: https://www.freepublicprofile.com/ContactNotes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: FindRec - https://findrec.com/
Removal Link: https://findrec.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://findrec.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Glad I Know - https://gladiknow.com/
Removal Link: https://gladiknow.com/opt-out
Contact: support@gladiknow.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: GoLookup - https://golookup.com/
Removal Link: https://golookup.com/support/optout
Contact: support@golookup.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Grey Pages - https://www.grey-pages.com
Removal Link: https://www.grey-pages.com/removal
Contact: https://www.grey-pages.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Haines & Company - https://www.haines.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: criscros@haines.com, info@haines.com, custserv@haines.com
Notes: Send email with name and address and request to be removed from all databases.

Service: Hometry - https://homemetry.com/
Removal Link: https://homemetry.com/control/privacy
Contact: https://homemetry.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: HPCC-USA - https://www.hpcc-usa.org/
Removal Link: https://www.hpcc-usa.org/research/change-listing.html
Contact: https://www.hpcc-usa.org/research/contact-us.html
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: ID Crawl - https://www.idcrawl.com
Removal Link: https://www.idcrawl.com/opt-out
Contact: support@idcrawl.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: ID True - https://www.idtrue.com
Removal Link: https://www.idtrue.com/optout/
Contact: support@idtrue.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Infopay - https://www.infopay.com/
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacy@infopay.com
Notes: Submit request to email contact.

Service: Infospace - https://infospace.com
Removal Link: https://infospace.intelius.com/optout.php
Contact: support@infospace.com, info@infospace.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Infotracer - https://infotracer.com
Removal Link: https://infotracer.com/optout
Contact: https://infotracer.com/help/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process. Alternative site: https://members.infotracer.com/removeMyData

Service: Infotracer UK - https://uk.infotracer.com/
Removal Link: https://infotracer.com/optout/
Contact: https://infotracer.com/help/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process, must email for UK entries.

Service: Instant Check Mate - https://instantcheckmate.com
Removal Link: https://instantcheckmate.com/optout
Contact: privacy@instantcheckmate.com, support@instantcheckmate.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: InstantPeopleFinder - https://www.instantpeoplefinder.com/
Removal Link: https://www.intelius.com/opt-out
Contact: support@instantpeoplefinder.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Intelius - https://intelius.com
Removal Link: https://www.intelius.com/opt-out
Contact: privacy@intelius.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: IntelligenceX - https://intelx.io/
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://intelx.io/abuse
Notes: Online contact option will complete the process.

Service: IRBSearch - https://irbsearch.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: customercare@irbsearch.com
Notes: Email request required.

Service: Kiwi Searches - https://kiwisearches.com
Removal Link: https://kiwisearches.com/optout
Contact: support@kiwisearches.com
Notes: Email request required.

Service: LexisNexis/Accurint - https://lexisnexis.com
Removal Link: https://optout.lexisnexis.com
Contact: privacy.information.mgr@lexisnexis.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process. You can upload digital documents.

Service: LexisNexis Direct Marketing - https://www.lexisnexis.com
Removal Link: https://www.lexisnexis.com/privacy/directmarketingopt-out.aspx
Contact: privacy.information.mgr@lexisnexis.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Locate Family - https://www.locatefamily.com
Removal Link: https://www.locatefamily.com/removal2.html
Contact: https://www.locatefamily.com/contact.html
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Locate People - https://www.locatepeople.org
Removal Link: https://www.locatepeople.org/optout
Contact: https://www.locatepeople.org/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: MashPanel - https://www.mashpanel.com/
Removal Link: https://www.mashpanel.com/remove.php
Contact: https://www.mashpanel.com/contact-us
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Mastercard - https://www.mastercard.us/
www.mastercard.us/en-us/vision/corp-responsibility/commitment-to-privacy/privacy/data-analytics-opt-out.html
www.mastercard.us/en-us/vision/corp-responsibility/commitment-to-privacy/privacy/email-opt-out.html
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Melissa Data - https://melissadata.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: paul.nelson@melissa.com or brett.mcwhorter@melissa.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: MugshotLook - https://www.mugshotlook.com/name/landing
Removal Link: https://www.mugshotlook.com/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.mugshotlook.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: MyHeritage - http://myheritage.com
Removal Link: https://faq.myheritage.com/en/article/how-do-i-delete-my-account-on-myheritage
Contact: support@myheritage.com
Notes: Send email with removal request(s).

Service: MyLife - https://www.mylife.com
Removal Link: https://www.mylife.com/ccpa/index.pubview
Contact: privacy@mylife.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. CA residents can use the opt-out link.

Service: National Cellular Directory - https://www.nationalcellulardirectory.com/
Removal Link: https://www.nationalcellulardirectory.com/optout/
Contact: support@nationalcellulardirectory.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Neighbor Report - https://neighbor.report
Removal Link: https://neighbor.report/remove
Contact: help@neighbor.report
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: NewEnglandFacts - https://newenglandfacts.com/
Removal Link: https://newenglandfacts.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://newenglandfacts.com/pg/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Number Guru - https://www.numberguru.com/
Removal Link: https://www.beenverified.com/app/optout/search
Contact: support@numberguru.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Numberville - https://numberville.com
Removal Link: https://numberville.com/opt-out.html
Contact: https://numberville.com/contact.html
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Nuwber - https://www.nuwber.com
Removal Link: https://nuwber.com/removal/link
Contact: support@nuwber.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Official USA - https://www.officialusa.com/p/a/
Removal Link: https://www.officialusa.com/opt-out
Contact: support@officialusa.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: OK Caller - https://www.okcaller.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: support@OkCaller.com
Notes: Within results, click any option to "Opt-out or "Unlist".

Service: Old Friends - https://old-friends.co/
Removal Link: https://old-friends.co/
Contact: support@old-friends.co
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Old Phone Book - http://www.oldphonebook.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: lookupuk@gmail.com
Notes: Click the removal link below any results.

Service: Open Corporates - https://opencorporates.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: data.protection@opencorporates.com
Notes: Send removal request with public details via email.

Service: Ownerly - https://www.ownerly.com/
Removal Link: https://www.beenverified.com/app/optout/search
Contact: https://www.ownerly.com/contact-us/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: PCCare99 - https://pccare99.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: panchamithracreators@gmail.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: PeekYou - https://peekyou.com
Removal Link: https://www.peekyou.com/about/contact/optout/
Contact: support@peekyou.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Peep Lookup - https://www.peeplookup.com
Removal Link: https://www.peeplookup.com/opt_out
Contact: hello@peeplookup.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: PeopleBackgroundCheck - https://people-background-check.com/
Removal Link: https://people-background-check.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://people-background-check.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People By Name - https://www.peoplebyname.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplebyname.com/remove.php
Contact: support@peoplebyname.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People By Phone - https://www.peoplebyphone.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplebyphone.com/remove-my-number/
Contact: support@peoplebyphone.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Data Labs - https://www.peopledatalabs.com/
Removal Link: https://www.peopledatalabs.com/opt-out-form
Contact: privacy@peopledatalabs.com/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Finder - https://peoplefinder.com
Removal Link: https://peoplefinder.com/optout.php
Contact: support@peoplefinder.com, info@peoplefinder.com
Notes: Intelius online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Finders - https://peoplefinders.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplefinders.com/opt-out#IT
Contact: support@peoplefinders.com
Notes Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Looker - https://peoplelooker.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplelooker.com/f/optout/search
Contact: west.privacypolicy@thomson.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People-Search - https://www.people-search.org
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: info@people-search.org
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Search 123 - https://www.peoplesearch123.com/
Removal Link: https://www.peoplesearch123.com/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.peoplesearch123.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Search Expert - https://www.peoplesearchexpert.com
Removal Link: Appears on result page
Contact: support@ peoplesearchexpert.com, info@ peoplesearchexpert.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Search Now - https://peoplesearchnow.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplesearchnow.com/opt-out
Contact: support@peoplesearchnow.com, info@peoplesearchnow.com
Notes: Complete form and mail to listed address.

Service: People Search Site - https://www.peoplesearchsite.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: info@peoplesearchsite.com
Notes: Click the opt-out link (bottom right of profile), and follow instructions.

Service: People Searcher - https://www.peoplesearcher.com/
Removal Link: https://www.peoplesearcher.com/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.peoplesearcher.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Smart - https://peoplesmart.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplesmart.com/app/optout/search
Contact: privacy@peoplesmart.com
Notes: Been Verified online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Trace UK - https://www.peopletraceuk.com
Removal Link: https://www.peopletraceuk.com/RequestRecordRemoval.asp
Contact: support@peopletraceuk.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People's Check - https://www.peoplescheck.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplescheck.com/optout/
Contact: support@peoplescheck.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: People Whiz - https://www.peoplewhiz.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplewhiz.com/remove-my-info
Contact: info@PeopleWhiz.com
Notes: Online removal tool plus email confirmation will complete the process.

Service: Persopo - https://www.persopo.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@persopo.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: Phone Number Data - http://www.phonenumberdata.net/
Removal Link: None
Contact: phonenumberdata@live.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Phone Owner - https://phoneowner.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: customer-service@phoneowner.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: Phonebooks - https://www.phonebooks.com
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: help@phonebooks.com
Notes: Find the "Request That This Person Be Removed" link in the bottom right corner of the page.

Service: Phonebook BT - https://www.thephonebook.bt.com/person/
Removal Link: https://www.productsandservices.bt.com/consumer/edw/privacypolicy/copyform/bt/#/
Contact: https://www.thephonebook.bt.com/HelpAndSupport/HelpAndSupport/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Pipl - https://pipl.com
Removal Link: https://pipl.com/personal-information-removal-request
Contact: support@pipl.com, mail@pipl.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Plaid - https://plaid.com
Removal Link: https://plaid.com/legal/data-protection-request-form/
Contact: privacy@plaid.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Private Records - https://www.privaterecords.net
Removal Link: https://www.privaterecords.net/optOut/name/landing
Contact: https://www.privaterecords.net/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Pro People Search - https://propeoplesearch.com/
Removal Link: https://propeoplesearch.com/optout
Contact: https://propeoplesearch.com/contact-us
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Property Shark - https://www.propertyshark.com/
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@propertyshark.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Private Eye - https://www.privateeye.com/
Removal Link: https://www.privateeye.com/static/view/contact/
Contact: support@peoplefinders.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Pub360 - https://pub360.com/
Removal Link: https://pub360.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://pub360.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Data Digger - https://publicdatadigger.com/
Removal Link: https://publicdatadigger.com/removeprofile
Contact: support@ publicdatadigger.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Data USA - https://publicdatausa.com
Removal Link: https://publicdatausa.com/optout.php
Contact: https://publicdatausa.com/contact.php
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Info Services - https://www.publicinfoservices.com/
Removal Link: https://www.publicinfoservices.com/help-center/remove-my-public-record
Contact: support@publicinfoservices.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Mail Records - https://publicemailrecords.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: publicemailrecords@gmail.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: Public Records - https://publicrecords.directory
Removal Link: https://publicrecords.directory/contact.php
Contact: support@publicrecords.directory
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: Public Records Now - https://www.publicrecordsnow.com/
Removal Link: https://www.publicrecordsnow.com/static/view/optout/
Contact: https://www.publicrecordsnow.com/static/view/contact/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Records Search - https://www.publicrecords.com/
Removal Link: See Intelius
Contact: See Intelius
Notes: Intelius online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Public Seek - https://publicseek.com/
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacy@publicseek.com & support@publicseek.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Publishers Clearing House - https://pch.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacychoices@pchmail.com
Notes: Send email with name and address and request to be removed from all databases.

Service: Quick People Trace - https://www.quickpeopletrace.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplefinders.com/opt-out#IT
Contact: clients@quickpeopletrace.com
Notes: Send email with name and address and request to be removed from all databases.

Service: Radaris - https://radaris.com
Removal Link: https://radaris.com/control/privacy
Contact: support@radaris.com, info@radaris.com
Notes: Select your profile and submit to removal URL.

Service: Rehold - https://rehold.com
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact customer-support@rehold.com & https://rehold.com/page/contact
Notes: Click "Information Control" on right side of page and follow directions.

Service: RetailMeNot/Redplum - https://www.retailmenot.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://help.retailmenot.com/s/contactsupport
Notes: Request removal of information through the contact support page.

Service: Reveal Name - https://www.revealname.com
Removal Link: https://www.revealname.com/opt_out
Contact: support@revealname.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process, must know full URL.

Service: Reveal Phone Owner - https://www.revealphoneowner.com
Removal Link: https://www.revealphoneowner.com/data-removal
Contact: support@revealphoneowner.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Reverse Phone Lookup - https://www. reversephonelookup.com
Removal Link: See Intelius
Contact: See Intelius
Notes: Intelius online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Sales Spider - https://salespider.com
Removal Link: http://salespidermedia.com/opt-out-and-information-removal.php
Contact: support@salespider.com
Notes: Locate profile and select "Delete this profile".

Service: Search Bug - https://www.searchbug.com/
Removal Link: https://www.searchbug.com/peoplefinder/how-to-remove.aspx
Contact: support@searchbug.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Search People Free - https://www.searchpeoplefree.com
Removal Link: https://www.searchpeoplefree.com/opt-out
Contact: https://www.searchpeoplefree.com/contact-us
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Selfie Systems - https://wwv.selfie.systems
Removal Link: https://www.spokeo.com/optout
Contact: support@spokeo.com, customercare@spokeo.com
Notes: Spokeo online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Smart Background Checks - https://www.smartbackgroundchecks.com
Removal Link: https://www.smartbackgroundchecks.com/optout
Contact: https://www.smartbackgroundchecks.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Social Catfish - https://socialcatfish.com
Removal Link: https://socialcatfish.com/opt-out/
Contact: welcome@socialcatfish.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Spy Dialer - https://www.spydialer.com
Removal Link: https://www.spydialer.com/optout.aspx
Contact: support@spydialer.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Spokeo - https://spokeo.com
Removal Link: https://www.spokeo.com/optout
Contact: support@spokeo.com, customercare@spokeo.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: SpyFly - https://www.spyfly.com
Removal Link: https://www.spyfly.com/help-center/remove-info
Contact: support@spyfly.com
Notes: Sens email requesting removal.

Service: Spytox - https://www.spytox.com
Removal Link: https://www.spytox.com/opt_out
Contact: hello@spytox.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: State Records - https://staterecords.org/
Removal Link: https://infotracer.com/optout/
Contact: support@staterecords.org
Notes: Online removal tool for InfoTracer will complete the process.

Service: Super Pages - https://www.superpages.com/
Removal Link: https://tinyurl.com/dexknowscom
Contact: https://corporate.thryv.com/contact-us/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Sync Me - https://sync.me
Removal Link: https://sync.me/optout/
Contact: ken@sync.me
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Telephone Directories - https://www.telephonedirectories.us/
Removal Link: https://www.telephonedirectories.us/Edit_Records
Contact: https://www.telephonedirectories.us/Contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Tenn Help - https://www.tennhelp.com
Removal Link: https://www.tennhelp.com/public-resources/change-listing.html
Contact: https://www.tennhelp.com/public-resources/contact-us.html
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: That's Them - https://thatsthem.com
Removal Link: https://thatsthem.com/optout
Contact: https://thatsthem.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: The Real Yellow Pages - https://www.therealyellowpages.com/
Removal Link: https://tinyurl.com/dexknowscom
Contact: https://corporate.thryv.com/contact-us/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Thomson Reuters/Westlaw/CLEAR - https://www.thomsonreuters.com/
Removal Link: https://tinyurl.com/dexknowscom
Contact: privacy.issues@thomsonreuters.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: TLO - https://tlo.com
Removal Link: https://service.transunion.com/dss/ccpa_optout.page
Contact: CustomerSupport@TLO.com, TLOxp@transunion.com
Notes: Send demand via email and website to remove all records. Expect resistance.

Service: Tower Data - https://www.towerdata.com
Removal Link: https://dashboard.towerdata.com/optout/
Contact: privacy@towerdata.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: True Caller - https://www.truecaller.com
Removal Link: https://www.truecaller.com/unlisting
Contact: support@truecaller.com, info@truecaller.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: True People Search - https://www.truepeoplesearch.com
Removal Link: https://www.truepeoplesearch.com/removal
Contact: https://www.truepeoplesearch.com/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: True People Search.net - https://www.truepeoplesearch.net
Removal Link: https://truepeoplesearch.net/remove-my-info
Contact: support@truepeoplesearch.net
Notes: Email request required.

Service: Trustifo - https://trustifo.com/
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: satisfaction@trustifo.com
Notes: Click "Control Profile" within result.

Service: Truth Finder - https://www.truthfinder.com
Removal Link: https://www.truthfinder.com/opt-out/
Contact: support@truthfinder.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: UFind - https://ufind.name
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@ufind.name
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: United States Phonebook - http://www.unitedstatesphonebook.com/
Removal Link: http://www.unitedstatesphonebook.com/contact.php
Contact: paulmfield@gmail.com / lookupuk@gmail.com
Notes: Send email with removal request. Removes data from several subsidiaries.

Service: Unmask - https://unmask.com
Removal Link: https://unmask.com/opt-out
Contact: https://unmask.com/contact/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: USA People Data - http://www.usapeopledata.com
Removal Link: Embedded
Contact: lookupuk@gmail.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process after a search.

Service: USA People Search - https://www.usa-people-search.com
Removal Link: https://www.usa-people-search.com/manage/
Contact: https://www.usa-people-search.com/contact.aspx
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: US Phone Pro - https://www.usphonepro.com
Removal Link: https://www.usphonepro.com/opt_out
Contact: hello@USPhonePro.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: US Phonebook - https://www.usphonebook.com
Removal Link: https://www.usphonebook.com/opt-out
Contact: support@usphonebook.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: USA Trace - https://www.usatrace.com
Removal Link: https://www.peoplefinders.com/opt-out#IT
Contact: research@usatrace.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: US Search - https://www.ussearch.com
Removal Link: https://www.ussearch.com/opt-out/submit/
Contact: support@ussearch.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Valassis - https://valassis.com/
Removal Link: https://valassis.com/do-not-sell-my-personal-information/
Contact: privacyrequests@valassis.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Valid Number - https://validnumber.com/
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://validnumber.com/doc/contact/
Notes: Send removal request through contact page.

Service: Valpak/Cox - https://valpak.com
Removal Link: https://www.valpak.com/coupons/show/mailinglistsuppression
Contact: info@skulocal.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Vehicle History - https://www.vehiclehistory.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: support@vehiclehistory.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Verecor - https://verecor.com/
Removal Link: https://findrec.com/page/privacy
Contact: https://findrec.com/page/privacy
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Vericora - https://vericora.com/
Removal Link: https://vericora.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://vericora.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Veriforia - https://veriforia.com/
Removal Link: https://veriforia.com/ng/control/privacy
Contact: https://veriforia.com/page/contact
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Veripages - https://veripages.com
Removal Link: https://veripages.com/page/contact
Contact: support@veripages.com, removal@veripages.com
Notes: Send email with removal request or click "Control Profile" which will enable an opt-out.

Service: Verispy - https://www.verispy.com/
Removal Link: https://www.dataaccessmanagement.com/verispy/
Contact: support@verispy.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Veritora - https://veritora.com/
Removal Link: https://federal-data.com/control/profile?url=
Contact: https://federal-data.com/page/contact
Notes: Paste your original url from veritora.com following the = sign in the removal link.

Service: Visa - http://visa.com/
Removal Link: https://marketingreportoptout.visa.com/OPTOUT/request.do
Contact: None
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Voter Records - https://voterrecords.com/
Removal Link: https://voterrecords.com/faq
Contact: https://voterrecords.com/contact
Notes: Follow directions in the FAQ above.

Service: White Pages - https://whitepages.com
Removal Link: http://www.whitepages.com/suppression_requests
Contact: support@whitepages.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Whooster - https://www.whooster.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: privacy@whooster.com
Notes: Send email with removal request.

Service: Whoseno - https://www.whoseno.com/
Removal Link: None
Contact: https://www.whoseno.com/
Notes: Send email through website with removal request details.

Service: WYTY - wyty.com
Removal Link: https://www.wyty.com/remove/
Contact: privacy@wyty.com
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: XLEK - https://www.xlek.com/
Removal Link: https://www.xlek.com/optout.php
Contact: https://xlek.com/contact.php
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Yasni - https://yasni.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: info@yasni.com, support@yasni.com
Notes: No removal option, but will identify sources of data. Will refresh occasionally.

Service: Yellow Book - https://www.yellowbook.com
Removal Link: https://www.beenverified.com/app/optout/search
Contact: https://www.beenverified.com/contact/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Yellow Pages - https://www.yellowpages.com/
Removal Link: https://tinyurl.com/dexknowscom
Contact: https://corporate.thryv.com/contact-us/
Notes: Online removal tool will complete the process.

Service: Zabasearch - https://zabasearch.com
Removal Link: None
Contact: info@zabasearch.com, response@zabasearch.com
Notes: Send your custom opt-out request form via fax to 425-974-6194.

Service: ZoomInfo - https://zoominfo.com
Removal Link: https://www.zoominfo.com/about-zoominfo/privacy-manage-profile
Contact: privacy@zoominfo.com, support@zoominfo.com
Notes: Click "Is this you?" in your profile. Signup and delete desired details.

Reserved for your own additions:

Service:
Removal Link:
Contact:
Notes:

Service:
Removal Link:
Contact:
Notes:

Service:
Removal Link:
Contact:
Notes:

Service:
Removal Link:
Contact:
Notes:

Service:
Removal Link:
Contact:
Notes:

There is a level of personal data acquisition which I find much more invasive than the people search websites previously mentioned. Companies such as **Clearview** (clearview.ai) collect images of people's faces from public websites, social networks, uploaded documents, and government records. They then analyze those images and upload all facial recognition data into their servers. They claim to possess the "world's largest facial network". This allows them to analyze future images, surveillance video, and practically any other visual representation of us to identify the people within the media. Did you post images of yourself online and then later participate in a protest? Clearview can identify you within the surveillance videos and images uploaded by the media. Did you upload an unredacted copy of your driver's license to any of Clearview's data partners? Clearview may have used that image as a great identifier for future collected images of you. This can be quite upsetting.

Clearview is used by both law enforcement and the private sector. This can be even more concerning. I respect the ability to solve a homicide with Clearview's assistance when only a surveillance video exists. I also understand that the science is not perfect and mistakes are made. Consider the events associated with Nijeer Parks. In 2019, he was arrested and accused of shoplifting and assaulting an officer with a car in Woodbridge, New Jersey. The police had identified him using facial recognition software, even though he was later confirmed to have been 30 miles away at the time of the incident sending money at a Western Union business. He spent 10 days in jail and paid $5,000 to defend himself. In November 2019, the case was dismissed. Could that happen to you?

If you have ever had any photos online, you are probably in the Clearview system. They can likely determine your name, address, and contact information from your facial recognition data. Any new photos or videos of you could be matched against their system to discover your identity. What should you do about this? That is difficult to answer.

Clearview does possess an opt-out system which allows residents of California (thanks to CCPA which is explained later) to remove any data stored about them based on their likeness. However, they do not appear to confirm your status as a California resident. I am not encouraging you to lie to this private company which profits millions of dollars annually for the collection and usage of your likeness, I am only stating the facts. Since Clearview claims to only store images and facial recognition data, without directly storing names or other details in their database, they have no way to publicly acknowledge your state of residence. The following website allows anyone to remove their data from Clearview.

https://clearviewai.typeform.com/to/yc4rX9

However, there is a catch. In order for them to identify the data associated with your likeness, they demand an image of your face. You must upload a clear headshot within their opt-out portal, which makes me uncomfortable. We know they make their money selling data about our images, why would we upload new information for them to use? This will be a personal choice you will need to make. It was easy for me. I do not post images online and I never send unredacted scans of my ID. While they could possess visual representation of me from video surveillance or my distant past, I find this unlikely. Since I believe they do not possess enough data about me to construct a profile based on my likeness, I have not submitted a removal request. However, you might feel differently.

If you have had a long history of public photos on the internet, you might want them to remove the data they possess. You could upload your image and have little to lose. While they could use that upload maliciously, I doubt they do. That could invite new unwanted attention and lawsuits. It all comes down to your trust of the company and the level of damage which could be done with the new data. Consider the benefits versus the risk.

Third-Party Removal and Reporting Services

In 2021, I began noticing the use of third-party data removal companies. When a website is required to offer a way to remove or request your personal information, a third-party service might be used to eliminate the burden. The most prolific is OneTrust. Their website does not offer any search functionality, but we can find what we need with Google. Consider the following search queries.

site:privacyportal.onetrust.com intitle:"privacy web form"

This search presents over 1200 data removal portals for various companies.

site:privacyportal.onetrust.com intitle:"privacy web form" thomson reuters

This search presents one result, which is the data removal option for Thomson Reuters.

site:privacyportal.onetrust.com intitle:"privacy web form" "marriott"

This search presents one result, which is the data removal option for Marriott.

site:privacyportal.onetrust.com intitle:"privacy web form" "onetrust privacy webform"

This search presents one result, which is the data request option for the OneTrust website itself. If you cannot locate a removal page for a specific company, remember these examples.

Search Engine Re-Indexing

Anytime you remove information from the internet, whether it is from people search websites or the methods explained later in this chapter, you should submit the target websites for re-indexing through the major search engines. Otherwise, sensitive data might still be included within a search result for your name, even though the content has been removed from the source website. As I write this, a client has asked me to remove her home address displayed on a website. I was successful. However, a Google search of her name links to this site and displays her home address within the summary below the result. I need Google to re-index the website in order to remove the entry from this search.

- Sign in to any Google account.
- Navigate to https://search.google.com/search-console/remove-outdated-content.
- Click "New Request".
- Enter the exact URL of the target page.
- When prompted, enter a word that appears in the old version but is no longer live.
- Submit the request.

In my scenario, I entered the street name which was present before removal. Google confirmed that their search index had indexed this word on that URL and that the word was no longer present. After 24 hours, a search for my client's name no longer presented this result. We can replicate this process with Bing.

- Sign in to any Microsoft or Google account.
- Navigate to https://www.bing.com/webmasters/tools/contentremoval.
- Enter the exact URL of the target page.
- Select "Remove outdated cache".
- Submit the request.

Data Removal Shaming

In 2019, I began seeing more people search websites shaming those who have requested removal from their service. Consider the "Removal Error" page located at https://www.locatefamily.com/removal-errors.html. It publicly displays every person who requested removal while using a disposable or temporary email address. Not only did Locate Family refuse to remove the profiles, they announced to the world anyone who tried to protect their privacy by using a masked email provider. This is deliberately malicious and an attempt to shame anyone craving privacy. We must always be cautious of these abuses. If a site refuses to remove profiles because a masked email was used, we may need to assign a ProtonMail account for this purpose.

Social Media Background Services

In 2020, I began seeing more companies providing a service to report "inappropriate" workplace behavior as an employee screening strategy. If you are about to hire a person at your business, these companies will provide a complete report of online activity from the potential employee. This includes any social network posts which contain profanity or threats of violence. Unfortunately, these systems also collect posts with no inappropriate content. This is especially true with posts containing humor and sarcasm taken out of context.

One of the offenders in this game is FAMA (fama.io). It appears that they collect any publicly available social network content which displays "toxic behavior" and stores it indefinitely. When a potential employer requests this service and provides any identifiers about the employee, FAMA conducts a query and provides any content gathered about the individual. This usually includes posts which the employee "liked" which happen to contain a curse word. This seems quite excessive to me. If you identify any of these services in use by your potential employer, you might consider removing your data before the background check. Below are a few options for the most popular services.

- **FAMA**: Send an email to privacy@fama.io and specifically demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **Social Intelligence**: Send an email to info@socialintel.com or call 888-748-3281 and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **JDP**: Send an email to clientservices@jdp.com or call 877-745-8525 and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **Good Egg**: Send an email to privacy@goodegg.io and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **Ferretly**: Send an email to info@ferretly.com and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **Critical Research**: Send an email to privacy@criticalresearch.com and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **A Good Employee**: Send an email to customerservice@agoodemployee.com and demand removal of any data stored in reference to your social network account(s).
- **Background Profiles**: Complete the online contact form, demanding removal of any personal data stored, at backgroundprofiles.com/contact-us/.

If any of these companies refuse to honor your removal request, consider an additional attempt citing the California Consumer Privacy Act, as explained soon.

Mailing List Removal

If you have removed yourself from all of the people search websites and forwarded all of your personal mail to a CMRA or PMB box, you are still likely to receive some junk mail in your true name at your home. This can be frustrating and is a sign that your personal information will continue to populate online websites. I encourage you to eliminate all mail in your name, even if it is meaningless advertising. I offer a few thoughts when a company refuses to remove you from their database.

Demanding absolute removal typically fails. Companies do not want to lose potential future business. Therefore, I find a request for change of address works better. I call the company and tell them that I just moved and no longer receive updates about their products. I advise that I want to update my address in their database. I then provide my true home address which is still receiving the mail and claim that I have moved. I provide a street address of a real apartment complex, but an apartment number which does not exist.

If this method fails, I claim death. I send an email similar to the following.

"I'd like to cancel a subscription to your catalog. The original subscriber was my mother and she has recently passed. The catalogues are upsetting my father."

Most companies will cancel the mailings immediately, and often apologize for the inconvenience. Some readers may scoff at my strategy. Please remember that I only recommend this after polite requests to be removed are ignored by the company.

We also have the option of DMAChoice's Deceased Do Not Contact List (DDNC). The contact information for "deceased" individuals can be entered into their mail, telephone and email preference services and offered as a stand-alone file so that marketers can suppress them from marketing lists. Any provided details will be flagged so marketers will be able to remove those specific names from their prospect marketing lists. The form is available at the following location and further details about the services of DMAChoice can be found within the second address.

https://www.ims-dm.com/cgi/ddnc.php
https://www.dmachoice.org/

Finally, Direct Mail offers a "National Do Not Mail List", but I have yet to witness any effectiveness. More details can be found at the following address.

https://www.directmail.com/mail_preference/

California Consumer Privacy Act

In 2020, the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) became effective, which is a state statute intended to enhance privacy rights and consumer protection for residents of California. However, residents of other states may also benefit from this law. First, let's summarize the basic characteristics of the CCPA. Overall, it grants California residents the following three basic rights in association to their relationships with businesses.

- KNOW what personal information companies possess about you.
- DELETE your information if desired.
- DEMAND companies not to sell your information.

This may sound powerful, and it is, but there are always caveats. First, you must be a California resident in order to be eligible for protections from this law. However, many companies with a strong California presence, such as Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and others are applying the protections to all customers regardless of location. Next, there are exemptions which companies can use to refuse your requests, including the following.

- The data is necessary to complete transactions.
- The data is necessary to comply with legal obligations.
- The data is necessary to protect security and functionality.
- The data is necessary to protect free speech.
- The data is necessary to complete scientific research.
- The data is necessary to complete internal uses.

It would not take much effort for a company to apply one of these exemptions to your request. However, it is always worth trying. In early 2020, I encountered a website which refused to remove sensitive personal information from their publicly available online service. I sent the following request to the email address on their website.

Pursuant to the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), I demand that my personal information be removed from your website. Furthermore, per Part 4 of Division 3 of the California Civil Code (AB-375), I demand a waiver of any payment for this demand. My current California address is as follows.

Michael Bazzell
GENERAL DELIVERY
Los Angeles, CA 90001-9999

The company did not respond, but my information was removed the next day. They could have likely claimed an exemption, but it is less effort to simply remove content. It is also not worth the risk of violating the CCPA, as each violation carries a $2,500 - $7,500 penalty. This only applies when the company generates more than $25 million per year in revenue; collects information on more than 50,000 consumers each year; or derives more than 50 percent of its annual revenue from data. This should be applicable to most services which possess threats to our privacy.

I highly doubt the company displaying my details sent anything to the address I provided, but it is legal for me to use it. This address is the General Delivery option for Los Angeles, and any mailings will be forwarded to the post office located at 7101 South Central in Los Angeles. I would need to respond to that location with ID in order to pick up any general delivery mail. This should never be used whenever a package will be sent. I only use it as a temporary California address. I feel this is acceptable, as the official USPS website states "General Delivery is a mail service for those without a permanent address, often used as a temporary mailing address". Since my home is in the name of a trust, of which I am not the trustee, I believe I technically do not possess a "permanent mailing address". My PMB and UPS box would go away if I failed to renew either, so I view those as "temporary". I am probably unnecessarily splitting hairs here, but I like to have a clean conscience while executing my strange tactics.

The CCPA defines protected personal information as any data including the following.

Real Name	Account Name	Browsing History
Alias Name	Social Security Number	Search History
Postal Address	Driver's License Number	Geolocation Data
Email Address	Passport Number	Professional Information
Online Identifier	Purchase History	Educational Information
IP Address	Biometric Information	

This provides many opportunities for privacy seekers. Any time you identify a company possessing or selling this type of data about you, you might be able to demand them to stop. Each scenario will be unique, and you should expect resistance. I suspect we will see other states follow in California's footsteps. Ideally, we would see a federal law provide similar protections, but that is likely much more complicated than each state taking charge for their residents.

The United States Census

It may be useless documenting these strategies now, since we experienced a census in 2020. The next tally of every resident in the country will not occur until 2030. However, we should have a conversation in the case that your neighborhood, city, county, or state decides to conduct their own investigation into the population within specific boundaries. A census is defined as the procedure of acquiring and recording information about the members of a given population. In simplest terms, the U.S. Census attempts to identify the primary residence of every resident as of April 1st every ten years.

The Census bureau will tell you that the responses are confidential and secure. The intentions are good, but we know the history of the government failing to protect our data, such as the OPM breach. They will want to know the full name, DOB, gender, and relationship of every person in your household. This may seem harmless, but we must use caution. If the Census bureau were to experience a data leak or breach, this content would be extremely valuable to the people search websites previously mentioned. If you applied the techniques in previous chapters in order to remove any association from your home to your name, you may be hesitant to hand these private details over to the government. Since it is federal law that you accurately complete the census form, there is no option to simply ignore this demand. If you do, expect Census employees to start knocking on your door demanding answers. Our goal is to stay off their radar, and not bring attention to ourselves.

However, you can comply with the Census while maintaining a sense of privacy. When you receive a form requesting the name, gender, and DOB of every resident of the home, I believe you can legally comply by responding similar to the following in the name fields.

Adult Male	Adult Female	Minor Male	Minor Female

This provides the number of occupants, gender, and whether each person is an adult or minor. This gives the Census enough data to continue their tally in order to provide appropriate services, grants, and various government programs to your area. If you do this, there is always a possibility that an employee will be unsatisfied with your answers and may still contact you to seek more information. I encourage you to include a VOIP telephone number on the form. This may encourage the employee to call instead of visiting in person. Most importantly, never lie on these forms or ignore them. This is not an opportunity to provide disinformation. Doing so may result in a fine.

Online Content Removal

Bad things happen. I know people who have spent many months creating their perfect invisible life only to see it jeopardized by one minor mistake. While this will likely never happen to you, it is important to be prepared. This section will provide immediate actions which can be taken to minimize the damage after a mistake or malicious act has caused a data leak. Your scenario will likely fall into one of the following categories.

- A photo or video of you is posted online.
- Your financial information or documents are posted online.
- Your reputation is purposely slandered online.
- Your criminal or traffic charges are posted online.

Personal Photos

If you strive to prevent photos of yourself from appearing online, you are aware of the constant struggle. Family and friends are constantly updating their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram feeds with photo and video proof of every facet of their lives. There are no opt-out policies on these websites. There are no removal request forms. Your only option is a polite request.

At this point, the Bing results page was fairly clean. The first page included legitimate LinkedIn and other social network pages under the control of the victim. However, Google was a different story. The suspect had created a post on a popular revenge pornography web forum where he linked to the previously mentioned video. Technically, this video was not present on the website, only mention of it and a direct link. This forum post was now the number one result when searching my victim's name. This page made several references to her full name and identified her in the inappropriate video. I submitted this page through the same Google reporting page and waited. I was denied the request because the page did not contain any actual pornography. The direct link did not satisfy the requirements of their takedown policy.

I took drastic action that would not be appropriate for all situations. This web forum allows any members to post comments about the videos. I created a new member account anonymously, and submitted a comment on the page in question. In this comment, I embedded an animated image in gif format that displayed a very short (partial) clip of the video in poor quality. This clip looped and repeats while people are reading the comment. It did not actually include nudity, only showing unidentifiable bodies from the target video. I re-submitted my request to Google and the link was removed nine days later, as it now violated their terms of service (even though it was my fault). The rest of the results on the first page of her Google search were legitimate websites that she approved. My work was complete.

DMCA Rights and Failures

I once assisted a client when a website which contained extremely personal and slanderous details about her refused to remove the content. The theme was that she was a cheater and it included false accusations of infidelity. She suspected it was published by her former boyfriend, as it appeared days after their breakup. It was a free WordPress blog hosted on the official WordPress domain. The page contained her full name and several photos of her. My first attempt was a DMCA takedown request, which failed.

DMCA is an acronym for the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. It is a U.S. copyright law. It addresses the rights and obligations of owners of copyrighted material who believe their rights under U.S. copyright law have been infringed, particularly on the internet. DMCA also addresses the rights and obligations of OSP / ISP (Online / Internet Service Providers) on whose servers or networks the infringing material may be found.

My client confirmed that she possessed the original photographs which appeared on the website. Some of them were captured with her own mobile device, and her originals could prove this. In my view, she was the copyright holder of these images. WordPress was violating this since she did not authorize the publication of the photos. WordPress has an easy DMCA submission page at https://en.support.wordpress.com/our-dmca-process/. I followed the steps and issued my complaint. The next day, I received the following message.

"We have reviewed your DMCA notice and the material you claim to be infringing. However, because we believe this to be fair use of the material, we will not be removing it at this time. Please note that Section 107 of the copyright law identifies various purposes for which the reproduction of a particular work may be considered fair, such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. Please note that you may be liable for damages if you knowingly materially misrepresent your copyrights – and we may seek to collect those damages."

Not only did WordPress deny my claim, they threatened to seek damages from my submission. I am sure this is a canned response due to abuse, but I found it a bit inappropriate. My next attack was on the suspect blog itself. The page allowed anonymous comments below the slanderous content. I scribbled a barely legible signature on paper, took a photo with my anonymous mobile device, and uploaded it to the page. It immediately appeared, as the site did not require administrative approval for new posts. I then submitted the page to Google for takedown, as explained in the following page. Per their policies about websites containing signatures, the site was removed from their index within a week. The original page is still present on WordPress, but no one searching for my victim on Google or Bing will find it.

Financial Information

If you find a page in a Google search result that displays personal information about you, such as your social security or credit card number, you can request immediate removal. Google will review the request and remove the information from their search results. This will not remove the information from the website that is displaying it, but it will take the link off Google to make it more difficult to find. Even if Google removes the link from their search results, you should contact the offending website directly and request removal of your information. The following are the three scenarios that will force Google to remove a link to personal information.

- Your Social Security Number is visible on a website.
- Your bank account or credit card number is visible on a website.
- An image of your handwritten signature is visible on a website.

Each of these situations can be reported through the following three specific websites.

- support.google.com/websearch/contact/government_number
- support.google.com/websearch/contact/bank_number
- support.google.com/websearch/contact/image_of_handwritten_signature

Each page will instruct you to complete an online form which requires your name, anonymous email address, the URL of the website that is exposing the information, the URL of a Google results page that displays the information, and the information being exposed. Fortunately, Google offers detailed help on these pages explaining how to obtain the required information.

Bing also offers an automated removal request with an option of "My private information (intimate or sexual imagery, credit card numbers, passwords)". This form can be found at the following website.

https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/concern/bing

In early 2015, I was contacted by an attorney that was attempting to remove some content from the internet. He and a former business partner had developed a nasty relationship after a failed venture. The former partner uploaded numerous sensitive contracts on which he claimed my client had defaulted. He placed them on his personal website and posted malicious comments about my client. Since my client had a very unique name, a Google search revealed this undesired information within the first three results. At first, I assumed that there was nothing I could do about this expression of free speech. The documents were legal.

However, each scanned contract on this website included the signature of my client. I submitted a request to Google for removal of the link to this website. I cited their policy about linking to images of a person's signature. Within five days, the link was gone. While the presence of a signature was not the concern of my client, I used it as leverage to remove the undesired content. Sometimes you may need to look at alternative ways to achieve your desired removal results.

If you want to know whether your signature, social security number, credit card number, or bank account information is visible on a public website, you will need to conduct specific searches. The easiest way is to occasionally conduct a search of your account numbers and view any results. Keep in mind that your searches will only be successful if the exposed data is in the same format of your search. Also, use an anonymous search option such as the website duckduckgo.com. You should conduct several searches of this type of data including spaces, without spaces, and only the last four or eight numbers alone. This also applies to searches for any financial account numbers and social security numbers.

Street View Images

Online mapping services commonly provide a Street View option within populated areas. These images are captured from vehicles attempting to document the entire world. They capture images of anything they encounter and soak up the Wi-Fi names for their location databases. The images could visually display your home, vehicles, children, or any personal items. While most services attempt to blur children's faces and license plates, they are not perfect. Many problems slip through the cracks. Fortunately, most services are willing to blur anything sensitive within these images, including your home. The following explains the process for the three most popular services.

Google (google.com/maps):

- Navigate to Google Maps and browse to your home address.
- Switch to Street View mode by dragging the small yellow human-shaped icon to your home.
- With your house in view, click "Report a problem" in the lower-right corner of the screen.
- Center the red box on your home, and select "My home" in the "Request blurring" field.

Bing (bing.com/maps):

- Navigate to Bing Maps and browse to your home address.
- Switch to Street View mode by changing to "Streetside" in the upper right and clicking your home.
- With your house in view, click "Report a privacy concern" in the lower-left corner of the screen.
- Click your home in the street view image and complete the request form requesting burring.

Apple (satellites.pro):

- Email a detailed summary of your request to MapsImageCollection@apple.com.

Before erasing your street view, consider a few reasons why you may wish to avoid this strategy.

- **Home Sale**: You cannot reverse this process once it is complete. When you sell your home, many people will want to see the street view. Blocking this could prevent a potential home sale. However, it can also prevent permanent exposure within hundreds of real estate sites which display street view data from every home in the country.
- **Unwanted Attention**: If your neighbors notice that you have blurred your house, it could raise suspicion. Why did you do that? Are you famous? What are you hiding? Are you paranoid? The neighbor who has never spoken to you may now become inquisitive every time you are outside your home. This could bring more annoyances than benefits.
- **Neighborhood Service**: I am not recommending this, but you could blur your entire neighborhood in order to eliminate the spotlight on your blurred home. Warning: This may upset your neighbors.

If you would like to see this strategy in action, research the following addresses:

- 670 Lincoln Ave, Winnetka, Illinois (The Home Alone House)
- 10336 Dunleer Dr, Los Angeles, California (The Modern Family House)

You should notice that the street view of both are completely blurred. Understand the benefits and risks of this method before replicating on your own. Note that future street view captures should stay blurred, but you should check your address annually to confirm this.

Libelous Websites

There is a disturbing new trend of websites which allow anonymous users to post any type of slander about an individual or company. These include services such as Ripoff Report and cheating spouse websites. Remember, it is not vital to always remove the CONTENT. It is more important to remove the LINK to the content from search engines. This is how people are likely to find the sites you want removed. I will go to every website and look you up, but I will go to Google and follow any links. Therefore, I target the most likely source viewed by someone. Let's discuss complaint websites such as Ripoff Report as an example.

This website allows users to complain anonymously about any company or person. It requires users to create an account before reports can be submitted, but it does not verify the identity of users. Ripoff Report results usually show up on Google searches for the people or companies mentioned in the report, which can be embarrassing or damaging. According to the site's Terms of Service, users are required to affirm that their reports are truthful and accurate. However, the site says that it neither investigates, confirms, nor corroborates the accuracy of any submissions. In other words, it is an easy way to get revenge against an adversary.

Companies or individuals who have been named in a report may respond with a rebuttal. There is no charge to submit one, but they must have a registered account. The rebuttals are almost never successful in removal of information. Alternatively, to repair the reputation because of something that is written in the website, Ripoff Report asks victims to pay high fees for internal investigations of complaints and responses carried out by Ripoff Report's pool of arbitrators. Another way of phrasing this is "extortion". Again, these investigations almost never result in the desired removal.

How bad can these sites be? On Ripoff Report, I see entries about my clients falsely accusing them of fraud, adultery, theft, and in one instance murder. Anyone can post anything they want without any accountability or fear of prosecution. It is a cesspool of hate. Worse are the "cheating" sites such as shesahomewrecker.com. These sites allow anyone to anonymously report a "cheater", including photos, full names, addresses, and explicit descriptions.

These sites are a popular magnet for people desiring revenge, regardless if the other person has done anything wrong. There are also numerous websites that allow anonymous reporting of people that have a sexually transmitted disease (STD). For obvious reasons, I will not provide a link. Overall, there are many places where people can ruin digital lives quickly. Imagine if a Google search for your name instantly revealed a website announcing you have an STD. Clients call me constantly asking for help with these situations.

The best solution I have to offer is to attack through the legal system. Suing the websites is not likely to work in your favor. Many are hosted overseas, and all will claim protection by the 1996 Communications Decency Act which provides immunity from liability for providers and users of an "interactive computer service" who publish information provided by third-party users. In other words, I can host a website and not be held liable if someone else posts something defamatory.

Instead, I have initiated lawsuits in order to obtain a court order to remove online links to defamatory content. Google and Bing will not respond to my request to remove hateful content. Google may agree with me that the post is inappropriate, but that means nothing. They will only respond to a specific court order. Therefore, the first step is to get a judge to issue the order. However, that first requires a lawsuit. If you do not know the identity of the suspect, it can be difficult to launch a civil case. This is where a "John Doe" or "Fictitious Defendants" lawsuit can be a powerful tool.

Assume that Ripoff Report possesses an anonymous report about you. It clearly displays false defamatory content that has created a "loss" for you. Maybe you applied for a job and did not get it, and you believe it is from the posting. Maybe you have lost business because of the content. You may have significant losses which you can cite in court as damages. You file a fictitious defendant civil lawsuit at your local court due to the defamation and potential damages. This provides you subpoena power. You can now request a subpoena to the

websites that possess the content with hopes of identifying the culprit via IP logs or email addresses. This identification rarely happens, but it places pressure on the sites and their legal teams.

Next, you can petition the court to provide an official court order to remove the content from the internet. The wording of this can vary, and must be precise to your situation. Be sure that the order forces removal of all links to the specified content and any cached copies. The offending sites will ignore this request, but Google will not. Upload the entire court order to Google at the following address.

support.google.com/legal/contact/lr_courtorder?product=websearch

Expect no response at first, and submit the same order once weekly until the links have been removed. Some courts will send the order on your behalf, which usually results in a faster removal. I have seen content removed within 48 hours and up to two weeks later. In most states, your right to file a defamation lawsuit ends a year after the initial publication, including original internet posts. In my experience, a John Doe suit can cost $5,000 to $15,000 in legal fees. Consult with an attorney to determine the relative merits and potential of success for your specific case. It is possible to do all of this yourself, but it is not advised. Any mistake can ruin your chances of an order being signed by a judge.

This court order is often in the form of a Cease and Desist order (not a letter). An order is created by the court, and a letter would be created by you. Cease and Desist letters are almost always ignored, but a court order is not. This universal document can be used in many scenarios, such as copyright infringement, trademark infringement, debt collection, harassment, slander, and libel. These orders vary widely between states, counties, and judges. Because the order is issued by judges presiding over civil cases, you must convince them to issue the order, and to include the desired wording. This is where a well-known local attorney can be very valuable.

Any valid Cease and Desist court order should include descriptions of each false statement, reasoning why the statements are false, and descriptions of how the false statements affect you. You must clearly claim that you have damages from the published content. Without this, there is very little need for a civil suit. I have had clients who have been able to substantiate financial loss, even if minimal, from the undesired content. It will be up to you to determine if you have suffered any loss. The following page contains a fictitious example of a court order demanding Google to cease and desist providing access to libelous content. It is not a template or actual document, and is presented only for understanding of the technique.

I have over-simplified the process of filing a lawsuit and obtaining a court order. This is where a proficient attorney can assist greatly. I never attempt any of this myself. I always hire a local attorney on behalf of my client. I usually seek former prosecutors who understand the system and have direct access to judges.

Assume that you own a carpet cleaning company, and one of your competitors posted on Ripoff Report stating you were a criminal and possessed STDs (this is a common theme with libelous online complaints). The order on the following page would tackle this and demand that Google remove the links to this content.

CEASE AND DESIST ORDER

[The Honorable Judge John Doe]
[City, State, Zip Code]
[Date] - VIA Certified Mail

Google Inc.
Legal Compliance
1600 Amphitheatre Parkway
Mountain View, CA 94043

RE: Cease and Desist – Libel

To Whom It May Concern:

It has come to my attention that your company is currently providing direct access to specific online content contested as libelous to [YOUR NAME]. A direct link to the libelous website is available on your service when searching [YOUR NAME]. The exact address of this content is currently located at https://www.ripoffreport.com/reports/carpet-cleaning-by-psycho. The content on this page states in part:

"[YOUR NAME] is now facing multiple criminal and civil actions including investigation by the IRS and FBI for failure to pay taxes, impersonating a federal agent, making false claims, animal abuse, slander, fraud, stalking and collecting welfare funds while claiming no source of income. He is a pervert and has several STDs."

[YOUR NAME] contests these statements as false during current civil litigation. [YOUR NAME] has no known criminal record and there is no known evidence available to this court substantiating the additional claims made on this site. [YOUR NAME] claims economic harm as a result of the online content that your company provides during a search of the name [YOUR NAME]. [YOUR NAME] claims potential loss of income due to potential employers identifying this content during a search of [YOUR NAME].

I hereby demand that you immediately cease and desist displaying any hyperlinks, including any cached content, to the above referenced website(s) within 10 days of the date of this letter, and notify me in writing when these tasks have been completed.

_____
Judge John Doe

Criminal Information

Many new websites have appeared which host mugshots and associated criminal information of anyone arrested in select states. This varies based on state laws which allow unlimited access to this type of content. While arrest records are public data, I do not support websites that post this data in bulk. They are not doing this as a public resource. They are extortion websites which hope to benefit from your removal request. Most of these will remove your mugshot for $500. The only purpose for these sites is for financial gain.

I have found removal requests to these websites to be a waste of time. Letters from lawyers will go unanswered. They simply do not care. If your mugshot appears on one of these sites, I have only found two potential solutions. Your results will vary with this technique. The following examples will explain the processes that I took for two clients.

I was contacted by a subject who had been arrested for speeding. This may sound ridiculous, but he was speeding over 20 miles per hour above the limit, which was a misdemeanor in his state. He was booked, processed, and

released on bond. The next day, his mugshot appeared on one of these extortion sites. Within a week, it had been indexed by Google. A search of his name revealed the mugshot directly above his LinkedIn and business websites. He was devastated.

The website that hosted this image was fairly dysfunctional. It was poorly designed and only existed to make a quick buck. I placed an alert on the exact page where the client's information was hosted through a service called Visual Ping. The moment that the website went down for maintenance, I received an alert that the page had changed. I immediately submitted a request for Google and Bing to re-index the client's mugshot page, which was offline. I identified the address as missing, and both Google and Bing re-indexed it during the 24-hour maintenance down-time. The mugshot was no longer listed in his search results. If someone were to search the website directly, they could still see the photo. This is highly unlikely. It is possible that Google and Bing could re-index this live data. I have found that this usually happens when new content is posted. Since I informed the search engines that the content was missing, it will not immediately re-index that stale data.

I want to clarify that I was very lucky in this scenario. I took advantage of the situation. It is not a permanent solution, but it did buy some time to make an intentional decision that is not based on frantic thinking. I take a firm stance against paying the removal fees offered by these sites. Not only does it give in to this type of behavior, but it also increases the chance of the photo reappearing. If you paid once, you will likely pay twice. Furthermore, most of these websites are owned by the same entity.

The second solution takes advantage of new state laws specifically targeting mugshot websites. Lucky for nomads of South Dakota, this state possesses strong laws that demand these sites remove your content at your request. Send a certified letter to the website stating your demand to remove your mugshot from the website. Advise that this must be completed within 30 days, per South Dakota state law (or your state). Expect this demand to be ignored. After the 30 days have passed, a small claims suit against the offending website should be considered. In my experience, this causes the website to remove the content in order to avoid a costly court appearance. They will know they are in violation of law and rarely submit any resistance.

Right to be Forgotten

The right to be forgotten is a concept that was discussed and put into practice in the European Union and Argentina in 2006. Search engines began to acknowledge this option in 2014. The issue has arisen from desires of individuals to determine the development of their life in an autonomous way, without being perpetually or periodically stigmatized as a consequence of a specific action performed in the past. Basically, you have the right to "start over" in Europe. This does not apply to Americans.

Google and Bing both allow you to submit requests for content removal from search engines if you live in Europe. The removal forms can be found on their support pages similar to the instructions mentioned in the previous example. They will ask for the search results URL and a digital signature of your name. They will verify that your name appears in the results and remove anything defamatory from the index.

Until recently, I found that submitting a request from an email address that possessed a UK domain was sufficient as proof of citizenship. However, Google has become much stricter and now demands photocopied identification. I have found Bing to be more lenient. I cannot advise you on how to proceed with a request like this if you do not live in Europe. I have received many success and failure stories from other people's attempts to take advantage of this law. If your sensitive details are posted anywhere online, it is vital that you act quickly. The internet is a timer counting down until your data is spread onto additional websites. Proper alerts, constant monitoring, and better sharing habits will protect your privacy long term. I respect that we cannot control the internet and that removing personal data is like playing cat and mouse. However, I take my privacy seriously. I am willing to put in the effort in order to maintain my desired level of anonymity. Even as an author and international speaker, I keep a low profile online. I have multiple websites, but none connect to my home address or telephone number. I have a business Twitter account, but no posts mention anything about my personality, interests, or location.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
BEYOND EXTREME

You may believe that the privacy strategies presented in this book are a bit too complex for your needs. For many of my clients, the previous pages represent only the basics, and there is a desire for the next level of privacy. Some clients need extreme protection through name changes, dual citizenships, or various uncommon legal documents. Most people reading this may need none of that. However, in the rare situation where you are targeted by a powerful adversary, these are tools to possess in your arsenal of privacy strategies. Before proceeding, let's have a quick reality check and consider your progress.

Until now, I have focused on the most popular services which my clients request from me. Moving to an invisible home, driving an anonymous car, and communicating from sanitized electronics are very normal in my business. These are the things which I encourage you to implement. Traveling full time, changing your name, moving to another country, giving birth to expedite citizenship, and planning the details after your death are rare, but I have assisted in these situations. This chapter represents the extreme of the extreme. Please do not execute any of these strategies without seriously considering all potential consequences. Of everything discussed in this book, the methods explained in this chapter backfire the most. For many, this content may just be an entertainment break before jumping back into common strategies. For others, it may save their lives.

Readers of the previous edition of this book offered criticism of the placement of this chapter. Many believed it should have been presented at the very end of the book. This is valid feedback, but I chose to leave it in the current chapter lineup. This chapter navigates us toward the end of our PROACTIVE journey toward extreme privacy. In the next chapter, I transition to methods for damage control, which are more defined as REACTIVE. You may be tempted to skip this chapter and move on to more applicable topics. The content within this chapter is not necessary in order to implement later tutorials. However, I hope that you will indulge me by considering the topics presented within the next several pages. If you ever find yourself stuck within an exceptionally rare threat, you may need to rely on these extreme methods.

The RV Life

In previous chapters, I discussed ways in which nomad residency could be obtained in order to provide a true ghost address for government documentation. This instruction took advantage of rules and policies designed for full-time travelers without the requirement of living out of an automobile while exploring the world. In 2021, I assisted more clients with becoming truly nomadic than in the past decade combined. This section explains the process of committing to a life of constant movement.

Most people who are nomads in South Dakota rarely visit the state. They have a recreational vehicle (RV) and stay within warm boundaries at all times. They visit their favorite RV campgrounds in Florida during winter and northern cities in summer. They have eliminated most of their belongings and crave a life of freedom while having the ability to pick up and go at any time desired. I respect that lifestyle, but it is not quite what I present to my clients. During this section, I will assume you have an urgent need to disappear, and that you are not ready to commit to the purchase of an anonymous home. You may not know where you want to go, and you may have concerns about making mistakes while creating trusts, LLCs, and your personal privacy strategy. Becoming a true nomad eliminates some of these stresses while providing a quick exit. The following actions were taken by a client in 2021.

"Jeni" left an abusive relationship with a tech-savvy man and needed to disappear. He had made numerous threats to end her life after she left him. There was no time for a home purchase and she had no friends or family outside the small town which she lived. She had not traveled much and had no ideas about where she wanted to live. My immediate recommendation was to obtain an RV and take some time to collect her thoughts.

The first decision is whether to rent or purchase. For most clients, I always recommend renting before purchase. Many people learn quickly that living in any type of automobile is not for them. The tiny kitchens, tight sleeping areas, and overall lack of any privacy can become too much to take long-term. Other clients adapt quickly and commit to a life of mobile living. Another benefit of renting is the absence of any vehicle registration requirements. You can hit the road and be fairly untraceable with minimal effort. Jeni chose this route.

She rented a small class B Airstream which provided plenty of room for her. It had the appearance of a large extended van. She confirmed that her current vehicle insurance covered her and the rented vehicle. She established a South Dakota PMB and forwarded all mail permanently to it. She changed her address on all important accounts. She drove the RV to South Dakota and applied the previous lessons to obtain a new driver's license. She stayed at a local campground the night before, and provided a receipt to the DMV to meet the nomad qualification. She was now a legal nomad with a new DL and ghost address. She technically lived in her RV and began identifying campsites where she could spend some time.

Jeni obtained a new mobile device, prepaid cellular plan, VOIP phone calling options, secure communications, and masked debit card service. She never provided her real name; paid most of her camping fees in cash; and collected her mail at campgrounds right before she left for another area. She was invisible. She later met a new partner and they traveled the country together. This fairy tale is not as simple as I present it. Let's take a look at the problems you might face in this scenario.

Downsizing: If you plan to go mobile, you will need to eliminate everything unessential to your life. Space is extremely limited and valuable while you travel. I recommend either storing your belongings before leaving or eliminating them altogether. I have been through this process, which can be difficult. I found that photographing memorabilia, awards, and other sentimental items eases the pain of getting rid of them. Digital scans of all important documents, photos, and paperwork eases the transition to mobile life. Make sure you have strong backups of everything.

Insurance: Some providers do not insure rental vehicles, and those that do may not cover RV's. If your provider will not offer coverage, contact a local insurer in the county of your new PMB. They are very aware of the requirements.

ID Requirements: Many campgrounds and RV lots require identification upon entry. Most do not scan them, but I have found some which do. I do not object to showing ID, but I demand that a scan is not collected. I have found that a polite request to avoid any scanning or collection works most of the time, especially with independent campgrounds. I try to avoid any national chains.

Purchase: If you want to buy your own RV, there are more complications. I recommend establishing your PMB first; then purchasing the RV in the name of a trust, and then registering the vehicle within the PMB state.

Registration: If you purchased your own RV, the state will allow registration in the name of a trust with a mandate to know the true information of the trustee (likely you). I find this acceptable for two reasons. First, your name will not be publicly attached to the registration plate. Even law enforcement will not receive your name with a standard license plate check. Only the DMV can disclose your name and PMB after an official request. Next, if your name is associated with a place which you never visit again, there is minimal threat.

Food: If you enjoy cooking large meals in a full kitchen, you will be disappointed. Outside of a hotplate and miniature refrigerator, you do not have much of a kitchen. However, always keep a few comfort foods available which remind you of home. I have found this uplifting during extended travel.

Internet: For light browsing, you may find your mobile device's data plan sufficient for primary internet access. You can enable a VPN on both the device and your laptop, then allow your device to share internet wirelessly. For heavier users, you may want to purchase a dedicated portable internet device.

Expense: A nice RV can be very heavy in weight. This results in low mileage per gallon of gasoline and high fuel costs. I have been naive to this and surprised at the frequency of gas stops and high costs. If you need to be untraceable, make sure to carry plenty of cash without relying on ATM withdrawals. If you need water and electric hookups, expect to pay a premium for these services. Do your research before you commit and be overly prepared financially. When you get desperate, most Walmart stores allow overnight parking for free.

Social: Living as a nomad, especially if you are alone, can be emotionally burdensome. However, it can also be a great opportunity to make new friends. When I have tried to strike up a conversation while staying at an extended-stay hotel, I was perceived as a creep with bad motives. When I repeated that same conversation at an RV campground, I was welcomed into the conversation; offered food and drink; and encouraged to return the next evening. I believe you will find an easy time meeting other people if desired. You can also make up practically any alias and former life without worry of criticism or judgement.

Children: One surprising advantage of living in an RV is the ability to easily register children for school. Schools want to know your true physical home address which complicates privacy. If you are staying (even temporarily) at a local campground within the boundaries for a specific school system, you should qualify for registration. This will always vary, but most public schools do not fight it.

Stability: Many clients feel an uncomfortable sense of instability. The few belongings they have are with them at all times and there is no physical home waiting for them after the adventure. I see this kick in about three weeks on the road and disappear after two months. Everyone will be unique.

Freedom: I want to end this on a positive note. I have talked with numerous clients while they were living a truly nomadic lifestyle. The common sentiment was an appreciation for the overall freedom, privacy, and security they felt. The ability to move around fairly anonymously is comforting to those who are running from a legitimate threat. Traveling by vehicle while purchasing fuel with cash eliminates most common travel tracking possibilities. The lack of airfare history, hotel stays, and rental vehicle contracts prevents the common methods which are used by abusers to locate victims.

Name Change

For the record, I almost never recommend a name change (outside of a traditional change associated with marriage or adoption). Changing your name does not carry the power it once had in previous decades. Today, your new name is likely to appear as an alias on your consumer profiles within data mining products. This is because your new name is still associated with your current SSN. Additionally, some states and counties require your name change to be publicly posted, such as within a local newspaper. Digitization and permanent archiving of these details will not keep them hidden long. For clients who are insistent on a name change, I follow a specific recipe.

First, I run them through the nomad residency process through South Dakota as previously explained. I obtain a new license in their official name, and then wait. Six months after residency, you are allowed to petition for a name change. The required forms can be found at https://ujs.sd.gov/uploads/forms/namechange/UJS-024_Instructions_for_Change_of_Name.pdf. The process begins with a petition for change of name, followed by a hearing, and finally an order if the change was approved by a judge. All of this will require physical presence within the state and multiple court visits over a couple of months.

This process is very similar in other states. The difference is the privacy. Many states, such as California and New York, make court records public on the internet. This is becoming the default action as most states digitize all historic records and place them online. Some more populated states allow third-party companies to devour this data electronically via application programming interfaces (APIs). In other words, many states allow companies to automatically suck up all court documents in order to populate their own data mining systems. South Dakota is much more reserved. While a name change is public record, unless a judge can be convinced it should be sealed, South Dakota does not go out of their way to notify the world. In my experience, it is not

difficult to convince the court that a name change should be sealed (private) in scenarios involving physical attacks toward the victim. This will not make you invisible as your true privacy threat is your SSN and DOB combination.

If you are going to change your name for privacy reasons, you really need a new SSN in order to stop the association. Even then, it will be easy for companies to determine you are the same person. Changing your SSN requires a visit to a Social Security office. You will be required to show ample identity documentation and your current Social Security card. This is not an immediate process, and your old number will remain present within many systems. Your case will be evaluated, and a new number may be denied. If issued a new number, expect problems with any attempts to establish new credit. If you do require a new credit card or loan, the new SSN and the old will be permanently connected, which removes any privacy strategy here.

Overall, I do not recommend name changes and/or a new SSN. In order to possess any privacy, you can never obtain any new credit or use your new name and SSN on any official documentation. This will be difficult. If you slip, you associate the old information with the new. I believe that you can achieve the same level of privacy by executing the previous methods displayed throughout the book. With permission, I provide the following undesired result after a name change was conducted for a client.

In 2019, "Janis Doe" had become a South Dakota nomad. Her PMB was the only valid address on any public or private record. Her condo was in the name of a trust and her vehicle titled to an LLC. Her utility companies had no clue of the identity of the occupants in her home. In my opinion, she was invisible. She contacted me with a desire to change her name as a final strategy to eliminate her past. After encouraging her to avoid a name change, she insisted on moving forward and I began the process.

We submitted the paperwork with the state and she made her appearances in front of a judge. Due to her experiences with physical abuse, the court agreed to seal the record. Within a few weeks, she was now "Janis Smith". She obtained a new driver's license in this name, applied for a new passport, and she now had a new identity. Eventually, the Social Security Administration confirmed they recognized the change but delayed issue of a new SSN. That is when the real problems began.

When she notified her bank of the name change, they insisted on sending a physical form which would need a "wet" signature and notary. She provided her PMB address which was flagged as a CMRA mail drop. The bank refused to send anything to that location. Since they wanted to verify a physical address, stopping by a local branch would not help. Until she provided her true physical address the bank refused to update her information. After a few visits to a local branch, a manager finally agreed to file the paperwork on her behalf. This was the beginning of the paper trail which would ruin her efforts. Her insurance policies, credit cards, and retirement accounts were all updated, and each of them added to the trail. As I write this in 2020, a search of this "Janis Smith" within every premium data mining company to which I have access reveals her to have an "also known as (AKA)" entry for Janis Doe. A search of her old SSN immediately connects to a record of the new SSN. The two identities are very connected and she has no real privacy protection from the name change.

Today, I believe there is no reason to change your name or SSN, aside from emotional scars from family issues. These changes will not erase your financial, residential, and family past, and will always leave a trail which combines the two identities. The name changes of fifty years ago were effective. Today, they are just cosmetic.

Marriage Considerations

The physical location of your marriage can have a huge impact on your privacy. Consider two states which approach public access to this type of information very differently. New York provides public access to all records via a dedicated division titled the Vital Records Office at the New York State Department of Health. Their website proudly announces that every marriage (and divorce) record from 1880 to present is available to anyone online. A simple search form is provided for immediate access. In contrast, Colorado's state law (C.R.S. 25-2-117) declares vital records such as birth, death, adoption, marriage, and divorce as confidential. As a result,

Colorado vital records are not public records; therefore, they are not searchable online. Vital records can only be released to those who are eligible, such as the bride, groom, or an immediate family member. These are only two examples. You should research the laws and policies of any state where you are considering marriage.

If you had your mind set on a California wedding, you have a surprisingly private option. California is the only state which offers both a regular public marriage license and a confidential marriage license. A confidential marriage license is legally binding but not part of any public record. Section 501 of California's Family Code allows the county clerk to issue this option. Section 511 states that these licenses are not open to public inspection except by a court order. However, public marriage licenses allow anyone to look at the personal information that appears on the licenses at the county clerk's office. This includes the couple's names, dates and places of birth, parents' names, and any previous marriages.

I have been asked on several occasions whether a confidential California license is better than a public license from within a state which does not allow online search of marriage records. In most scenarios, I believe the California confidential option is better. If a state which is fairly private now, such as Colorado, later changes to a public record model, your details could become publicly shared with third parties. I believe this is less likely with an intentionally confidential license from California. Many states offer an option to have the court seal the record, but this brings unwanted attention to you, and you will be forced to convince a judge to protect your privacy. I prefer more streamlined options.

Overall, I recommend that privacy-seeking clients apply for a marriage license, and execute the ceremony, outside of their home state. This provides a small layer of privacy. Many automated people search databases will associate marriage records from within a specific county to people with those names from that county. Marriage records from distant counties may not be automatically added to a person's profile. However, if the public marriage record includes dates of birth and parental details, it will likely be associated with the individuals anyway. This is why I push clients to become married in states which respect the privacy of the marriage, and are at least one state away from their home. Always contact the county of potential marriage to identify whether the details are publicly shared.

The next consideration is name changes due to marriage. In the United States, it has been customary for the bride to take the surname of the groom. I believe this is very traditional thinking which has not kept up with our current society. Today, it is very common for each spouse, regardless of gender, to keep their own surname. In most scenarios, I believe this is best. It is not only convenient to avoid countless name change forms, but it also provides two last names which the couple can use when necessary. Consider the following scenarios.

- A spouse with a very unique name is heavily targeted with online threats. The spouse with a common last name can hide more easily within online records if the name should become public after utility or delivery details become public.
- The same targeted spouse feels uncomfortable associating his last name with the couple's new home, but the HOA demands a confirmed resident be listed within the neighborhood records. The spouse with the more common name, who is not targeted, could be included in the documentation, with less threat.
- In contrast, a spouse who is being heavily targeted could decide to take the last name of the spouse with a more common name in order to provide a slight layer of privacy.

In each of these scenarios, the protection is minor, and does not replace the privacy strategies explained throughout the book. If executed properly, your name(s) will never be associated with your home, and none of this may matter. However, backup plans are always nice. Next, consider the privacy invasions of online wedding registries. These require you to publicly disclose the names, location, and general details of your upcoming wedding and attendees. This information is later sold to other companies in the wedding industry. You are also required to disclose a physical address to which your gifts can be shipped. I encourage you to eliminate this marketing scam from your wedding. Your family and attendees will likely revert to the gift-giving methods from a pre-internet era.

Reality Check: Modifying the plans of your marriage may present a new layer of privacy desired by you. However, consider the feelings of your spouse. Refusing to take a married name (or refusing to give it) could create serious strain on a new marriage. Hiding the details from public view may generate a suspicion of embarrassment in the relationship. Never execute these strategies without seriously discussing it with your partner. If there is hesitancy or a sense of confusion and discomfort, take a step back and identify the issues. For me as well as my clients, family relationships are more important than the desire to disappear. If your partner is on board with all this extra effort, you may have found your match. Approach cautiously and do not blame me when you are left at the altar because you did not consider the wishes of your mate.

Birth Considerations

Many children's birth certificates are public record. While we do not see them copied into people search websites, the data itself can be usually seen or verified by anyone willing to visit the county seat and claim to have a need for a copy of the record. Worse, services such as VitalChek (a LexisNexis company), allow practically anyone to order another person's birth certificate online by confirming a relationship and need. While writing this section, I provided publicly available information about myself to VitalChek. I stated I was a relative and the service authorized me to obtain my own birth certificate as a genealogy researcher. The cost was $20 and anyone could have replicated this by knowing my name, date of birth, and mother's maiden name. These details can be found online for most of us.

Similar to marriage records, states such as California make birth certificates easily available to data mining companies while states such as Colorado consider them confidential. Let's consider the data required to complete a birth certificate which could become public. Most states require the following information, which is usually submitted by a medical attendant.

Child's Name	Location of Birth	Parents' Places of Birth
Child's Gender	Parents' Names	Parents' Signatures
Child's Date of Birth	Parents' Dates of Birth	

This information may not seem too sensitive to most. A home address is usually not present unless the birth occurred at home. However, I respect that some clients do not want these details released publicly. Some may be keeping a relationship secret, while others do not want any clues about the county in which they reside available to a stalker. Regardless of your situation, extreme privacy enthusiasts may desire to keep a birth certificate private. Some states have specific laws which declare birth certificates confidential and only available to immediate family. However, I find this to be a small hurdle to bypass. While illegal to access someone else's birth certificate without family authority, people do it anyway. I encourage clients in extreme situations to assume that the birth certificate for their child will become public record. Therefore, they should consider the key data which will populate the document.

Location: If I know the county in which you live, I know where to search for a birth certificate. If you choose to give birth in another county, this makes my search more difficult.

Name: If I know the name of your child, possibly if it were posted to social media, I would have enough information to conduct a search. Preventing details of your birth from appearing on the internet eliminates the easiest way to obtain a copy of the birth certificate.

While we are discussing names, we should address privacy implications of naming a child. The less unique the name is, the greater your child's privacy will be in the future. A person named John Smith may be much more difficult to track than one named Michael Bazzell. Finding the right John Smith would require substantial time to sort through thousands of records. If you have a common last name, you are already at a huge advantage over those who have unique surnames. There are still steps you can take to make your child's name less distinguishable.

While I respect that passing a family name to a child is a traditional and important piece of family history, there are extreme situations when this may be avoided. I have witnessed the following.

- Some privacy enthusiasts will choose the desired name with which they wish to address their child, but make it the middle name. If they desire to call their child Michael Bazzell, they might make the official name John Michael Bazzell. This results in most people search sites identifying the child as John Bazzell. People who know him as Michael Bazzell might not identify this association.
- In one scenario, a couple did not possess the same last name. They were married, but the wife never changed her name to match the husband. They decided to "mash-up" their last names and provide their son a unique last name. Assume the father's last name was Bazzell and the mother's name was Singleton, the child's last name was similar to Baton. Obviously, this is a fictional example in order to protect the privacy of the real parents and child.
- Some choose to issue numerous middle names to a child. John Michael William Bazzell could legally use John, Michael, Mike, William, Bill, Billy, or Will as a legal name at any time. This provides numerous legal aliases ready for the future.

The next consideration is the Newborn Genetic Screening test, which is required in all 50 states. Nearly every baby born in the United States gets a heel prick shortly after birth. Their blood fills six spots on a special paper card. It is used to test for dozens of congenital disorders which, if treated early enough, could prevent severe disabilities and even death. Some states destroy the blood spots after a year. However, many states store them for at least 21 years. California is one of a few states which stores the blood spots for research indefinitely. These results are often given to researchers, queried by other government agencies, and sold to private corporations. You pay the fees for this mandated test.

Most hospitals provide information about this data collection and your rights according to the specific state where the child was born. Most states require submission of a card which either allows consent to share the data collected or explicit refusal to participate in the program. Some parents may choose to omit their child's blood sample from any state or national databases. Many people report that the samples are collected and shared if no action is taken after birth. I encourage you to identify this consent form and consider your options. If desired, notify the hospital that you do not want a birth announcement in the local newspaper. A surprising number of hospitals provide this data without parental consent.

In 2021, I consulted with a client concerned about child birth privacy and health safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. After many conversations, they settled on a birth center with a midwife. A birth center is a health care facility for childbirth where care is provided in the midwifery and wellness model. A birth center is typically freestanding and not a hospital. Birth centers are well known for respecting a woman's right to make informed choices about her health care and her baby's health care based on her values and beliefs. This can create an environment for a much more private experience compared to a traditional hospital. My clients witnessed the following benefits.

- Birth centers typically have fewer deliveries at any given time with proper staff for each patient. This may prevent random and unfamiliar staff entering and exiting at all times.
- Private rooms are much more common at birth centers than maternity wards.
- Hospitals typically demand government identification from visitors, which are often scanned into insecure systems. Birth centers have more leniency on these requirements.
- The midwife typically completes the baby's application for recording of birth and can offer to send the state documentation via USPS instead of digital transmission online. Many states share application data submitted electronically with third parties such as VitalChek, the service previously mentioned which is owned by LexisNexis. These companies then charge the public fees to access documents, such as a birth certificate, of your child. Per the VitalChek privacy policy, they reserve the right to share your personal information with their affiliates, technology providers, customer service representatives, service providers, suppliers, editors, payment processors, and email service providers.

- Genetic screening tests are optional and not required by the birth center.
- Birth centers typically provide more education on your privacy-related options as parents.
- Many birth centers allow payment to be made in cash for the entire visit. My client's final bill was $5,200.

Choosing the method of child delivery is a very personal decision and should never be made solely on the recommendations of a privacy nerd like myself. I present this page as an option to initiate a conversation with your family about privacy considerations during childbirth.

Dual Citizenship

On rare occasions, I hear from a client that wishes to obtain dual citizenship. This provides a second passport in your true name from a country outside of America. Dual citizenship is completely legal, but a huge hassle. There can be several legitimate reasons to desire a second passport from another country, but they are mostly obtained for the "cool" factor. If I were forced to identify legitimate needs for dual citizenship as an American, I would provide the following three reasons.

Travel: A second passport can protect you from travel limitations and provide more visa-free travel. Visa-free travel is the ability to enter a country without obtaining a visa in advance. If you have a U.S. passport, you need to obtain a visa to travel to places such as China. This can become an expensive and time-consuming task if travel is frequent. If you had a passport from Grenada, a visa is not required to enter China from a country other than the U.S. These scenarios are rare, but legitimate for some.

Investments: Many countries refuse to allow Americans to invest within their territory. This is often due to strict American banking laws which requires citizens to report offshore accounts. Foreign banks simply do not want to deal with you or the IRS. A foreign passport can break through these barriers and allow investment. I do not get involved with clients in this situation. It almost always leads to some level of tax avoidance.

Safety: Having more than one option means you do not belong to a single government. If things become unsafe in America, and we find ourselves in danger simply being present, you can immediately and effectively take yourself and your family out of harm's way. While unlikely, options are always a good idea. My clients who desire a second passport usually fit mostly into this category.

There are three main strategies to obtain a second passport, which are ancestry, time, and money. All of my clients who have expressed interest in dual citizenship have chosen the easiest option, which is money. If you have enough of it, you can buy a passport from one or more of many countries. I have one client who collects them like baseball cards. Let's first take a look at the three avenues to dual citizenship, in order of most affordable to most expensive.

Ancestry: Obtaining a second passport usually requires either a lot of time or a lot of money. If you have the good fortune to have parents, grandparents, or in some cases, even great-grandparents from specific countries, a second citizenship can be easily and inexpensively obtained. If you have ancestors from Italy, Poland, Ireland, Germany, England, France, Portugal or Estonia, you might be entitled to citizenship based on ancestry. This means you can get a second passport in a very short time, and at very low cost. I always encourage clients to explore their family tree and identify any easy routes first.

Time: Most countries provide an option for naturalization through residency. However, the conditions vary with each country. Consider the following three factors.

- How long must you be a resident in order to be eligible to begin the application process for naturalization?
- How difficult is it to obtain residency? There are many countries eager to take in hard-working individuals, while others scrutinize and deny most applicants.

- Do you actually need to physically live there? Many countries' naturalization regulations require an applicant to spend the majority of time in that country. If you spend too much time out of the country, you render yourself ineligible for citizenship. Some countries have very minimal requirements for the length of time you must be physically in the country.

Money: Finally, the easiest option. If you have enough cash, you can often "buy" your dual residency. In previous decades, enough money would guarantee you a passport within weeks, without any investment or time requirements. In some rare cases, a $5,000 "donation" to the country generated a passport that same day. Those deals are no longer available, and the theatrics have changed. Countries now often require large investments while some still accept pure donations. As I present each country's options, I clearly display the outright fee you can pay in order to quickly bypass the lengthy application process for traditional naturalization.

Residency vs Citizenship

If you are not eligible for a second passport through ancestry, time, or money, the next best option is to obtain a second residency. It gives you the same benefit of always having a place to go, and it can potentially help you obtain a second passport within a few years through naturalization. Residency should not be confused with citizenship. Citizenship provides you an official passport which can be used for transportation. Residency simply grants you the authority to reside in the country. Residency is often a large role in the path toward citizenship.

The following pages explain the possibilities for obtaining a second citizenship for many of the countries which allow it. In order to avoid preference, or expose my own interests in this privacy strategy, I have listed them in alphabetical order. Please note that foreign politics change rapidly, and this information could become outdated quickly. While there may be additional countries which allow this and are not listed here, I present those which have a lengthy track record of positive experiences. There are many online scams surrounding "too good to be true" options which should be avoided. Each country summary ends with two considerations, as displayed below.

Cost: The average fee (USD) you will pay to obtain dual citizenship, instead of time.
Time: The amount of residency time required to apply for citizenship, instead of a fee.

Antigua and Barbuda

Antigua previously offered an affordable economic citizenship program, and recently reinstated it with much higher costs. There are now three options under Antigua's program.

- Pay $250,000 as a donation to the National Development Fund, as well as approximately $50,000 in legal and other fees.
- Purchase government-approved real estate valued at $400,000 or more, and hold that real estate for at least five years. You must also pay nearly $100,000 in legal and government fees per adult, and about $50,000 per child.
- Invest in a local business or businesses with a minimum investment of $1.5 million.

Cost: $300,000 or $1.5M investment **Time**: Not Applicable

Argentina

An Argentine passport allows visa-free travel throughout all of Europe, including Russia. However, Argentine passport holders must have a visa to enter the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Argentina's nationality law has been unchanged since 1869 and states that one can qualify to become a citizen after only two years of residing in the country. Any residency visa qualifies you for this. Similar to Chile, the easiest options are "rentista" or retiree visas, which require you only to prove a certain amount of monthly passive income. In Argentina, in order to qualify for the rentista visa you need to demonstrate a minimum of $1,000 per month in passive income, which

needs to be transferred to an Argentine bank account in your name. The rentista visa is a temporary one-year visa. It can be extended in one-year increments. It is best to initiate the residency process while in Argentina, not as a consulate abroad, which would complicate matters unnecessarily. Once you have your residency, you should spend at least six months of the year in Argentina for both years. After two years, you may apply for naturalization. Upon application you will need to demonstrate an intermediate level of Spanish language proficiency. The language test is very informal and "friendly", usually consisting of a short conversation.

Cost: Living expenses **Time**: 2 Years

Belgium

Belgian citizenship is quite valuable as a gateway to the European Union. It has some great options for first gaining residency, and once you become a resident you can apply for naturalization in 5 years. The most appropriate way to obtain residency in Belgium, and eventually citizenship, is to create a company in Belgium and apply for the professional card residency. You could also hire yourself from your company and apply for a work permit. This requires the services of a legal professional to assist you through the process. Obtain a residential address by renting or purchasing a home. Once you have the address, register it with the local city hall. Stay at that residence for the initial police check, which usually happens within two weeks and likely will be repeated during the course of the visa. This makes you a resident of Belgium. After two years, apply for renewal, then renew every 5 years. You are eligible to apply for naturalization after five years. You can then go to the local municipality to state your intention of becoming a naturalized Belgian citizen. They will inform you of the documents necessary for application. In order to become naturalized, you do not need to physically live in Belgium full-time. However, you do need to spend a "reasonable" amount of time there each year and show that you are a member of the community.

Cost: Living expenses **Time**: 5 Years

Chile

A Chilean passport allows you to travel to 150 countries visa-free. It is one of only two travel documents that enables you to travel to all G8 countries visa-free. This includes the U.S., Canada, and Russia. It requires approximately five years of continuous residency, first temporary, followed by permanent residency. For individuals with established income and assets, the easiest option is called the rentista visa. To apply for this visa, you need to prove that you have income from investments held overseas. The easiest path for most clients is a lump-sum held within a bank account which pays interest. After nine months on the rentista visa, and having spent at least six months in Chile, you can apply for permanent residency. The six months do not need to be consecutive and can be accumulated over the course of one year. When you apply for naturalization, your case is best supported if you can show some legitimate ties to the country. This includes the ability to speak basic Spanish and demonstrating that you are involved in the local community.

Cost: Living expenses **Time**: 5 Years

Cyprus

A Cyprus passport is less attractive after the financial crisis of 2013. You have two options, both of which require a large amount of money.

- Invest 2,000,000 euros into Cyprus businesses, with at least 500,000 euros of that amount as a donation to the government's Research Fund. If you do not want to make a donation, you must invest 5,000,000 euros.
- Deposit 5,000,000 euros in a Cyprus bank for three years.

Cost: $2M - $5M Investment + $500,000 donation **Time**: Not Applicable

Dominica

This Caribbean country's passport program only offers a donation option. This means your entire "investment" will not be recovered. The most affordable passport program options cost approximately $130,000 for an unmarried applicant.

Cost: $130,000-$150,000 **Time**: Not Applicable

Grenada

Grenada offers a real estate investment option that requires a $500,000 investment. However, that investment must be made in only one government-approved development, and obtaining a second passport in Grenada comes with a residency requirement. You must actually reside there most of the year.

Cost: $500,000 investment **Time**: Not Applicable

Panama

Panamanian residency is one of the easiest in the world to obtain. After five years of residency, you are eligible to apply for naturalization. A Panamanian passport offers you visa-free travel in 125 countries. This passport is attractive for many because there are exceptionally low requirements for the amount of time you must be present in the country. A second benefit is the country's territorial tax system, which means that Panamanian residents and companies only have to pay local tax on their Panamanian-sourced income. As long as your income is earned outside of Panama, it is not taxable by Panama.

The easiest residency option is through the Friendly Nations Visa, which applies to nationals of more than 40 countries including the United States. One can obtain residency in Panama extremely easily by merely demonstrating "economic activity" in the country. This does not mean that you necessarily need to conduct any business within Panama. Instead, you can satisfy this requirement by registering a Panamanian corporation and making a reasonable deposit at a local bank. Once you submit your residency application, you are free to leave the country and come back a few months later to collect your documents and ID card. You do not need to physically reside in Panama. The law only requires that the visa be renewed after two years. After five years of residency, you are qualified to apply for naturalization. As always, your naturalization case will be much smoother if you have basic knowledge of the Spanish language and you can demonstrate involvement in social life.

Cost: Living expenses **Time**: 5 Years

St. Kitts & Nevis

I first learned about this option when reading the book ***Emergency*** by Neil Strauss. He documented his efforts to obtain this passport, which was surprisingly easy. Things have changed. The popularity of this program has introduced much stricter rules and inflated fees. This is the longest running second citizenship program in the world and has been in operation since 1984. To get a St. Kitts passport today, you must choose one of two options:

- Make a donation of $250,000 or $300,000, depending on your family size, to the government's Sugar Industry Diversification Fund. This fund was established to help the workers who lost their jobs when the sugar industry became unviable. This is a gift to the country and not an investment.
- Purchase at least $400,000 in "government approved" real estate. These are extremely overpriced and held specifically for wealthy subjects desiring dual citizenship. While you technically own the properties, there is very minimal chance of ever recouping the cost.

Cost: $250,000 - $400,000 **Time**: Not Applicable

Renouncing Citizenship

In 2018, I had a client who insisted on renouncing his U.S. citizenship. I never recommend this, but his political reasons outweighed my concerns for him. He was confident in his decision, and was ready to proceed with or without my assistance. He had recently acquired a secondary citizenship in one of the countries mentioned here. This is not technically required in order to renounce citizenship, but heavily recommended. If you have no other country of citizenship, you would become stateless. It would be very likely that your request to renounce would be rejected.

Once he had his new citizenship in order, he traveled to that location. You should always schedule an appointment with the U.S. embassy or consulate of the location of your secondary citizenship. During the first meeting, diplomatic officials ensure that you are not renouncing your citizenship under duress. You will also need to complete a DS-4079 form (available at https://eforms.state.gov/Forms/ds4079.pdf). The second appointment requires you to read an oath in which you state your desire to renounce citizenship. Your documents are then sent to the U.S. State Department, which reviews the paperwork and makes a decision on your case within two months. If approved, you will receive your Certificate of Loss of Nationality. After renouncing your citizenship, you no longer pay future U.S. income taxes, and you will not need to report income unless you invest or do business in the country. However, you are required to file a final tax return covering the time between January 1 and the day you renounce. If your average annual net income tax in the past five years was $162,000 or more, or if your net worth is more than $2,000,000, you may have to pay an exit tax. The standard fee for renouncing citizenship is currently $2,350. The exit tax can be 30% of your wealth. Again, I never recommend this. Most people who request information about renouncing citizenship eventually decide it is not worth the hassle and risk. Even if you choose to leave the country and live abroad, possessing a U.S. passport is a luxury that many spend years to acquire.

Expatriate

If you believe you need a second citizenship, I encourage you to first consider becoming an expatriate (expat). An expatriate is someone who lives in a different country other than where they are a citizen. In general, expatriates are considered to be people who are residing in their host country ***temporarily***, with the ultimate intention of returning home at a later date. However, many expatriates leave their home country and find they can experience a better life abroad. For this reason, many of them never return home, but do not necessarily require a second citizenship. More details, including popular places for expats, can be found at www.expat.com. You might also consider the following tactics which allow extended residency within specific Caribbean countries under a remote work program.

Remote Work Dual Residency

Many clients desire a second citizenship in order to obtain another passport and permanent residency whenever desired. That is overkill for most. In 2020, I saw an abundance of Caribbean countries offering a quick residency option to those who can work remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic was devastating for countries who rely heavily on tourism funds. In effort to bring in money to hotels, restaurants, and other businesses, many countries loosened their restrictions on long-term stays. The following currently offer work residency programs.

- Antigua and Barbuda
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Bermuda
- Cayman

While each country has their own rules, the following is typically required for participation.

- Application fee ranging from $500-$1700
- Valid local health insurance
- Proof of income ranging from $50,000-$200,00 annually
- Air travel
- Two weeks of quarantine at hotel or other lodging
- Long-term lodging throughout stay
- Bank statements and proof of funds letter
- Proof of identity
- Criminal record from FBI or local agency

Most islands offer an immediate two-year residency allowance with the option to extend at expiration. None of these islands currently offer citizenship to those who participate in the remote work program, but that could change. By the time you read this, the pandemic may be over and these islands may have withdrawn the program. If another pandemic arrives, these may be places of interest to you. I had experience with this program in late 2020. It works well if you are self-employed or own your own company, and can conduct business remotely over the internet. It does not work well if you need to leave and return often. At the time of this writing, an additional 14 days of quarantine are required every time you return. I talked with many colleagues and friends who participated in these programs. While the sun and weather were wonderful, "island fever" is a real threat. This is the realization that you are stuck on an island without any easy way to return to your home country to visit others. I witnessed a huge sigh of relief once the COVID-19 vaccine was available and remote workers could go home.

Birth Tourism

There is an additional path to citizenship that I have not yet mentioned. Being born within a country that honors the "jus soli" principle, which means "right of the soil" in Latin, can immediately generate dual citizenship. This means that children born in these countries are granted citizenship, regardless of the nationality or immigration status of the parents. In some countries, being born within the borders of the country is enough to automatically be granted citizenship, even if the parents are there as tourists. Countries with unrestricted jus soli laws include the following.

Antigua & Barbuda	Chile	Guyana	Peru
Argentina	Costa Rica	Honduras	Saint Kitts & Nevis
Azerbaijan	Cuba	Jamaica	Saint Lucia
Barbados	Dominica	Lesotho	Saint Vincent
Belize	Ecuador	Mexico	Tanzania
Bolivia	El Salvador	Nicaragua	Trinidad and Tobago
Brazil	Fiji	Pakistan	United States
Canada	Grenada	Panama	Uruguay
Chad	Guatemala	Paraguay	Venezuela

In some other countries, one can only obtain citizenship for the child if certain additional requirements are met, such as that at least one parent is a citizen or permanent resident, or that at least one parent was born in the country themselves. Notable options include the following, and are not usually recommended.

Australia	France	Ireland
Colombia	Germany	New Zealand
Dominican Republic	Hong Kong	United Kingdom

While it is too late for you to choose where you are born, you can make preparations for your child to possess dual citizenship. Some countries, such as Brazil and Panama, allow the parent of a child born on the soil to go through the expedited naturalization process. I will explain more on that in a moment. First, let's consider reasons why one might choose birth tourism as a privacy strategy for a newborn child.

Immediate dual citizenship: Many people strive to obtain dual citizenship for themselves. It can be very costly and can take years to accomplish. With most birth tourism, dual citizenship is immediate for the child. This can be very enticing for parents with an interest in this topic.

Healthcare: Every year, thousands of babies are born in the U.S. to mothers from China. Parents do this to obtain American citizenship for their children. They spend tens of thousands of dollars to hire agencies that help arrange their trips to the U.S. because America's healthcare system is desired. Many people in China do not trust their domestic medical system, which is underfunded and overburdened. Under-the-table payments to doctors in the form of "hongbao" (lucky money) are exchanged as a way to skip long patient queues or ensure patients are treated well. Canada is also experiencing high rates of birth tourism because of this issue.

Education: Many citizens of countries with poor education systems crave a better option for their children. Being born in most Western countries entitles the child to education choices which would never be present in their parents' home countries.

Travel Restrictions: This was previously explained. Parents that desire less restrictive travel for children throughout their lives can use this strategy to bypass visa requirements from their home country.

Child Limits: Some countries, such as China, impose limitations on the number of children allowed per family. While these laws have been relaxed in recent years, they still exist. Births outside of these countries can bypass restrictions. In China, this requires parents to exclude their children from the Chinese national household registration system, which can present other problems. Overall, this strategy is not usually justified.

Parental Citizenship: This is the primary reason for privacy-conscious parents to explore birth tourism. The child born on foreign soil is often referred to as an "anchor baby". Parents intentionally give birth in a specific country in order to possess a child with citizenship in that country. The intention is to use this connection in order to gain their own citizenship. I will focus only on this strategy for the remainder of this chapter, as it is the most applicable to extreme privacy. Let's walk through a typical scenario, which is loosely based on my experiences with two separate clients, both American citizens. I cite Panama as the desired country of secondary citizenship, but you could substitute many of the "jus soli" countries in its place. The following is presented as a checklist of considerations.

- **Decision**: When a person is expecting a child, there is obviously a small window of time to consider if secondary citizenship might be beneficial to the child's future. I urge parents to consider all options, including eliminating this strategy completely.
- **Timing**: Traveling days before a birth due-date is risky. Giving birth on a plane does not accomplish anything. For those considering a foreign birth, I recommend arriving at least a month before the due-date. This gives time to become familiar with the area without a sense of urgency.
- **Birth**: After the child is born, citizenship of the country is immediate. The birth is reported locally and a birth certificate is issued. The child is a citizen of Panama, regardless of the parents' nationalities.
- **Documentation**: Aside from the official birth certificate, a passport can be requested for the child.
- **"Home" Citizenship**: If the parent(s) are American citizens, the birth should be reported to the U.S. while still abroad. The 2001 Child Citizenship Act (CCA) outlines the requirements with "a child who is under the age of 18, was born outside the U.S., and has at least one U.S. citizen parent automatically acquires U.S. citizenship upon entry into the country as an immigrant".

- **"Home" Documentation**: The parent can request a Certificate of Citizenship and U.S. passport for the child. The child's parents should contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for a Consular Report of Birth Abroad of a Citizen of the United States of America (CRBA) to document that the child is a U.S. citizen. If the U.S. embassy or consulate determines that the child acquired U.S. citizenship at birth, a consular officer will approve the CRBA application and the Department of State will issue a CRBA, also called a Form FS-240, in the child's name. According to U.S. law, a CRBA is proof of U.S. citizenship and may be used to obtain a U.S. passport and register for school, among other purposes. This should be submitted, authorized, and received while still abroad. If desired, the entire family, including the child with dual citizenship, can safely travel back to the U.S. legally.
- **Parental Application**: The parents can now apply for fast-tracked secondary citizenship. In our example, Panama's President signed a new law allowing foreigners who gave birth to a child in Panama within the last five years to qualify as permanent residents. Many other "jus soli" countries offer this, but the time, expenses, and requirements vary greatly.
- **Basic Requirements**: In Panama, and most other countries, a nationwide criminal police record of both parents must be filed from their home country's national police force. For U.S. citizens this will usually be from the FBI. If one or both parents have lived in Panama without having left the country for a minimum of two years, they can obtain the criminal background report from the Panama police (Department of Judicial Investigations "DIJ"). You must also provide an original birth certificate for the child from the Panama Civil Registry. Finally, you must file a letter of responsibility signed by a Panama citizen. This is usually completed by an attorney.
- **Financial Requirements**: Most countries require proof of economic solvency, such as a letter from a Panama bank displaying adequate funds of the applicants. Countries want to ensure you will not further drain their resources for citizens.
- **Costs**: Our scenario with Panama is on the low end of costs. The average expenses per parent include a $1,050 application fee for the immigration department, $150 for the permanent residency carnet (ID card), and up to $2,000 in legal fees. The high end for other desired countries can be over $20,000 per parent.
- **Time**: Obtaining residency in Panama is almost immediate and full citizenship can take up to a year. Other countries can require up to three years for full citizenship for parents of a child born locally.

I hope I did not make this process sound easy. There are always numerous unexpected hiccups when governments move slowly or scrutinize applications. Overall, I do not recommend this privacy strategy for most people. The following explains some complications to consider.

- **Same-Sex Parents**: Many countries do not recognize marriages of same-sex couples, and may exclude residency and citizenship options for anyone who is not biologically connected to the child. I have seen this in the U.S. In one scenario, a couple experienced hurdles after a birth in London. A child was born via surrogate to a male same-sex couple from the U.S. The baby's parents were married and both were U.S. citizens, but the sperm-donating parent was originally born in Britain. Shortly after birth, the U.S. State Department issued a letter informing the couple that their child was not a citizen of the U.S. at birth. The parent with a genetic attachment to the child had not lived long enough in the U.S. as a citizen to pass his citizenship to the child. The other parent, who was a natural born U.S. citizen, could not establish a "blood connection" to the child. According to the principles of "jus soli", the child was an "alien" to the U.S.
- **Government Scrutiny**: Many countries, including the U.S., Canada, U.K, and Australia, are scrutinizing babies born during birth tourism, and proposing laws to prevent it. I do not recommend this tactic as a way to gain citizenship in these countries.
- **Healthcare**: While this was previously mentioned as a benefit for some expectant parents, it can also be an undesired consequence. Some of the countries which allow this do not possess quality healthcare. You may find yourself in a very uncomfortable situation outside the expectations of healthcare in your home country.

- **Stateless Child**: In a worst-case scenario, you may find all of your effort wasted and your child in a "stateless" condition. The country of birth may not recognize the child as a citizen and your home country may not allow entry of this undocumented foreign person. Always do your homework and seek legal help local to the target destination.

Summary

Name changes, dual citizenship, secondary residency, and birth tourism are extreme privacy tactics, but required for some targeted clients. I cannot think of a more powerful privacy strategy when trying to avoid America's surveillance than to simply leave. I close with a warning. Secondary citizenships often carry risks. Some countries require mandatory military enlistment for all citizens. Some apply inflated taxes on secondary citizens. A few are always at risk of financial ruin, and any investments could be lost. I try to discourage clients from these methods unless absolutely necessary. The grass is not always greener on the other side. Also, I can speak from experience when I report that secondary citizenship does not bode well for a security clearance renewal.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN
DAMAGE CONTROL

If you applied most of the previous privacy strategies toward your life, you should be in good shape, for now. Around every corner is an invasive threat toward your privacy. Data mining companies, marketers, and government entities continue to want your information. It has extreme value in our data-obsessed world. If you want to keep the level of privacy you created, you must put forward effort to maintain it. This chapter presents many considerations for staying private and secure after all of your hard work.

My first advice is to eliminate all potential online privacy threats such as social networks. There is no way to use Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and other similar services anonymously. They all possess numerous technologies which attempt to identify you, your location, and your online habits. If you absolutely must use social networks, only use them within your web browser. Never install mobile social network applications on your devices. Viewing Facebook through a web browser gives you some control over which information it can access. Opening the Facebook app provides a deeper level of access to your device's data.

Hardware technologies are also a constant threat. It is becoming much more difficult to purchase various home electronics without jeopardizing your privacy. Consider the following common purchases and concerns.

Home Assistants: Amazon Echo and Google Home devices have seen a surge in popularity and adoption. These are the small devices that listen for you to say "Alexa" or "Hey Google" while in your home in order to assist you with daily tasks. Most users of these devices allow them to conduct searches, display videos, or place orders online with only a voice command. I will never allow these devices in my home. A quick search online reveals numerous reports which provide sufficient evidence for my concerns. Amazon admits that numerous employees listen to you through these devices and that they keep the recordings forever. Google is more tight-lipped, but I expect the same.

Smart Doorbells: The Ring doorbell is now owned by Amazon while the Nest option is owned by Google. These have become a trophy of sorts displayed at the front doors of many households. These devices stream video and audio over the internet from your home. If a stranger is at your door while you are at work, you receive a notification and can interact as if you were home. I completely understand the security value of such a device. However, my privacy concerns outweigh the benefits. These devices are invasive to your neighbors across the street and provide potential hacking attempts since they are connected to the internet. In 2021, Ring announced it would start allowing your neighbors to connect their devices to your Wi-Fi without consent. I could never imagine allowing this in my home.

Televisions: Practically every modern TV available today has embedded Wi-Fi and software which reports usage back to the manufacturer. Some possess front-facing cameras. This is extremely invasive. Most people express little concern for this, as they never connect the TV to their home Wi-Fi, which is encrypted with a password. This is not enough to prevent connection. Some TVs are configured to connect to any open Wi-Fi, such as a neighbor or coffee shop. You could find the wireless adapter and unsolder it from the board, but you would take a high risk of ruining the TV. My preference is to purchase monitors instead of televisions. Since I connect my TV to a media center and amplifier with speakers, a large computer monitor is plenty for my needs. You may pay a slight premium for this, but I find it justified.

Samsung is one of the most popular smart TV manufacturers. During Christmas season of 2019, they made a strong marketing push in reference to their "intelligent" TVs which could control home automation; learn to know your interests; and listen for voice activation through mandatory internal microphones (which are always enabled). They also promoted use of internal cameras (which are always enabled and facing the viewer) and the ability to control your TV from any smartphone. I find all of this invasive to our privacy, but their own privacy policy confirms why I will never have one of these devices in my home. The following is an excerpt.

"...the IBA Service will collect information about your TV viewing history (including information about the networks, channels, websites visited and programs viewed on your Samsung Smart TV and the amount of time spent viewing them) and Samsung Smart TV usage information (such as how long and often you use the apps on your Smart TV). We may use automatic content recognition (ACR) and other technologies to capture your TV viewing history. We also may obtain other behavioral and demographic data from trusted third-party data sources..."

The ACR feature referenced in their policy is the ability for Samsung to collect screen captures of your current viewing, transmit them to Samsung networks, and analyze the content. This could include public channels, streaming services, private content played through external media, photographs, home movies, and anything else which may be present on your screen. Yes, even pornography can be copied and transmitted to Samsung. Do you view personal slideshows of family photos on your smart TV? Technically, those can be collected and transmitted back to the manufacturer. Some online privacy enthusiasts have reported that Samsung transmits data through over 200 connections within ten minutes to various subdomains of samsungelectronics.com. Is this legal? Yes, we agree to their terms of service by simply using the product. What can you do?

The first step is to avoid these features when possible. Never connect your TV to any Wi-Fi. If still concerned, create an open Wi-Fi access point and monitor the TV and router log to see if a connection was made to the open network. If you know your TV has no connection to the internet, you are probably fine. Cover any cameras with privacy stickers as mentioned earlier. Navigate through your on-screen controls and disable everything possible. This does not prevent communication attempts, but should lessen the threats substantially.

Lack of connections will also disable desired features such as Netflix and other premium streaming services. I always recommend a separate media server for these options, such as a Roku, Apple TV, or FireTV device. These have their own privacy issues and concerns, but do not send data to your television manufacturer. Each possesses their own version of ACR, but also allows you to disable the option completely. Personally, I prefer a Kodi media server. This option requires a bit of work to set up, but affords more privacy. The details of a Kodi installation exceeds the scope of this book, but online tutorials are abundant.

My policy is to avoid all unnecessary internet-connect devices as possible. My refrigerator does not need to be online. I prefer to control my thermostat with my hand while in my home. Every time you provide internet access to hardware in your home, you now have an additional attack surface. If you do not constantly apply security patches to these devices, you risk immediate exposure once a new vulnerability is published. It is easier to avoid the problem completely by minimizing the number of internet-connected devices. Even if you think you have a low-tech home, it is still vital to scan for vulnerabilities. I conduct two types of audits often within my home and the homes of clients. The first is to discover any connected devices which may be unauthorized. The second is to scan for open Wi-Fi which could unintentionally be used to transmit data from any devices desired to be offline.

Scanning Devices: Since I possess a pfSense firewall as explained previously, it is quite easy to identify the devices on my network. After logging in to pfSense, navigate to "Status" > "DHCP Leases". This screen displays every device on the network which has been issued an IP address from pfSense. This should include any devices connected through your wireless router, as long as you disabled DHCP from that device and rely on pfSense to provide the addresses. If you see anything with an unusual name, investigate.

Scanning Open Wi-Fi: I first reset the network connections on my iPhone (Settings > General > Reset > Reset Network Settings > Confirm). This removes any known Wi-Fi connections. I then analyze any networks without a lock icon in my Wi-Fi connection screen (Settings > Wi-Fi > Networks) while I move around my property. If I locate any open connections which I control, I make the necessary changes. If I find a neighbor with open Wi-Fi, I politely tell them about the risks associated with this behavior. My goal is to simply eliminate any open Wi-Fi which could be used by any device without my authorization.

DNA Kits

Consumer DNA testing kits, such as those from 23andMe and Ancestry.com, provide a detailed map of your genealogy which can include information about your family history and potential diseases to which you could be susceptible. These home testing kits usually require a cheek swab or saliva sample which is mailed to the company. That sample includes your unique genetic code. Most companies will share that data with law enforcement, sell it to third parties, and provide it for numerous lucrative research projects. In the future, it could influence insurance premiums or the ability to obtain insurance at all. I find this frightening.

Many of my clients have asked how to utilize these services anonymously. In simple terms, you cannot. You could order a kit using an alias, masked credit card payment, and anonymous mail drop, but that would be the end of your privacy. Since your DNA sample is unique only to you, it would not take long to discover your true identity. Once another family member submitted a sample using their true name, your sample would be associated due to the genetic lineage. After enough samples were collected from other family members, public data could be used to make the connection from them to you. I strongly recommend avoiding these services, and I encourage your family to do the same. If you think I am being paranoid, research the warning issued by the Pentagon in December of 2019. In an internal memo, Pentagon leadership urged military personnel not to take mail-in DNA tests, warning that they create security risks, are unreliable, and could negatively affect service members' careers.

I suspect that most readers of a book such as this would never want to have a third-party company sequence their DNA, so I will stop the sales pitch for avoiding this technology. Instead, let's focus on what can be done if you have already submitted to this type of testing. We know that your data has already been shared, but you can stop future privacy violations. The following instructions will prevent your stored DNA data from being shared or sold by the top three providers.

23andMe: Log in to your 23andMe account and navigate to the account settings page. Click the "Delete Your Data" option under "23andMe Data". Download all of your data before you destroy it. If you agreed to have your physical sample saved, it will be destroyed. Some data, including your DNA, gender, and date of birth, will be retained in order to comply with various medical regulations. However, the company will no longer use or share that information.

Ancestry: Log in to your Ancestry account and click the "DNA" tab. Choose "Your DNA Results Summary" and click "Settings". Choose "Delete Test Results" and re-enter your password. This process will delete your DNA data and prevent you from appearing in any "family finder" results. If desired, you can delete your entire Ancestry account. Your DNA information will be retained for regulatory compliance purposes, but no longer shared or sold.

MyHeritage: Log in to your MyHeritage account and click your name in the upper-right corner. Choose "Account Settings" and scroll to the bottom of the page. Click "Delete Account". Since MyHeritage labs are CLIA-certified, they will still retain some information about you, but no longer share or sell any data.

Removing this data prevents unauthorized breaches from leaking your sensitive details; private companies from profiting from your DNA; and whatever future risks may surface once companies execute new invasive uses for your genetic profile. I believe we are in the infancy of abuses of DNA data.

Fitness Trackers

Digital health monitoring devices have become very popular. Both Google and Apple understand the value of the mass amounts of personal data captured by these gadgets. It would be very easy to simply state that you should avoid all fitness tracking devices, as they all suck up your personal health data for their own benefit. However, I hear from many people who apply these devices to their daily grind in order to obtain better health and a happier life. Therefore, I provide a few considerations for privacy while benefiting from the features.

First, I absolutely avoid anything manufactured by Fitbit. While some of the older devices have the ability to protect your data, anything purchased recently provides user data to the manufacturer. Alphabet Inc., the parent company of Google, announced its intent to acquire Fitbit on November 1, 2019. The sale closed in 2020. This acquisition provides all collected health data to Google for any use desired. I also avoid anything from Apple. While their business model is hardware sales, and they tout privacy as a fundamental right to its users, they are still a huge company which could benefit from the sale of the health data of millions of customers.

This leaves many independent companies which offer various levels of privacy and security within their devices. I suggest looking for devices which provide the following features.

- Allows you to disable Bluetooth and Wi-Fi
- Enables all features without creating an account with the manufacturer
- Allows you to operate the device without internet access
- Provides enough storage capacity to retain collected information within the device
- Does not require connection to a mobile device

As technology capabilities increase, finding a fitness tracker which respects privacy will become more difficult. I encourage you to research older devices instead of the latest trends.

Apple AirTags

In 2021, Apple introduced AirTags. These small devices can be used to track your lost backpack, keys, or electronics. They can also be used to track us. Since they use nearby iPhone devices to collect and report locations, a direct internet connection is not required. This presents a scary opportunity for stalkers. If I place an AirTag in your backpack and you go home with it, I see your location in real time. While Apple has implemented abuse preventions, they do not help much. A device will beep if separated from its owner for three days, but the damage would already be done. Apple iOS users can download a Bluetooth scanning application such as LightBlue and search for connections labeled "Unnamed". This might indicate an AirTag is nearby. Android users have a better option called AirGuard which is available on F-Droid. It identifies any nearby AirTags and can even report the historical activity. I occasionally launch the application in crowded areas; identify any nearby AirTags; and execute the option to make them all sound an alarm.

Financial Data Aggregators

I started my first business in 2006. I began using a service called Mint to organize the finances of the company. Mint was later acquired by Intuit (Quicken) and many new features were added. The online service connected to my bank, downloaded all transactions, and helped me understand the flow of my finances. It relied on a service called Yodlee to keep the connection from my bank to Mint alive. At the time, I never considered the privacy implications of using this type of service.

While I allowed my accounts to be updated daily, third parties were allowed to analyze my transactions and sell that information to practically any other company. Today, there are an abundance of financial data aggregators which will happily facilitate connections to your accounts in order to collect data about you. Quicken, Mint, Yodlee, Plaid, Banktivity, and many others generate billions of dollars of revenue thanks to your data. Consider the following example.

Assume you have a software program, such as Banktivity, installed on your computer. You have paid for the annual service which synchronizes the transactions from your bank account to the software. You can now conveniently keep tabs on your money. However, Banktivity relies on synchronization services from Yodlee, which is now owned by Envestnet. Envestnet receives and analyzes all of your transactions and packages that information for sale to the majority of large financial institutions. Every transaction you have ever made is now in the hands of countless banks, investment firms, and credit providers. This happens without a warrant, since

you agreed to the sharing by simply using the product. Today, Envestnet has over 3,000 employees and over a trillion dollars in assets under management.

I encourage you to avoid any service which offers to analyze your financial data or connect to your bank accounts. The convenience does not outweigh the privacy violation. The information collected by these companies could be used to influence insurance premiums, credit scores, or loan applications.

As I write this section, the Wall Street Journal reports that Yodlee is accused of selling consumers' personal financial data without proper consent. Three lawmakers submitted a letter calling on the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the matter. Yodlee, now a unit of Envestnet, currently aggregates data from consumers' financial accounts within 15 of the 20 largest U.S. banks, impacting more than 25 million users globally. The letter partially stated "Consumers' credit and debit card transactions can reveal information about their health, sexuality, religion, political views, and many other personal details. Consumers generally have no idea of the risks to their privacy that Envestnet is imposing on them". I suspect we will soon learn of new ways that companies such as this are violating our privacy.

Unintentional Sharing by Friends & Family

Next, consider your future circle of trust. For many clients, their worst privacy exposure is created by their friends and family. Friends may accidentally expose your home address when they post photos to social networks, and family members will not understand why they cannot send Christmas cards to your home address in your name. This is a delicate consideration which should be discussed with everyone in your household. For my clients with extreme privacy needs, I take a very strict stance. The only people in your life who should know your address should be those who will continuously visit you at your home with your consent. Even then, use caution.

I know this sounds restrictive and harsh. The reality is that every weak link in your privacy strategy is one accidental action away from exposing your hard work. Some clients prefer to visit friends and family instead of welcoming them into their own home. Most provide the PMB address as the only mail contact for cards and letters. You must strongly consider the amount of accurate information you are willing to share and with whom. For many years, I knew people who would temporarily hide any number markings on their home when friends visited. This prevented them from writing down the address and later accidentally exposing it. Today, online maps and GPS eliminate the need for a posted address. Your guests' smartphones are a much bigger threat over human error. I cannot tell you how to approach your own family and friends, but I can disclose a few scenarios that have helped my clients.

When my family visits me at my home, I have a strict faraday bag rule. In my case, I meet them at the nearest town and escort them to my property. I blame poor Google Maps directions and my concern they will get lost. When we meet in town, I collect their phones in a large Faraday bag. They know I am a bit eccentric and no longer question many of my antics. I tell them that they will have a means for communication once we get to the home and assure them that a weekend without phones will be great for all of us. At the house, I provide a community laptop which I have never used with my own accounts. It has a Debian Linux operating system and a Firefox browser (with strong privacy settings). The laptop is connected to my guest Wi-Fi protected by my firewall with VPN. They can visit any website, check any email, and enter any passwords they choose. They can stay connected without exposing my home address through cellular towers or GPS data.

I realize that this will not work for many readers. Most people will refuse to give up their phone and must be connected at all times. I respect their decision and offer to spend time with those people outside of my home area. I am also fortunate that there is no active cellular signal on my property. This was very intentional.

Kindle and Other E-Readers

You may be surprised to see a section devoted to electronic book readers, such as the Kindle. After all, what could be invasive about reading an e-book? You may be surprised. If you are using a Kindle, Amazon collects and stores the following details about you in your profile, and then shares it with third parties (with your consent from the Terms of Service with which you agreed when activating the unit).

- All books which you have purchased through the device
- All books which you have read through the device
- All books which you have searched from the device
- The last page read of any book in your account
- Any annotations, highlights, or markings within all books
- Speed at which you read any book
- Device language setting
- Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connections
- Estimated locations and signal strength
- Times and dates of usage with device log files

Some will argue that this is not a big deal. Those people probably did not make it this far into the book. I believe that this is a very big deal. Per the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), this data is shared upon request with law enforcement, civil litigation attorneys, and other Amazon services. If you are involved in a lawsuit, your reading habits, including the date and time that you read a specific chapter, are available to the case. If that happens, this can become public record. Imagine that you are in a child custody dispute or a bitter divorce. If you have been reading books about privacy and security, moving to a foreign country as an expatriate, or growing cannabis, these titles may be used to paint you as shady or unfit. It may be argued that you were reading privacy books to conceal an affair. Your interest in a book about living overseas may be construed as you planning to flee the country to avoid child support obligations. A book about cannabis may be used to make you look like a drug dealer.

Amazon obtains this data when you connect your device to the internet. This happens over the internal Wi-Fi or cellular connection within the unit. The easy solution is to turn off the connection. However, this is also how you obtain new books and have them sent to your device. I encourage you to withdraw from this type of data collection by using the following techniques. I will assume that you are purchasing a new Kindle, but the steps can be applied to existing units. Please note that only a new Kindle will give you complete anonymity. Any existing device already possesses your personal information.

- Purchase a new Kindle from Amazon using a new account created in an alias name. Pay with a masked card for added privacy. Never attach this account to your real name or home address. Ship the device to your CMRA Box or Amazon Locker. Register the device with this account and use any alias name for the Kindle.
- Turn the device on while outside the range of any public Wi-Fi. This could be in your home if your wireless router is secured with a password. Immediately place the Kindle into airplane mode which will disconnect any wireless connections. Never disable airplane mode.
- Order any books for this device from the same Amazon account which was used to purchase the Kindle. The books you purchase will only be accessible on this specific unit. Change the default option of "Deliver to Kindle" to "Transfer via Computer". Your Kindle will be listed on the following screen. Select "Deliver to".
- A file with the extension of AZW will be downloaded to your computer. Connect your Kindle to your computer via a USB cable. You should see your Kindle listed as a new drive. Copy and paste the book into the Documents folder of the Kindle. Unplug the device and you can now read this book without invasive tactics.

If the Kindle never leaves airplane mode, you will not share any data from the device. Furthermore, the Kindle cannot retrieve new advertisements to place on your home screen. If your device has never touched the internet, there will never be any ads. Amazon will know the books that you have purchased, but will not know who you are. They will not know the details of your reading and annotating. They cannot target you with ads similar to books that you like. If you plan on purchasing a Kindle, I recommend creating a new Amazon account, and using this account only for Kindle-related book purchases.

Reality Check: We are diving down the rabbit hole of connected devices. We should pause a moment to weigh our risk versus reward. Technology is amazing. The ability to connect our devices to the internet provides wonderful benefit and entertainment. Going too far with disconnections may quickly upset others in your home. Before blindly eliminating internet connectivity from every device you own, consider a conversation with others about the usage and risks.

There might be a middle ground which can gain more privacy while enjoying some of the features of the various devices which you have purchased. I have found that discussing these issues with family before "laying down the law" can create better acceptance of your desires and paranoia. Ultimately, try to involve those who will be impacted by your decisions. While this book is titled ***Extreme Privacy***, and my personal application of these tactics are "all or nothing", every situation is unique. Again, pick your battles wisely.

Disinformation

Misinformation is when a person unintentionally provides inaccurate information which causes inappropriate content to be released or replicated. I encourage disinformation. This is when a person intentionally provides false or misleading information with an attempt to create inaccurate data. Disinformation is more valuable to us than occasional misinformation. Disinformation will help make any accurate data about you seem useless inside a stream of completely inaccurate content.

If you have been extremely successful with eliminating your online information and prohibiting new data from being acquired, you may not need disinformation. However, if you have found a few services that display your private data, or simply want to harden your overall security, disinformation may be the perfect solution. Before proceeding, consider whether this action is right for you. Completing these tasks will add more information about you to the internet. Since the information supplied is false, there is little privacy concern. However, this will lead to much more content available about your name.

Many people like this because it creates a difficult scenario when someone tries to locate them. Some people do not like this tactic because it makes their name more visible throughout the internet. Only you can determine if this action is appropriate. Understand that it may be difficult or impossible to remove the false information which you provide. This section will identify possibilities that you may consider for your own disinformation attempts. They are divided into five specific groups. The options are endless, and I encourage you to email me any great ideas that you have.

- **Name Disinformation**: This will focus on providing many different names to be associated with your real address and real telephone number to make it difficult to identify the true owner of each. This is beneficial for hiding your real name from people or companies searching for information about your address or number.
- **Address Disinformation**: This will focus on associating various addresses with your real name to make it difficult for people or companies to determine which address is your real home.
- **Telephone Disinformation**: This will associate various telephone numbers with your real name to make it difficult for a person or business to identify a valid number to contact you.
- **Business Disinformation**: This will indicate that a fake online business is associated with your true residence. This can dominate online data which may help hide your true details.
- **Death Disinformation**: While extreme, this may be your final data posted online.

Name Disinformation

Name disinformation will create an appearance that numerous people live at your residence. This could increase the delivery of mail and advertisements to your house. However, none of it will jeopardize your privacy. In fact, it will raise your level of privacy quickly.

Earlier, I explained how to use alias names in connection with your home address. When you activate internet service using a masked card, you have the option to use any name desired. The information you provide will eventually be released to third-party data companies. This is a form of disinformation. There are two routes you can take with this. You could choose a different alias name for every bill and service, which will generate chaos. This may be desired, but I prefer a more reserved approach. I choose a single generic name and place various bills under that name. This creates a strong appearance that this person is the true resident. Even if you place your utilities in the name of a trust or LLC, the companies will still want to attach a name to the account. Alias name consistency can create an appearance of legitimacy.

Next, identify a couple of popular magazines for which you are interested in a subscription. Conduct a search for that magazine plus "free subscription". You may be surprised at the abundance of magazines that will give anyone a free subscription. I have found Wired, Forbes, and numerous technology magazines to continuously offer free trials. The most vital part of this exercise is that you do not provide anything close to your real name. Additionally, provide a different name for each subscription. I like to relate each name to the magazine that is being requested. The following could be a guide.

Men's Health: John Sporting
Money Magazine: Tim Cashman
Wired: Alex Techie
Food Magazine: James Cook

I also encourage you not to go overboard. Please only obtain subscriptions that you will read or pass on to someone who will enjoy them. There is no need to waste the product and immediately throw them in the trash. You will also eventually get frustrated if you have several issues arriving every week filling your mailbox.

Similar to magazines, I encourage you to identify a single newspaper that you would enjoy receiving. Newspaper subscriber databases are unique and cater to a specific market. This subscription information will leak out slowly to third-party companies. I do not recommend multiple newspaper subscriptions unless this is appropriate for your daily reading abilities. I enjoy reading the Wall Street Journal every day. A search online for "Wall Street Journal 39 week" will identify dozens of websites which will provide you a 39-week free trial of the paper. Complete the request and provide a unique name. I have found Mary S. Market to be appropriate. You will begin receiving your print and digital editions within one week. At the time of this writing, I could not locate any completely free trials, but I did find a twelve-week subscription for $12. You can cancel at the end without any further fees. If you choose this route, be sure to use a masked card which can block any future charges.

Trade magazines and mailings are designed to target a specific industry or trade. These are usually free by default and generate revenue from the advertising within the publication. Visiting www.tradepub.com will display numerous options to consider. I encourage you to be cautious with this method. Many people will load up on magazines of interest and use a false name. While this is acceptable, it does create an association with your home address to your real interests. For example, if you subscribe to seven different web design magazines, and you are a web design artist, this could lead to an accurate profile about the people who live at your home. I would only choose this option if you do not take advantage of a magazine or newspaper subscription.

The time will come when you will need some professional work completed at your home. This will often happen the moment that you stop associating your real name with your home address. Use this as a disinformation opportunity. Consider the following example.

A friend recently discovered that he needed a new roof. Calling a stranger on Craigslist and paying cash would have been acceptable for privacy concerns. However, he understandably wanted to hire a professional company and possess a valid warranty on the new roof. He had recently conducted a complete cleaning of his personal information on the internet, and was concerned that this could jeopardize his privacy.

I recommended that he identify the company that he wished to hire and ask them to provide a quote. He gave them his real address for the roof job, but provided the name of a fake contracting company that was similar to the name of his invisible LLC. If your LLC was named Particle Ventures LLC, you could provide Ventures Contracting. This allowed him to keep his real name away from the process and attach yet another type of disinformation to the address. Upon completion of the work, my friend possessed a written warranty attached to the address and not to a person. This would suffice for replacement if problems with the roof appeared. If you do not possess an invisible LLC, you could use the name of your trust.

Remember, we are not using any of these methods to commit fraud. We are only protecting our privacy and will pay any accounts in full. For most work like this, paying either cash or with a check is acceptable. It is not likely that the name on the check will be attached to the data from the work, but it is possible.

Address Disinformation

This is the most vital type of disinformation if you are trying to disassociate your real name from your real address. The goal with these methods is to create an illusion that you currently live somewhere that you do not. This will make accurate name searches difficult. Before proceeding, you should have an idea of which addresses you will be providing. This section will explain how to create at least three valid addresses that you can intentionally associate with your real name. The purpose is to show recent activity if someone was to search for you within a people search service. These services always display the most current information first. Therefore, you may want to complete as much of the removal process as possible, which was previously discussed, before providing this disinformation. Additionally, you would want to do this after you have stopped associating your real name with your address.

It is very important not to use another individual's home address. While it may not be illegal, it is not ethical and not fair to the other person. If you are hiding from an abusive ex, you do not want to put someone else in danger when they decide to break into a house believing it is yours. If you are a police officer trying to protect your family from criminals seeking revenge, you should not send them to some stranger's house and let those residents deal with it. We will only choose locations that do not pose a threat to anyone.

The first address may be a place that does not exist. Many companies possess verification software that will identify invalid addresses. These programs can often be fooled by selecting addresses in new neighborhoods. The following instructions will easily identify a new address for you.

- Conduct a Google search for "new construction city, state". Replace "city, state" with a location at least a few towns away from you. I also recommend clicking "Search Tools", "Any Time", and selecting "Past Year". This will display recent results.
- Choose a search result that connects to a real estate website which displays new homes for sale. The newly planted grass, identical houses, and identical sale price in each listing are also indicators of a brand-new neighborhood.
- Conduct a search on Zillow.com for the highest number visible on the chosen street. You should see a house attached to this address. Increase the address by ten or twenty numbers. In this scenario, I searched 1017 Park Charles Blvd. Zillow informed me that there was no house at this address.
- Search this new address on Google maps and confirm the house does not exist. Switch to the satellite view and confirm there would not likely be enough land to add the number of houses necessary to create this address.
- Document this new address and use it for disinformation.

If this is too much effort, replicate a process which was previously explained in regard to fake apartment addresses. Locate a large apartment building; determine the highest unit number; and identify a higher unit number which does not exist. The apartment street address should pacify the verification systems, which often ignore specific unit numbers. I find this method to be the most accepted by address verification systems.

Occasionally, advanced verification software will identify a fake address as invalid. You may need to provide a real address that is listed as residential but does not belong to an individual family. You may want to choose the address of an emergency shelter. The residents in these are constantly changing, and most of them have 24-hour staff and security. Since many people must consider these a temporary residence, the addresses often defeat the most advanced verification services. Choosing a city and searching it online including the terms "shelter", "men's home", "women's home", and "homeless" will usually provide options. I use this as a last option.

Public library addresses are almost always identified as commercial, but the addresses will pass standard validation. For most disinformation purposes, the address of any public building, including a library, will suffice. Now that you have some ideas for your new address, the next techniques will help you populate online records with this information.

A less invasive way of populating bad information about you on the internet is responding to television offers during infomercials. You have likely seen various offers for information about devices such as medical alerts, home security systems, and reverse mortgages on both daytime and late-night television. They all offer to send you an informational packet describing how they can help you in any situation. These are always a profitable business anticipating huge financial returns when they engage you for their services. Instead, I will use this as a way to mask my true home address.

I recently watched a commercial for a slow motorized device created to help the elderly and those with disabilities. It was a combination of a wheelchair and a moped that could move anyone around the street, grocery store, or mall. You are probably familiar with these "scooters". I called the number and requested information. I used my real name and an address in a new subdivision that did not exist. I do not like to use real addresses because someone will need to deal with the junk mail that is received. This way, the mailings are simply returned to the business. I purposely provided a street name that I located called "Mobility Way".

Within 90 days, while conducting a routine query of my name on people search websites, I located an entry for me on "Mobility Way". I now know with certainty that this company shares personal information. If people are trying to locate me, they will have one more address to research and be disappointed. There is no need to wait in front of a television all night with the hopes of catching a great disinformation opportunity. The internet has thousands waiting for you at all times. Searching for any of the following topics will likely present numerous websites eager to send you a free information packet. Providing your new "fake" address will get you quickly listed within several marketing databases with this false information.

Home Scooter	Home Food Delivery	Senior Vacation Tours
Time Share	Diabetes Supplies	AARP
Home Alarm	Medical Alert Systems	Cruise Lines
Lawn Treatment Service	Franklin Mint	

Please do not ever provide any real information about yourself, besides your name, to any of these services. Never provide a credit card number or any other type of payment information, as these types of companies are notorious for unauthorized charges. You should only use this technique to create the illusion that you live somewhere other than your real home. Additionally, if you have a common name, such as John Smith, address disinformation is not likely necessary and should be avoided.

Be aware that paper mailings will likely be delivered from, and returned to, the businesses that you contact. This is very wasteful for both the business and the planet. I encourage you to only perform the actions necessary to

obtain your address disinformation goal. I do not encourage you to unnecessarily contact hundreds of companies. It only takes a few large companies to make an impact on your overall address identity.

Once you are in these marketing databases, you might consider updating your contact information. Assume that various people search websites now display the address information provided to these companies. This alone is a success, but we could take it to another level. Contact each of these companies and ask to update your address because you have recently moved. Provide a new random empty lot or apartment address. Eventually, you may see updated details appear on the people search websites. This can make accurate details harder to find or questionable as legitimate. I understand that this may be overkill for most, if not all, readers. I only present the ideas which enter my head, even if they are extreme.

Advanced Address Disinformation

The previous methods will provide a small layer of privacy disinformation. None of those tactics will fool the big players. Ordering marketing materials in your name to a non-existent address will not populate the desired information within premium data mining companies such as CLEAR, Lexis-Nexis, and TLO. These providers only purchase and distribute vetted data, and place emphasis on lines of credit and public records. Some people may want to push bad data to these services, but I urge caution before considering the following techniques.

In 2019, a client insisted on populating address disinformation into the premium data broker providers. He knew that a potential employer would be conducting a background check which included an inquiry into a premium data service. This client lived in an anonymous home with no ties to his true name. He would not consider providing his actual home address to the potential non-government employer. However, this company demanded to possess a "home address" for all employees. Any address provided would be matched to online records from the premium services. He needed an address to provide on the application which would be present within his premium records profile.

This approaches a grey area in terms of legalities. Lying to a private company about your home address is likely not a crime. Creating disinformation about your home address within data mining companies is also likely legal. Generating false data with the intention of fooling a background check enters new territory for me. If he were applying for a government position, I would have backed away from this request as it could easily cross the line of criminal behavior. Since this was a private organization, I decided to pursue the opportunity.

The first step was to choose an address. This was much more important than using Zillow to find a vacant lot. This needed to be precise, and a place where the world could assume that he lived there indefinitely. We chose a large apartment building near the place of potential employment. For purposes of this example, the address was 1212 State Street. Over 100 apartments were in the building. A quick physical sweep indicated that the apartment numbers followed a pattern of the floor number followed by the room number. The last apartment on the fifth floor was 528. The address for that apartment was 1212 State Street, Apt 528. There were no rooms with 30 in the address on any floor. Therefore, we chose an address of 1212 State Street, Apt 430.

Most address verification systems only consider the street address when associated with apartment buildings. Any apartment number should pass automated scrutiny as long as the street address is correct. My client was confident that the background checks did not include an interview of neighbors or physical inspection of the provided home address. He simply needed an online background check to confirm an address.

Next, we entered an AT&T cellular telephone store and ordered new service. This required a government ID, SSN, and soft-pull on his credit. This violates everything I teach for most clients, but this situation was unique. My client wanted new credit established in order to manipulate the details present in data mining databases. He picked the most inexpensive plan and lowest quality mobile device offered. He would not be using it, and would only abuse the credit inquiry to his benefit. He displayed his DL and provided his real DOB and SSN. He entered the new apartment address on the application and advised that he has recently moved into this new address. The AT&T employee ran the credit check and my client was approved. The system did not care about the

mismatch of an address since the applicant was present in-store with a copy of valid identification. Replicating this attempt online would have likely failed.

I chose AT&T intentionally. In my experience, they always require a soft pull for any new line of service. They also provide the full application details, including the home address, to the services which they use for the credit pull. I have found AT&T to release more details to data mining companies faster than other providers. Also, AT&T provides a money-back guarantee. If my client were to return this unused phone within a few days, he is very likely to receive an entire refund. In this scenario, he wanted to keep the number for additional disinformation. The phone would stay in a Faraday bag at all times.

Next, he traveled to a local BestBuy and applied for an in-store credit card. Again, this made me cringe a bit, but I understood his intent. He provided his DL, DOB, SSN, and new apartment alias address. Since he was in-store with proof of ID, he was approved for a card with a low credit limit. He made a small purchase with this new line of credit and paid it off immediately before interest could accrue.

Within three weeks, we saw evidence of this new address on both his credit report and premium data report. While any investigator would see right through this, it was enough to pass the scrutiny of a standard background check using premium records. He then applied for, and received, his desired job.

For the record, I do NOT recommend these actions for the vast majority of my clients. It is usually unnecessary and can present additional problems. Any future background checks may need to explain this discrepancy on a public report. A government clearance may be denied when you disclose your antics of attempted disinformation with an alias address. There are many more reasons NOT to apply this technique than valid scenarios. I present this only as a tactic to possess in your arsenal of tools.

Proactive Online Content

I usually do not promote the creation of personal social network profiles. However, they can be very useful in some cases. I once consulted a young woman who was the victim of severe harassment by a man who was a former high school classmate of hers. His unwelcome approaches caused her to move and purchase a different vehicle. She was doing well at staying off his radar, but still knew he was looking for her. She created a Facebook page, added a couple photos of her pet, and publicly displayed her location as a town over an hour away. While monitoring the Twitter account of her stalker, she observed him "check into" a bar in that very town, likely looking for her. While this does not solve the issue long-term, it provided enough uncertainty to confuse the stalker and waste his time.

Creating several social network profiles and including publicly visible location data can be beneficial. You can either make them very confusing by placing different locations on each profile, or place the same city on all of them to create a convincing situation. For most clients, I find LinkedIn to offer a great platform for disinformation. I can create an account, provide a real name, and choose any current workplace and location desired. This can quickly throw an adversary off my clients' trails if the person is actively trying to locate them.

Aside from LinkedIn, I find Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook accounts valuable for online disinformation. However, always apply the digital security principles discussed earlier. After the accounts are created, never log in to them unnecessarily and always use a VPN. Never provide any sensitive details and never access the profile from your mobile device(s).

We can also rely on free services such as **Carrd** (carrd.co) to easily create a landing page on their servers. These will be indexed quickly and provide a realistic false internet presence. They appear more like a personal web page than a blog. While free WordPress pages can replicate the details for this purpose, I find them to appear suspicious. A page from Carrd appears much more professional and realistic. I prefer single pages within the "Profile" section. I created a demo page at https://michaelbazzell.carrd.co in less than five minutes. By connecting my disinformation social networks to this landing page, I encourage search engines and data

collection companies to associate the data, such as the fake address, with the dossier they store about me. Eventually, this inaccurate data will be populated across the internet. When I see "UNIT PH51" appear within public databases, I will know that the information was scraped from this page.

If you create appropriate online content about yourself and promote it within search engines, it becomes more relevant to Google in terms of search results. The longer you "age" these pages, the more weight they hold when someone searches your name. The goal is to provide enough "good" online content so that the "bad" stuff is more difficult to find. I have found the following to provide the most impact toward an online search in your name.

You could also consider free blogs on WordPress, Weebly, Wix, and other sites. Your blog should include your name and possibly vague or inaccurate location data. Consider a test example of michaelllezzab.wordpress.com. I created this page for free under the name of Michael Llezzab. If you search that full name, or a fictitious email address which I created of q9u7uaxbspas@opayq.com in Google, you should be linked to the blog(s). If a new website pops up with defamatory content about that name, it will likely appear beneath the results of my aged blog. The more activity within the blog, the higher the preference by search engines.

Websites such as ifttt.com can be configured to automatically populate content to your blog every day. You can see that my example blog receives updates automatically without any need to log in to it. This tells Google that the site is active and places priority over dormant sites. The following instructions will populate your current free WordPress blog with every new post created by another blog hosted at krebsonsecurity.com. This will result in a site similar to mine with constant new content, all automated behind the scenes.

- Create a free WordPress blog at wordpress.com. Supply your real name and any inaccurate details desired, such as a false telephone number and burner email address. Remain logged in to this account in your browser.
- Create a free account with If This Then That at ifttt.com. Search for "WordPress RSS" in the top search field and select the "RSS to WordPress" option. Click the "On" switch and it will ask for your WordPress credentials. Since this is a free throw away blog, I do not object to sharing this unique password. Save and enter a new feed item of "krebsonsecurity.com/feed". Save your entry.
- If you do not see the blog updates on the home page, make sure that "Your Latest Posts" is selected in the Settings > Customize > Homepage Setting menu.

Ideally, you will create numerous blogs which should force any undesired content to later pages in the search results. In my experience, it can take many months before Google indexes these pages. I have also posted numerous resumes which contain inaccurate details for my clients. I have found resumes to be constantly scanned and collected by recruiting services, and this quickly becomes populated online. In one scenario, I uploaded a resume in my client's name with a false telephone number, email address, and city of residence. This was replicated across 14 websites. Today, when you search her name, the first two pages of results are nonsense that does not expose her or display any negative statements. If someone decides to create a negative site about her, it will be buried within these deliberate results. The goal is to populate enough neutral content about yourself in order to suppress any potential negative postings. A good investigator will always dig through every search result. However, the casual internet searcher may not make it past the first page. If you want to generate more traffic to these profiles and an overall higher confidence that the information is legitimate, consider a simple personal landing page on a shared web host with a custom domain, as explained next.

Personal Website & SSL Certificates

Personal websites on your own domain can offer a stronger layer of disinformation. I purchase a domain for many clients associated with their real name, similar to michaelbazzell.com. I then place a static website with inaccurate details, including location and contact information on a shared host. Search engines index these sites quickly and place them as a priority within search results. I have placed a live example online at yourcomputernerds.com. This page includes a royalty-free stock image, false contact details, and links to multiple

social networks. These links help convince data mining websites that the information is real. The site was created using free templates from html5up.net. It appears professional and convincing.

I find Namecheap the most affordable option for this purpose, and the lowest tier of hosting ($30 annually) is usually sufficient. Unfortunately, Namecheap makes it difficult to provide your own SSL certificates for your domain in order to sell you an annual option at an inflated rate. I always recommend an SSL certificate for every website. This is not only an appropriate layer of protection for your visitors, but it also helps elevate your search results on Google and Bing. The following steps are quite technical and should be approached cautiously. They are designed for Namecheap, but should work with most shared web hosts which provides access to a cPanel dashboard. This is an advanced technique only for those comfortable with cPanel and SSH who want to avoid annual SSL fees. Conduct the following within cPanel.

- SSH Access > Manage SSH Keys > Generate a new key > Generate Key
- SSH Access > Manage SSH Keys > Manage > Authorize
- Manage Shell > Enable SSH

Conduct the following within Terminal (Linux or Mac). Replace any uppercase text.

- ssh CPANELUSERNAME@CPANELSERVERADDRESS -p 21098
- curl https://get.acme.sh | sh
- source ~/.bashrc
- acme.sh --register-account --accountemail YOUR@EMAIL.COM
- crontab -l | grep acme.sh
- acme.sh --issue --webroot ~/WEBSITEFOLDER -d DOMAIN.com -d www.DOMAIN.com --staging
- acme.sh --issue --webroot ~/WEBSITEFOLDER -d DOMAIN.com -d www.DOMAIN.com --force
- acme.sh --deploy --deploy-hook cpanel_uapi --domain DOMAIN.COM

After completion, reverse the cPanel steps to delete the SSH keys and disable SSH access. You should now possess an SSL certificate for your site which will auto-renew every 90 days.

Telephone Disinformation

Receiving unwanted telephone calls from telemarketers can be annoying. Calls from them to random numbers are unavoidable. However, targeted calls specific to you can be extra frustrating. You have already learned how to eliminate public record of your telephone number. You may now want to populate disinformation to prevent a person or business from discovering your true home or cellular telephone number.

Before you can provide the false telephone number information with hopes of it being attached to your name within public databases, you must select some appropriate numbers. Most importantly, you never want to provide a false number that belongs to another individual. That is not only rude, but it can also jeopardize that person's right to privacy from unwanted callers. Instead, focus on telephone numbers that either do not exist or belong to services that are never answered by an individual.

My favorite telephone numbers for disinformation are numbers that are always busy and cannot be answered. These were once abundant, but many of them have now been assigned to customers. There are still two large groups of telephone numbers that will always be busy when dialed. The following sets of numbers should work well.

909-661-0001 through 909-661-0090
619-364-0003 through 619-364-0090

The 909 area code serves the Los Angeles area of California and the 619 area code serves the San Diego area. These were early line numbers when service began in these areas and the numbers should not be assigned to any customers. Since these are not toll-free numbers, they should not be flagged as non-residential. Because numbers are ported so often, possessing a number in another area code should not raise any suspicion. When you give someone a number that is always busy, it does not create the appearance of a fake number. These may appear real to a person that would otherwise question the validity of a given number.

There are plenty of unused numbers that announce "disconnected" when dialed. Most of these are temporary and will be assigned to a customer at some point. The following range of numbers all announce a "non-working number" when dialed. The area code serves Pennsylvania. Giving one of these numbers to a person or business can enforce a desire to not be contacted. Always test the numbers which you choose before using them.

717-980-0000 through 717-980-9999

One of the quickest ways to associate a false telephone number with your real name is to enter various contests. You have probably seen a brand-new vehicle parked inside your local shopping mall. A box next to it likely contained blank pieces of paper asking for your name, address, and telephone number with promises that someone would win the vehicle. Have you ever known anyone that won a vehicle this way? I do not.

Instead, these gimmicks are often used to obtain a great list of potential customers that might be interested in automobiles. In one example, shopping malls across the country held a contest to win a car. A shiny Mustang was parked next to the entry box. However, they did not disclose that only one winner for the entire country would be announced. Furthermore, that winner did not get a new car. Instead, they were offered a small check to cover a used car purchase. Sneaky. The content obtained from the entry forms is often combined with other contest data and sold to numerous companies. Eventually, the provided information is attached to you through a marketing profile that may follow you forever.

In years past, I have always laughed at the idea of entering these contests. Today, I never pass up this opportunity. I always provide my real name, my false address from the address disinformation section mentioned earlier, and one of the "busy" telephone numbers previously listed. I like to use different numbers every time and watch for any online associations to me from these numbers. I then know which contest companies are selling my information.

Most grocery stores have a shopper's card program which provides discounts on merchandise. These are portrayed as opportunities to save money for being a loyal customer to the brand. In reality, these cards are closely monitored to learn about your shopping habits. This data is used to create custom advertising and offers. The only benefit of joining this program is the savings on the items which you purchase. The risk of joining is the guaranteed profile that will be created about you and sold to interested parties. However, you can enjoy the benefits without jeopardizing your privacy. This is a great opportunity for telephone disinformation.

Practically all of the stores which utilize this type of savings program allow you to access your account by the telephone number that you provided during registration. You are not required to provide or scan your shopper's card. You can simply enter your telephone number to obtain the savings and attach your purchases to your profile. I have found the telephone number of 867-5309 to work at most stores.

This number may not look familiar, but say the number out loud. This was the title of a song by Tommy Tutone in 1982 that gained a lot of popularity. This number is currently assigned to customers in most area codes. In fact, it is often sought after by businesses due to the familiarity. I never use this number with services that may try to contact me. Instead, I only use it when I register a shopping card at a grocery store.

If I am shopping in Chicago, I use an appropriate area code, such as 847. If you ever find yourself at a Safeway store anywhere in the world, you can use 847-867-5309 as your shopper's card number and it will be accepted

without hesitation. If you find that this number does not work at another chain, you should consider requesting a shopper's card and provide it as your number.

When I created this account, I provided my real name, the disinformation address discussed earlier (which does not exist), a Chicago area code, the 867-5309 number, and a specific email address from an email forwarding service. I will never use that email account again, and will know which company provided my information when I receive unwanted email at it. I can now provide 847-867-5309 as my member number when I shop at Safeway in order to benefit from the advertised sale prices. Now, you can too.

As a community service, I create new accounts at every store that I can using the number of 847-867-5309. The more strangers that use this number during their shopping, the more anonymous we all are. The data collected by the store will not be about one individual. Instead, it will be a collective of numerous families. If you locate a store without a membership with this number, please consider activating your own card with address disinformation. Within weeks, this information will be associated with your real name. It will add an additional layer of anonymity by making any present information difficult to find and harder to prove accurate.

In 2021, I began seeing intentional blocking of any grocery rewards account containing a telephone number which includes 867-5309. It seems they have caught on to us. Because of this, I have begun a new telephone disinformation campaign with the number 248-434-5508. This is a VOIP number which plays an excerpt of Rick Astley's 1987 hit "Never Gonna Give You Up" in the outgoing message, which is also known as a Rick Roll. If this number should fail, consider 212-255-2748, which plays random payphone calls from the 80's and 90's. I have given this number out to many companies demanding a way to contact me.

I provide this number to grocery rewards systems whenever I can. If you do the same, we can create global coverage and all benefit from the usage. Anytime you find a business which requires member discount cards, and the number does not work, please apply for membership with this number and the name of Rick Astley. Together, we can escape the abuses of these systems.

I suspect others are now aware of this number, as it is listed as a verified number registered to "Rick Astley". The web page at https://www.callercenter.com/248-434-5508.html is one of dozens of sites which announce this association. This is an example of a successful telephone disinformation campaign.

Business and 411 Disinformation

Regardless of whether you desire name, address, or telephone disinformation, you should consider business listings. Most of these types of websites allow a personal name to be used instead of a business name. Any data provided will replicate all over the internet quickly. The first service which I submit is listyourself.net, followed by Google Maps and Yelp.

The irony of suggesting these free services is that most of my clients want to avoid them or remove their information. Any data provided here, such as your name and address, will be populated across multiple people search websites within weeks. However, we can use this as a strong disinformation strategy. Before conducting any of the following tasks, consider your goals and what types of disinformation you want to be publicly available. You cannot change your mind later on this one. Whatever you give them is permanently public data. Consider the following steps I took on behalf of a client.

This client had successfully moved into an anonymous home, but knew her abusive ex-boyfriend had been released from jail and was actively pursuing her new location. A disinformation campaign was appropriate in her scenario. I visited listyourself.net and chose "Individual, personal or business listings". I then provided the following details.

- Phone number: I chose a telephone number of the hotel where I was staying at the time, in a city far from the client's home.
- Name: I provided my client's real name.
- Country: I entered my client's true country.
- Address: I supplied an address of a large apartment building in a city far from the client's home. New York City has many buildings with over 500 units each. This is the address I will publicly associate with my client, without an apartment number.
- Email: A ProtonMail alias address used for "junk" in the name of the client. This address is not associated with any online accounts or login portals.
- Validation Method: I chose the "Call me with a spoken code" option.

This service will waive any fees as long as they can confirm you have provided a true telephone number. Before I clicked "Add Listing", I took my laptop to the front desk of the hotel and spoke to the front desk clerk. I told her I was trying to connect to a web call with my boss, but it wants to verify my location. I asked "Can I have them call your main line and have them give me a code?", which she happily allowed. If met with resistance, you could show your "cracked screen" decoy phone which was previously explained. The telephone rang, she answered, and repeated the automated code she was given during the call. My listing was approved. Next, I navigated to www.google.com/business and signed in with an alias Google account which I only use for this purpose. I then conducted the following steps.

- Enter the name of my client as the business name.
- Confirm I wish to add a location.
- Enter the address used previously, and click "Next".
- Confirm that customers are not served outside this location.
- Provide a generic category such as "Personal Trainer".
- Leave the contact details blank.
- Click "Finish".
- Choose the options to "Verify by Phone".
- Provide the same hotel number.
- Repeat the process with the front desk, entering the code provided.

Some people have reported that they do not receive the option to verify by phone, and can only verify with a mailed postcard. I suspect this is due to the Google account being used. My account may have been allowed because it has been active for many years and has activated numerous businesses. If you do not receive the option to verify by phone, do not request a postcard and move on.

Next, I navigated to biz.yelp.com/signup_business/new/ and registered my client for her own personal Yelp page. I provided the same real name, alias apartment building address in the city used previously, junk email address, and a Google Voice number reserved for disinformation purposes. I was immediately sent an email to verify the account, and was forwarded to a page to create a Yelp account for the client. I completed the registration and was asked to verify the telephone number via confirmation code. The Yelp account was then active. Within a few days, searching my client's name on Google revealed a Yelp page identifying her home trainer business being located in a large apartment building in New York. Google Maps eventually confirmed this address for her home-based business. Her name, alias address, and number were populated on numerous 411-style websites within two weeks. That should keep the abusive ex-boyfriend busy for a while.

These services are constantly closing any loopholes which we use to exploit their services for our own benefit. By the time you read this, you may discover that these specific examples no longer work due to abuse. If this happens, use the overall strategies and identify new ways to supply business disinformation. If you strike gold, consider sharing your tactic with me through my website.

Death Disinformation

I hesitate writing this. However, I once had a client who needed to "die" digitally. She had no immediate family, a few close friends, and a dedicated former lover trying to harm her at any chance he could find. During an initial consultation, she stated "I wish he thought I was dead". I cautiously discussed the possibility, which she immediately demanded to be executed. The most bang-for-your-buck option is an obituary in the Legacy network of newspapers.

You can navigate to legacy.com > Obituaries > Submit an Obituary > Select a state > Select a newspaper. You will need to submit the obituary directly to the local paper of choice, and anything printed will be acquired by legacy.com and distributed. Expect a small fee. This will make an obituary extremely public, which can never be reversed. The obituary on legacy.com can be shared on social networks, and really "sells" the death. Use caution, because some newspapers demand a death certificate. I have found extremely small newspapers near the town of birth of the target are less likely to demand this versus large city newspapers. For extra credit, consider submitting a memorial and photo to Find A Grave at findagrave.com. If your Photoshop skills are not sufficient, contact an online tombstone maker and ask for an example of how your deceased relative's details would look (providing your information). They will create a realistic image and submit it to you for approval.

Overall, I never recommend this strategy. If you are in a situation regarding this extreme activity, contact me first. This could have a severe impact on future credit, employment, relationships, and sanity. If you conduct any level of research into faking your own death, you will mostly find stories of people who were caught doing this. For more information, read ***Playing Dead*** by Elizabeth Greenwood. I never encourage anyone to commit full pseudocide (faking your own death). Traditionally, this is done to collect life insurance funds, evade outstanding arrest warrants, get out of paying various loans, or simply start over with a new identity. Unless you plan on living in the mountains without any source of income, it simply will not work. Although no federal or state statutes explicitly ban pseudocide, you are likely to commit crimes such as conspiracy or fraud during the process.

My colleague "Mike A." offers one last piece of advice. If you receive undesired mail, such as advertisements, in your real name at your home, and you have asked to be removed from the mailing list, consider a death announcement. He purchased a rubber stamp from a local office supply store which prints "Return to Sender - Addressee Deceased" in red ink on any unsolicited mail he receives in his name. He then drops the envelopes in a nearby mailbox for return to the sender. This seems to have a better outcome than a polite request to be removed. I am ashamed I did not think of this. Please note this will likely only work with first class mail, as the post office does not return flyers and other bulk mail.

Disinformation Examples & Results

In 2021, I launched my own disinformation campaign as a test to see how quickly I could populate inaccurate details. I first identified an address in Los Angeles which possessed thirty-five luxury apartments. Each address possessed an amendment of PH and a number, such as PH1 and PH9, to represent Penthouses number 1 through 35. I decided to only use PH40 and above in order to prevent any attacks against anyone residing in the building.

My first address used was 105 S Doheny Dr, PH41, Los Angeles, CA 90048. I used this to register a domain and intentionally declined the domain registration protection service. Almost immediately, I began receiving spam email messages and offers for web design. Within 30 days, my true name and fictitious address were present within a "Leads" dataset sold to mobile app design businesses. Today, this exact address is associated with my name on two public websites. The Whois data for this domain, which announces my false details, can be viewed at https://who.is/whois/yourcomputernerds.com.

I created a disinformation landing page at https://yourcomputernerds.com/ with PH42 as my unit number. The image of "me" is a license-free photo from unsplash.com which can be uploaded to any site desired without

attribution. I used the Rick Roll telephone number previously explained and provided an email address of mb@yourcomputernerds.com. I associated Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn profiles. This page has been indexed by every major search engine and has been scraped by dozens of people search websites. I see this address offered on one popular "Background Check" service when my name is searched.

Next, I created a Twitter account at https://twitter.com/MichaelBazzell0. It displays my home address as PH43 and includes a false date of birth and link to the domain I associated with the previous address. This generates a link between these two resources and starts to convince the online artificial intelligence machines that I am real.

My Facebook profile is at https://facebook.com/100010658471564. It also contains the same photo, a link to my Twitter page, my disinformation website, and vague location details. This continues the population of data to confuse the machines. I provided an address of PH44, but I have yet to see this data surface online.

My LinkedIn profile is located at https://www.linkedin.com/in/michael-bazzell-a83572122/. It contains the same image in order to continue the connection to previous content. I provided PH45 as my apartment number and supplied false alumni and employer details. Approximately 60 days after account creation, I observed this unique address associated with my name inside a recruiter's database, which was obviously scraped from LinkedIn. I submitted my address unit as PH46 at listyourself.net, but it has yet to surface online.

Disinformation Concerns

Several government employees have expressed concern to me about the risks of removing all personal information from the internet. Their thinking is that if there is no information about you it could be a red flag that you are affiliated with the intelligence and/or special operations communities and could cause you to come under suspicion in a foreign country. This creates quite a conundrum.

If members leave all their personal information on the internet, their spouses and children could be exposed and placed in danger. This is becoming even more important as we are starting to see targeted terrorism and doxing of military personnel within the borders of the United States. Alternatively, doing so may compromise their status by giving them a digitally "different" profile. I agree entirely with this logic. However, I disagree with the suggestions I have heard for solving this problem. Most of these suggestions are to essentially do nothing and take a more passive posture on social media. This is not my approach.

My solution is to remove all real information to the maximum extent. I believe you should make your home, your vehicles, your children, and your spouse as difficult to identify as possible. Only then will you be able to sleep soundly at night, secure in the knowledge that you and your family are a very difficult target to locate. However, I do not believe you should stop there. My opinion is that disinformation in this case is as good as real information. If the person reviewing it is overseas and finds five separate records of your "home" online, the scrutiny will likely end there.

I am also not opposed to creating social media disinformation. A social media account that is in your true name, but contains no accurate information, will make you look real while preventing you from being compromised. I do not recommend you associate yourself with a social media account under a different name, especially if the account has photos of you. This will almost certainly have the effect of making you look even more suspicious. The more thorough your disinformation campaign is, the more protection it will afford you.

In some agencies or departments, you may be prohibited from doing this yourself. You should check your department, agency, or headquarters policy before undertaking this. Another concern that has been expressed to me is that if you need this level of protection the individual's organization will "take care of it". While this may be the case in some instances, I encourage you to take responsibility for your own security and safety where permissible.

Monitoring

Now that you possess an invisible home with disinformation attached to it, you should continuously monitor your progress. Searching for yourself and your family within various people search websites will confirm your success at staying invisible. This should be conducted monthly until you are confident that any new online data would be inaccurate. Your success at remaining invisible to the growing number of personal data collection organizations will be reliant on your constant monitoring for any new leaks of your details on the internet. I would like to add one technique that I have found valuable for those desiring an aggressive approach toward monitoring situations where other people may be searching for details about them. **Canary Tokens** (canarytokens.org) offers an advanced way to monitor this behavior.

This free service allows you to create a Microsoft Word document, among other options, including PDF files, which includes a tracking script within. Anyone who opens the document will unknowingly launch the script which will collect the user's IP address, approximate location, operating system, and browser information. While an adversary could easily block this type of collection with a tracking script within a website or email, it is more difficult to stop within a document. Consider the following example. I created a Canary Token document with a title of Michael Bazzell's Home Address and uploaded it to a public document storage site. When people conduct a search for my name and see this file, they are likely to open it, hoping to finally have my home details. The document is blank, but I am immediately sent the following information.

Date: 2019 Mar 15 16:34:25	Region: Georgia	Version: 74.0.3729.131
IP: 193.0.108.42	Organization: Comcast Cable	OS: Macintosh
Country: US	Language: en-US	Browser: Chrome
City: Marietta	Platform: MacIntel	

You now have knowledge that someone may be searching for you. These details are the exact data obtained from someone opening the "bait" document. This information tells me that someone was likely researching me from Marietta, GA, on a Mac running Chrome. The IP address confirms they use Comcast as their ISP. I do not know their identity or exact address, but this reveals a potential threat.

In 2021, I began noticing less success with monitoring via online documents. Today, I use the "Web Bug / URL" token, which is less likely to block monitoring. This allows you to enter an email address and be provided a URL. Anyone who clicks the URL will share their details with you via an email message.

Doxing Attempts

Many of these methods may seem ridiculous and inappropriate. If no one ever tries to find you, none of this is necessary. Many of my clients are targeted often, and I like to have false trails leading to inaccurate data. I have also found this to be beneficial for myself. In October of 2018, I was on the receiving end of a full doxing attack.

Doxing is the attempt to search for and publish private or identifying information about a particular individual on the internet, typically with malicious intent. Someone had posted information about a group called 4Chan/8Chan on my online forum. This group is known for hateful posts, doxing, e-swatting, and other malicious activities. Word had spread to the 4Chan/8Chan community that my site was talking about them in a negative way. They decided to attack me as the owner of the site.

Multiple people scoured the internet for any personal information about me. They believed they were successful, but did not uncover anything valid. The cell number they located was a Google Voice account provided on a Facebook page which I have never used. The home address they located was a non-existent house in my former city of residence. The email addresses they found were all intentional burner accounts which did not reach my true inboxes. They were effective in their search, but the data was simply inaccurate. I never predicted a doxing attempt toward me, but I was glad I had taken the necessary precautions ahead of the attack.

This seems like an appropriate time to remind readers that we never know when we will be a victim of an online attack. In 2017, two online gamers engaged in a feud over a $1.50 bet. This resulted in a swatting attempt toward one of the players. Tyler Barriss called the Wichita police from his Los Angeles home falsely reporting a shooting and kidnapping at the Wichita address of the other gamer. Police surrounded the home and Andrew Finch emerged from the front door confused about the commotion. After raising his hands at the order of police, he lowered one hand toward his waist. An officer shot him, killing him immediately. Tyler Barriss had conducted dozens of similar calls prior to this in order to harass other online gamers. This incident resulted in a 20-year prison sentence.

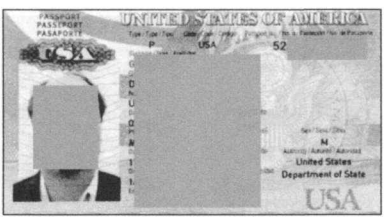
It does not take much today to upset someone to the point of taking malicious action against you. The internet has made it easier than ever to locate someone's home address within seconds. Being proactive by creating a safe and anonymous home is the first step toward preventing online attacks. Disinformation provides another strong layer of protection.

Personal Ransomware Exposure

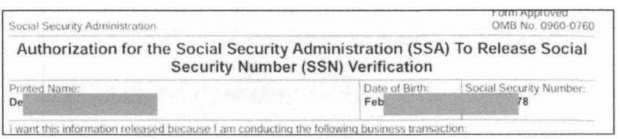
When we think about ransomware victims, I suspect most of us think about companies having their data encrypted and being extorted for Bitcoin payments in order to obtain the decryption tool which will unlock their documents. With more companies possessing proper backups due to the awareness of this criminal activity, we are now seeing ransomware groups focus more on exposure of data instead of decryption. This presents a new problem for all of us. It is now OUR data which is often exposed to the world when companies refuse to pay the ransom.

To be clear, I never support or encourage ransomware payments. However, I do support resistance when companies and government institutions demand our information and then store it insecurely. On my show, I talk a lot about my methods to sanitize my personal information when requested because I know it is likely to appear online due to poor privacy policies or accidental exposure. Let's take a look at some recent ransomware data dumps which are now publicly available and may be leaking YOUR personal details.

Accountants often demand to store copies of IDs and tax forms on your behalf. My account/attorney rolls his eyes when I insist on storage within encrypted containers and transmission only via encrypted email. I believe this is all justified. Clients of a California law firm now have all of their data exposed within a ransomware dump made public recently by a group called "Clop", as seen in the following.



This includes tax forms displaying names, DOBs, and SSN, as seen below.


Social Security Administration

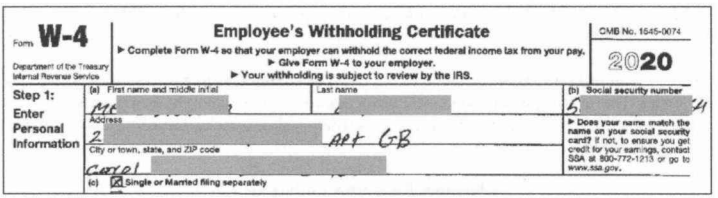
Form Approved
OMB No. 0960-0760

Authorization for the Social Security Administration (SSA) To Release Social Security Number (SSN) Verification

Printed Name:	Date of Birth:	Social Security Number:
De[redacted]	Feb[redacted]	[redacted]78

I want this information released because I am conducting the following business transaction:

This is the main reason I insist that my attorney either store data within a secure encrypted container or allow me to be responsible for storage of my own docs. Employers demand tax forms from us to legally pay us, but then store them with the same security as the rest of their daily documents. The following is one of many employee tax forms collected by a nutritional foods company which was hit with ransomware this year by a group called "Clop" which is now publicly available, as seen below.



Form **W-4** — Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service

Employee's Withholding Certificate

▶ Complete Form W-4 so that your employer can withhold the correct federal income tax from your pay.
▶ Give Form W-4 to your employer.
▶ Your withholding is subject to review by the IRS.

OMB No. 1545-0074

2020

Step 1: Enter Personal Information

(a) First name and middle initial: [redacted] | Last name: [redacted] | (b) Social security number: [redacted]

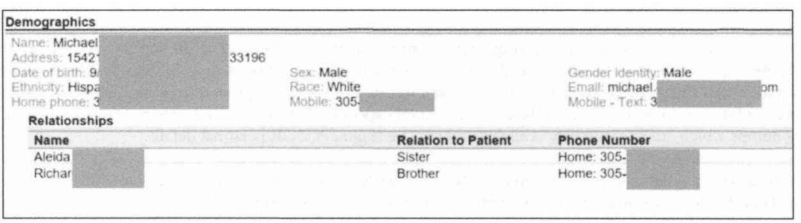
Address: [redacted]

City or town, state, and ZIP code: [redacted]

(c) ☒ Single or Married filing separately

▶ Does your name match the name on your social security card? If not, to ensure you get credit for your earnings, contact SSA at 800-772-1213 or go to www.ssa.gov.

This is one of the many reasons I conduct all business in the name of an LLC and only provide EINs issued by the IRS for all transactions. Universities and colleges demand our personal details and then include them within documents stored insecurely. The following Miami university breached document publicly discloses full name, address, DOB, ethnicity, phone, cell, email, and relatives, as seen below. I suspect people search websites will soon start including ransomware dumps within their infrastructure.



Demographics

Name: Michael [redacted]
Address: 1542[redacted] 33196
Date of birth: 9[redacted]
Ethnicity: Hispa[redacted]
Home phone: 3[redacted]
Sex: Male
Race: White
Mobile: 305-[redacted]
Gender identity: Male
Email: michael.[redacted]om
Mobile - Text: 3[redacted]

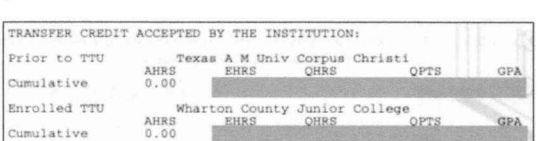
Relationships

Name	Relation to Patient	Phone Number
Aleida [redacted]	Sister	Home: 305-[redacted]
Richar[redacted]	Brother	Home: 305-[redacted]

A Colorado school went further by releasing class schedules and grades after they were hit with ransomware, as seen in the following.

Course		Description	Attempted	Earned	Grade	Points
BUSG	8000	Business Elective	3.000	3.000	[redacted]	0.000
DANC	1301	Dance Composition	3.000	3.000		0.000
DANC	8100	Dance Core Elective	1.000	1.000		0.000
DANC	8100	Dance Core Elective	1.000	1.000		0.000
DANC	8100	Dance Core Elective	3.000	3.000		0.000

Digging into the files further identifies every student's overall GPA which allows the public to now monitor his progress as a student, as seen below.



TRANSFER CREDIT ACCEPTED BY THE INSTITUTION:

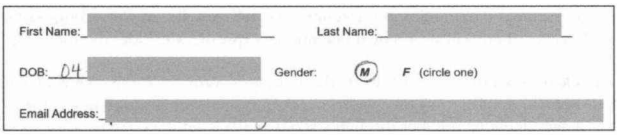
Prior to TTU — Texas A M Univ Corpus Christi

	AHRS	EHRS	QHRS	QPTS	GPA
Cumulative	0.00	[redacted]			

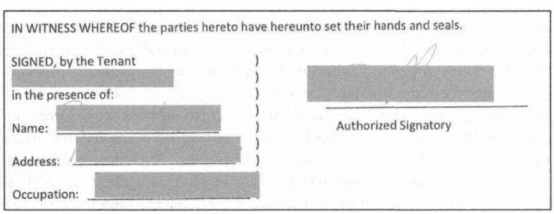
Enrolled TTU — Wharton County Junior College

	AHRS	EHRS	QHRS	QPTS	GPA
Cumulative	0.00	[redacted]			

I have no secure options for this problem. We have no control over school storage of our data. All of the forms your doctor or dentist makes you sign are rarely securely stored. The following redacted partial form was released after a dentist office refused to pay a ransom to a group called "Conti" and terabytes of data were exposed online, as seen below.



This is the reason I always resist signing unnecessary paperwork and scrutinize HIPAA release forms. We cannot refuse everything, but we can minimize our exposure. The apartment or home you have leased includes numerous contracts. When the property management company, in this case a business in Canada, gets hit with ransomware and ignores the extortion demands, all documents get released publicly, as seen next.



This is one of many reasons I title any home ownership or lease within the name of a trust or LLC. Physicians, surgeons, and dentists often capture digital photographs of various conditions. A hospital suffered a ransomware breach by a group called "Vice Society" and did not pay the criminals. As a result, all of their stolen data was published to the internet, including photographs of their patients' illnesses. This is one reason I SOMETIMES ask doctors to either avoid unnecessary images or delete them after any procedure is complete. If the images present within the data dump were not enough, a Word file titled "Login and Passwords" is included for access to third party services. I may or may not have confirmed that all of the passwords still work. This is why I never recommend storing passwords locally in an unprotected document, and only recommend locally-stored secure password managers with encrypted data.

Since my company often assists clients with ransomware attacks, I find the chat logs between businesses and the criminals especially valuable. Many of these logs are stored within the victim computers and become part of the data dump through the offender's website. These can be a great source of education for security researchers before engaging communication with ransomware criminals.

Many ransomware data leaks contain full Outlook PST files which include every incoming and outgoing email associated with a specific email address. The content of these files is incredibly sensitive. This is why I consider every email I send to be public information. I never send anything I would worry about becoming publicly available. I reserve sensitive conversations for E2EE ephemeral messaging. The next time a business demands your personal data or a copy of your ID, consider this section. When they ignore your resistance to provide personal details which are not required for the business being conducted, explain your concern through these examples. When your friends and family call you paranoid or difficult for wanting to keep your information private, know that you are not alone.

Contact Information Abuse

Everywhere we turn, there are attempts to collect our data. Companies want your phone number and email address in order to bombard you with marketing. The data collected becomes stored in company databases which are later sold, traded, leaked, or breached. The aftermath becomes our problem. Because of this, I am cautious to ever use personal communication accounts and rely heavily on forwarding services which were explained earlier. However, there will always be unintentional exposure. Consider the following scenarios.

Appointment Check-in Systems: In 2019, I scheduled an appointment to see a chiropractor before a long business trip. I was notified that they rely on a digital check-in system which now requires me to provide a valid email address or cellular telephone number through a series of iPads on the counter. I had never provided any contact details to this service, so I was not sure what to provide. The staff was very helpful and instructed me to use my first name then @123.com. Apparently, many of these systems accept any email address which ends with @123.com. I recorded one interaction of this for an introduction to my podcast. If I had provided a real email address or number, I suspect it would have been abused.

Lodging Requirements: In 2019, I checked into a resort where I was presenting a cyber keynote the following day. My room was prepaid by the conference and attached to the master bill. However, the clerk demanded I provide a valid cellular telephone number and email address. I respectfully declined and she informed me that she could not complete the check-in process without this information. I supplied a random number which was accepted. However, she stated that my email address would need to be verified via a response to a message before she could issue access to my room. She stated that the email address would only be used to contact me in the case of an emergency. I politely advised that I could be contacted at my room if there was an emergency. She did not budge. I provided a 33Mail account which was rejected by the system. Apparently masking services were blacklisted. I reluctantly provided a ProtonMail alias, which was accepted. I told her that I would be forwarding any spam to her if the contact details were abused, and collected her business card from the counter. Within 24 hours, I began to receive marketing emails from the resort. I quickly created a rule which forwarded any messages received from the resort to the clerk's email address. I suspect she was not amused. Today, I continue to receive spam to this address, which continues to forward to "Mary".

This is a tactic which I have used often when a company will not remove me from a mailing list. If I start to receive unwanted and unauthorized spam from a business, I identify the email addresses of any executives. I then create an email rule which forwards to them all messages which I receive from that company, then immediately sends them to my trash. In my experience, my email address is quickly removed from their list once an executive complains about the emails coming from me.

Verification Security Questions

You have likely telephoned a financial company in regard to your own accounts. Before a representative can participate in a conversation about your account, you must be verified as the account holder. This typically involves confirmation of a series of questions selected by you during account creation. The questions are selected from a small pool of options, and any honest answers are likely publicly available. As an example, one of the questions provided by my bank in order to secure my account is "What street did you grow up on?". I am asked to answer this question honestly during account creation and I should be expected to answer this question whenever I call them.

This is an awful way to confirm a person's identity. If I search for you within a free people search website, I will be presented all of your immediate family members. If I search for address history of your parents, I will see various home addresses which include date ranges of association with the home. After some simple math, I can determine the address of the home in which you were raised. Providing this detail could confirm me as you whenever I call to take over your account. Let's fix this problem.

I previously explained how I use a software password manager to store my credentials. Whenever I create a new online account which requires answers to pre-selected security questions, I include these questions and answers within the notes area of each entry. I do not have any preference of questions, as the answers I select will have nothing relevant to them. Let's run through an example.

I created a new account with an online service. I had to select a security question, so I simply chose the first option which was "What is your favorite food?". I opened my password manager (KeePassXC); made a new entry for this service; clicked the small dice icon next to the password field; and clicked the passphrase tab. This presented me with "stoneware thank" followed by many other words as part of a random passphrase. I supplied "stoneware thank" as my favorite food to the service. If I ever need to call support for this service and verify my identity, I will be asked for my favorite food, and my answer will be "stoneware thank". If questioned further, I will explain that this is a delicious treat.

Please consider every important account which you have created over the past many years. Does your bank have security questions of which the answers can be easily found online? If so, please change all of them. I believe your security questions are as important as your passwords. If you plan to change your passwords to randomly-generated options, you may want to do the same with your security questions.

Plant Your Flag

I first heard the concept of planting your flag from journalist Brian Krebs. The idea is to identify common ways which criminals will try to infiltrate various online services pretending to be you, then take control of those accounts before a criminal does, even if you have no plans of using the online services. Consider the following.

Credit Bureaus: You likely already possess a credit freeze, but do you have actual online accounts with the major providers? These free accounts are practically worthless, but we do not want criminals to create them in our name. The following pages should allow you to generate online accounts and claim your profiles.

https://my.equifax.com/consumer-registration/UCSC/#/personal-info
https://usa.experian.com/registration
https://service.transunion.com/dss/orderStep1_form.page?

IRS: Tax fraud is a big problem. If you have an Identity Protection PIN issued by the IRS, your taxes cannot be filled without this private code. This eliminates most risk of fraudulent filings. The following website allows anyone to request a PIN, regardless of your status as an identity theft victim.

https://www.irs.gov/identity-theft-fraud-scams/get-an-identity-protection-pin

If you want another layer of protection, consider creating an account with the Electronic Federal Tax Payment System at https://www.eftps.gov/eftps/. This is typically used by people who need to make quarterly estimated payments, but anyone can create an account (including a criminal portraying you).

Online Banking: Possessing a traditional checking account at your local bank may be enough to meet your financial needs. Even if you never plan to take advantage of online banking services, you should create an online account which is associated with your identity. You do not want a criminal to realize you have a bank account but no online login. This presents an opportunity for someone to access your account from anywhere in the world.

Cell Phone: Your cellular service provider likely offers an option to create a SIM PIN. In theory, this protects you from a SIM swapping attack. The protection is minimal, but there is no harm activating this feature. Contact your provider for details, but understand that it is not a bullet-proof mechanism. It is a small layer of protection, but there is no reason to avoid this strategy.

Voicemail: Many people possess telephone voicemail without any type of PIN. These users simply call their own number from their device and immediately retrieve their messages. This creates the potential for a spoofed call which could also hear your voicemail. Adding a PIN to your account is an annoyance, as you must enter this code every time you collect messages. However, it prevents targeted voicemail attacks.

Utilities: You likely receive a paper bill from the power company every month. You can send a check or call and make a credit card payment. Almost every U.S. utility company offers an option to pay electronically online. Regardless of your desires to use this service, you should create the account in order to prevent someone else from claiming to be you. If your adversary knows your approximate location, asking to open an account in your name would likely disclose your home address. If you already possess an account, a second attempt would be refused.

USPS: Did you know that a complete stranger can receive scanned copies of every piece of mail you receive at your home? The USPS offers a service called Informed Delivery which is designed to notify you of pending mail being delivered to your home. Unfortunately, they require minimal information to verify authorization for these details. The following link allows you to activate this free service. Consider creating an account before your adversary pretends to be you.

https://informeddelivery.usps.com/box/pages/intro/start.action

State Unemployment Office: Unemployment fraud is a huge issue lately. Even if you have no plans to file a claim, consider creating an account with your state's unemployment office. This prevents a criminal from claiming to be you while requesting benefits.

DMV: While you may receive a postal notification of upcoming expiration of your driver's license or vehicle registration, online accounts can be created in your name quite easily. Consider claiming your online account and securing it with a strong password. This prevents the potential of unlawfully adding vehicles under your name and identifying your personal details provided to the state.

Insurance: Both home and vehicle insurance providers allow online accounts which display details of your coverage and allow digital payments. This is a potential vulnerability for high-risk targets. If I pretend to be you and create an account under your DOB, I can likely see your home address, vehicle information, and registration plate details. Protect this information by owning the online profiles which can access this data.

Health Portals: When we visit a doctor, dentist, pharmacy, clinic, testing site, or vaccination event, our medical data is collected and stored digitally. Most of these services offer an online portal which we can use to see all of our data. Most of these sites only require a name and date of birth in order to establish your profile. Be sure to claim yours before someone else does.

Shopping Memberships: It is common for stores to offer discounts if you become a "member". Many of these chains generate the membership within the physical store and do not mandate the usage of an online portal. However, failure to claim this online login can be a problem. In 2021, a client asked me to conduct a full assessment of her online exposure. I made the assumption she was a member of a well-known outdoor recreational store which offered discounts and specials for members. Their website allowed me to populate her old email address and cellular number in order to discover her membership number. Knowing all three of these pieces of data allowed me to create an online account associated with her membership. This allowed me to see previous purchases, a home address used for delivery, and her local preferred store.

COVID-19 Concerns

There are numerous privacy-related matters which have arisen during the COVID-19 crisis. Much of this book was written during the various stages of self-quarantine which was experienced by everyone throughout the world. While I selfishly benefited from the extra time which allowed early completion of a final draft, the

pandemic introduced many new privacy concerns into all of our lives. This book will likely print before we see the end of these invasions, but I offer the following considerations for the next crisis.

Mobile Device Tracking

After most governments enacted rules which required people to stay at home unless travel was essential, we witnessed various levels of compliance. Some families practiced appropriate "social distancing" while others continued to attend large events. New cases of COVID-19 continued to emerge and many governments focused on technology as a possible solution. Many countries began tracking mobile devices in order to identify people who had possibly made contact with an infected person. The potential for abuse of this data is huge, so we should have an understanding of the technologies and threats.

Some countries relied on cellular connection details provided by mobile network providers. Cell phone tower logs can precisely identify the locations of devices (and people). This information can be used to detect large gatherings which violate local laws, or to identify devices which were within a few feet of a known infected person. Since most people purchase devices in their true names, it is easy to be identified as the owner of an account if you become a target. Some countries mandate that all device owners supply true information. In the U.S., we can easily mask our identity with prepaid plans, as previously explained.

Other countries have focused on application-based monitoring of COVID-19 infections. This requires effort by the end user while the previous cellular data monitoring is completely out of our control. I witnessed countries creating their own insecure apps which leaked potential sensitive data such as unique identifiers of hardware. In most scenarios, participation was voluntary. Some countries experienced a 20% adoption rate, but most needed at least 40% of the population to download the app in order for it to be effective. The typical goal with these apps is to identify people who may have come into contact with an infected person. If a participant is notified that they tested positive, this information can be reported through the app. The service then identifies devices which may have been in recent contact with the infected person and notifies them of the details. Typically, this occurs without disclosing any identities. However, apps created by government agencies usually are not very secure.

Finally, we have the execution of mobile device tracking by the U.S. government. Apple and Google partnered to create an infrastructure which could be used by third-party government and private sector mobile applications. On the surface, this sounds incredibly invasive and undesired. You may be surprised to read that I welcome this partnership and execution. I will not pretend to understand all of the technical nuances presented by their teams, but I have great respect for their determination to never reveal any details which could be used to identify a person, device, network, or other unique identifier.

The product created by Apple and Google is not a tracking application ready for installation. It is simply a framework which can be used by other applications. It is embedded into the iOS and Android operating systems. The benefit with this is that it removes the necessity for governments to apply privacy-respecting methods while creating a tracking service. The framework will never disclose a telephone number, MAC address, IP address, name, home address, email account, or anything else which would identify the device owner to any application connected to the free tracking service. It assigns everyone rotating unique identifiers which are never associated with hardware or personal details. This way, government apps can receive data about locations of infections without knowing any true identities.

The purpose of this is to track movement of people and their proximity to others. When a person self-reports a COVID-19 infection through an app, it can notify others who may have been in contact with the infected person within the recent past. This happens behind the scenes without the ability to be abused. Have I drunk the Kool-Aid and installed any tracking apps? No. However, I embrace any attempt to properly mask identities of individuals versus hastily created apps by government contractors with no respect for privacy. This method is the least of all evils. Further, I encourage these actions in effort to eliminate any future deaths from this disease. As of now, all participation is voluntary.

I am updating this in 2022. I do not know how various final product(s) appear as you read this. Both iOS and Android operating systems currently have an option to disable any tracking, and all tracking is disabled by default. Hopefully, COVID-19 is now a distant memory. If we are still in this pandemic, we could experience mandatory usage of these technologies. In that case, we should understand our privacy options. First, possessing an anonymous device prevents much of any potential abuse. If an app collects your true cellular number, there is little to glean from it if you executed the strategies previously explained. Next, consider the location of the device. If a mandatory tracking app is present, then anyone with access to the logs would know the location of the device every night. You can defeat this with my Faraday bag methods as previously explained. Turning the device "off" is usually not enough.

It is easy for a privacy enthusiast to label all device tracking as invasive and unacceptable. I can relate to these feelings, but I also want to stay alive and healthy. Safety always trumps privacy for me. Personally, I would only participate within these programs if I were located in an urban environment with high risk of delivering or receiving the disease, and I believed that my usage would be helpful. You should make your own decisions without influence from me.

Working and Schooling from Home

During the pandemic, we all experienced a new way of life. Working remotely from home became a normal day for most people. While many embraced the idea of working in sweat pants, most ignored the privacy invasions which accompanied the transition. Employers began demanding that employees install remote conference software on their own equipment, most of which possessed some level of snooping software, and "always-on" webcams became normal. Working from home can be viewed as a luxury by some and a curse by others. The techniques within the previous chapters should minimize much of your exposure, but we should be aware of some common scenarios.

- Remote conference software, such as Zoom, collects and stores a lot of personal information during use. Be sure to always use a VPN, provide anonymous contact details, cover your camera when possible, and never install the software on your primary computer. Windows users might consider a dual-boot computer with a Linux partition for all work-related activities. Mac users could dual-boot two isolated versions of macOS on the same machine and boot into the work option during the day and personal at night. Overall, try to gain some isolation between your work device and personal data.
- Most conferencing services push users to download the official desktop software application in order to participate within meetings. This is usually unnecessary. Most meetings can be held within a web browser without any third-party download. Webex is one of the culprits. When you connect to a Webex session, their software is automatically prompted for download if you do not have it installed. If you simply cancel the download, Webex presents a link to "Join from your browser". They hide this until you cancel the download, which I find inappropriate.
- Many schools demand installation of specific software which allows teachers to monitor students at all times. In most scenarios, instructors can watch students through webcams while taking tests or participating in lectures. This is a slippery slope toward abuse of the captured video or an eventual data leak. I encourage everyone to cover their webcams at all times in these scenarios. If you receive pressure from the school to enable a camera, explain that it appears broken and it does not work on any other apps. Again, never install proprietary remote conferencing software on any primary personal computer. An online search of "Zoom Privacy Dangers" should provide more reasons to protect yourself than you desire to read.

Vaccine Privacy Concerns

I am writing this section in April of 2021. I have numerous clients who have received the COVID-19 vaccine and each have experienced various levels of privacy intrusions. I suspect our society will face many future vaccinations for various viruses and variants, and booster shots will become a new normal. I present a summary of my findings for your consideration.

- Most states rely on some type of emergency and incident management software portal. These seem to vary by county and allow scheduling of vaccines according to tiers. Most of these demand a full name, DOB, postal code, email address, and cellular telephone number. All appear to accept masked email addresses and VOIP telephone numbers. Submitted data is typically not password protected, but a unique random URL is created for review at any time. These portals seem to be used for notification of eligibility and participation is not required to receive a vaccination. I avoid these.
- Each state possesses some type of scheduling portal. One popular example is PrepMod. This system allows individuals to register for an appointment and receive reminders of additional vaccinations. This system requests personal medical details, full name, DOB, full home address, and cellular number. It also accepts masked details and a PO Box. In order to access this data, an individual must know the unique URL and confirm a temporary code sent through email. You will likely be required to provide data into this system for a vaccine. The same system will be accessed during your vaccination and email updates will be sent to you through this network.
- Most vaccination clinics demanded photo identification during the visit. I believe this is mostly to confirm that the correct individual record was being updated. I am not aware of any clinics which attempted to scan any IDs into the system.
- None of the clinics demanded any proof of local residency.

Many clients asked if they should provide an alias name during this process. I strongly discourage this. Many of these clinics have a government connection and lying about your identity could be a crime. It could also prevent you from a future vaccination which could impact your health.

Overall, anticipate that any data provided could be abused. I do not believe patient data will ever be intentionally sold, but I worry about breaches, leaks, and sharing. Therefore, choose your data wisely. I instructed my clients to provide their true names and dates of birth. From there, anything else should be sanitized. VOIP numbers, forwarding email services, and mail drops all work fine. If this data is ever leaked, the damage is very minimal. If your burner email, VOIP number, and CMRA mail box become public information, it is not a huge deal. **Please make your choices about vaccinations based on your health needs and not paranoia**. If you choose to participate in this system, provide the best contact choices which you have available using the methods previously discussed.

The Next Pandemic

My concerns as I write this are not about the current pandemic. Today, we still have some control over participation in contact tracing and our data associated with vaccinations. By the time you read this, we may be under a full quarantine with mandatory access to our mobile devices. This would be quite difficult due to the privacy strategies available to us and the ability to simply conceal our devices in Faraday bags, but I never underestimate the capabilities of our government. I hope this book has provided the tools you need to take action which is appropriate for you, your family, and your desired level of privacy. Stay safe.

Summary

This is a large chapter which should be considered as a reactive response after you have established your desired level of privacy presented in the previous chapters. I typically advise my clients to consider the following after they are content with their privacy strategy.

- Identify home devices which require an internet connection.
- Eliminate network connectivity to these devices whenever possible.
- Consider data leakage from family and friends.
- Understand how disinformation strategies can assist those with unique names.
- Create proactive positive online content to help hide undesired search results.
- Create a personal website with a custom domain to possess desired disinformation.
- Monitor for potential adversaries attempting to identify home address.
- Remove undesired address and telephone data from the internet.
- Remove details from various mailing lists.
- Remove undesired online posts, photos, and videos.
- Establish a credit freeze, fraud alert, and credit opt-out.
- Change any accurate online security verification questions.
- Create accounts associated with your true identity when appropriate (plant your flag).
- Apply proper privacy and security protocols while working remotely.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
PHYSICAL PRIVACY & SECURITY

In 2017, I co-authored a book about physical privacy and security considerations as part of the Complete Privacy & Security Desk Reference series. Both volumes of the series are now out of print and severely outdated, but there were many timeless strategies which can benefit us privacy enthusiasts. My attempt in this chapter is to briefly summarize the content of that book, which is not otherwise present in this edition, in a way which can be easily digested. I present a lot of content here, compressed into glossary-style text, which can be further researched if desired. My goal is to get you thinking about these considerations as you establish your new private life. Let's begin with protecting the physical privacy of your home.

Home Privacy

After you have spent so much effort moving into your new anonymous home, you should execute best practices in regard to your physical privacy. Titling your home to the name of a trust loses privacy protection if your trash contains personal mail; legal paperwork can be seen through windows; and your business cards are visible within your vehicle parked in the driveway. The following tactics should be considered at all times.

Park vehicles in garage: There are many opinions on this. Some believe leaving a vehicle outside the house may convince a would-be burglar to stay away since someone is likely home. However, you obtain a potential layer of security at the risk of losing privacy. An exposed vehicle displays a license plate which can be swept into various license plate recognition systems. It is also prone to vehicle burglary and displays a pattern of behavior. If the vehicle is always present, but then disappears one night, you may be inviting unwanted trouble while you are gone. My strong preference is to always park any vehicles in a garage without windows. This allows you to conceal vehicle identifiers, items being transported into and out of the vehicle, and creates an overall assumption that someone COULD be home.

Properly eliminate personal trash: In the United States, I am legally allowed to take possession of any trash in front of your home. I can "steal" all of the bags and analyze them later when convenient for me. In fact, I did this during numerous investigations when I was assigned to a drug task force in the late nineties. During one assignment, we were preparing to execute a search warrant at a home later in the week on an early Friday morning. A call to the local trash service confirmed that Thursday was "trash day". On Wednesday night, I drove by the target location and observed several full trash bags within the designated pickup container. I grabbed them all and threw them in the trunk of my covert police vehicle. At the police department, I opened the bags and located paperwork confirming the main suspect resided at the home; receipts disclosing bulk purchases of drug-making supplies; and empty boxes of 9mm ammunition.

While this evidence was circumstantial, the discarded ledger of completed and pending drug sales provided an interesting piece of testimony at the trial. You could have replicated my actions without any legal repercussions. While my clients are not hiding from drug-related search warrants, they do have concerns about stalkers, former lovers, and paparazzi. The following trash protocol is taught to anyone hiring me for a complete privacy reboot.

Isolate any trash or recycling which contains true identities. This can include mail brought into the home after delivery to a UPS store, unwanted documents, private photos, expired credit cards, or any other sensitive items. The rule is that there should never be any evidence of a person's true name or image in the trash or recycling containers. Often, I will remove any labels from shipments I have brought into my home which contain my name. I can recycle or discard the package material, but never the labels.

Anything with a true name gets shredded into a cross-cut shredder. I currently use the AmazonBasics 6-Sheet High-Security Micro-Cut Paper and Credit Card Home Office Shredder (amzn.to/2SGjDQq). This device

shreds paper into 5/32" by 15/32" pieces. While this is a strong start, some text can still be read within the pieces. Once weekly, I burn all shredded material in a designated container outside my home. The combination of these two techniques ensures evidence of my identity is not available in my trash.

Apply proper window treatments: The term "proper" is quite subjective here, but I offer my guidance to clients. Any windows displaying access to the garage should be covered at all times with a material which prevents any view. I prefer to apply frosted glass spray paint to the interior of all garage windows. This allows light to enter without exposing clear details and eliminates accidental movement of curtains or blinds which could allow viewing from the outside.

I also try to identify the most common windows which will be viewed from a potential intruder. These are often the windows by the front and rear entry doors. Any window with easy access from a visitor should be covered with a curtain or blinds at all times. On occasion, walk the perimeter of your home in the way a potential intruder would investigate the premises. Identify any likely areas which could help determine that no one was home. Overall, you want privacy within living areas without the appearance of being a shut-in.

Eliminate personality from the exterior of the home: Before writing this chapter, I took a walk around my neighborhood. One home proudly displayed their child's high school football player number, which also identified the grade and school. I now know they have a high school senior named Tim who wears number 21. The house next to them displayed a large wood sign proclaiming the "Wilsons" to possess the home. Next to them, a neighbor possessed a sign announcing their love for Scottish terriers and a doghouse identified as the home of "Max" and "Greta". One of my neighbors spray-painted his last name on his trash bin, and displays a notice in his yard about his wood-cutting services. All of these scenarios present enough vulnerabilities to initiate a believable social engineering attack. While highly unlikely, these details could be abused. I prefer my clients to display no signs of interest or names.

Eliminate personality from the interior of the home: This one may lose several readers. If you are in the need of extreme privacy, you should eliminate all items within your home which might disclose your name or immediate family members in view of guests. Consider a few examples.

Wall of Fame: Most of us, including myself many years ago, possess an office or other room which proudly displays our achievements. In 2010, my home office displayed numerous awards on the walls. When a Charter internet technician came to troubleshoot a dying modem, a quick glance at my wall launched an uncomfortable conversation about my work. I no longer display any awards and I encourage many clients to do the same.

Personalized Gifts: Many gifts include some type of personalization such as engraving or printing of a family name. If you have your true name engraved on a door knocker, but you have convinced your neighbors that your last name is something else, this could cause unwanted inquisition. If your wedding album, with a custom cover announcing the true names and date, is visible on the coffee table, it may generate questions which you do not want to answer. After a client with an extreme situation moves into a new anonymous home, I conduct a sweep, attempting to identify any items which may need to be hidden. This can also include trophies, crafts, blankets, and collectibles which are too revealing.

Family Keepsakes: This one is the most difficult. Many of us possess items which have been handed down through several generations. Old newspaper articles, historic photos, family recipe books, and anything else which displays a family name can be trouble. These items should be carefully stored out of public view. I have witnessed stalkers and ex-lovers sneak around a suspected new home of their target in order to confirm their suspicions. The presence of one item containing the victim's name could be enough to cause someone to take their obsessions further.

Home Security

While you may be anonymous, you are not invisible. Criminals may not care about your identity, but are happy to take advantage of a vulnerable home in order to steal your items. While not directly related to privacy, protecting your family and valuables from crimes of opportunity makes good sense. If you need an extreme privacy example, consider the repercussions of a crime being committed at your home. A publicly-available police report displaying your true name and address associated with a burglary can eliminate all privacy strategies in place up to this point. Therefore, it is in your best interest to protect your property from potential crimes and the need to involve law enforcement. I present several ideas, beginning inside the home followed by exterior considerations.

Keep your valuables out of sight: This one may seem fairly obvious, but most people ignore the recommendation. Jewelry boxes on top of dressers, rare firearms behind hanging glass frames, and expensive laptops on the kitchen counter are all enticing to a burglar. A home free of visible items which can be quickly sold or traded may be passed for a more lucrative option.

Hide small valuables in unique places: Most thieves want something small and valuable. Money, jewelry, prescription drugs, and collectibles can be removed from a home quickly, and hidden within pockets while walking down the road. Because of this, I recommend placing small valuables within items which would likely be ignored during a burglary. First, I want to discuss popular options which I think are awful ideas. I NEVER recommend the following.

- Hollow books: Many burglars will quickly analyze books on a shelf knowing that empty decoys are commonly used to store valuables. It does not take long to identify the overly thick book with little weight.
- Anything in bedroom: Most thieves go straight to the master bedroom in order to find valuable loot. This is likely the worst place to keep anything important.
- Freezer/Refrigerator: This has become one of the most popular places to hide valuables, and thieves have been paying attention. It is fairly easy to identify items in a freezer which appear out of place, and this should be avoided.

This leaves us with the following options which are more ideal.

- Trophies: Almost all trophies are hollow within the metallic-coated pieces. Unscrewing these and placing small valuables inside are likely to go undetected. Placing all of the trophies in a cardboard box in the garage will add even less interest. If you possessed my sporting ability growing up, you can buy your own trophies. I once visited a trophy store and asked if I could buy any defected items. I walked out with a box full of awards I could never earn at a cost of $10. These could be used to hide thousands of dollars.
- CD Player: I recall the days when a full-sized CD player within a stereo cabinet would be a prime target for a theft. Today, they are ignored and practically worthless. These oversized electronics consist mostly of open air. Removing a few screws on the back reveals an opportunity to store small and midsized valuables. Cassette decks are also great for this.
- Electrical outlet: As mentioned in a previous chapter, I prefer electrical outlets as hiding places for extremely small items. There is usually a small amount of space surrounding the outlet itself, and commonly a hollow wall nearby. I have never known a burglar to remove outlet faceplates to take a peek behind them.
- Novelty hiding devices: Be careful here, but you can find many common household devices which have been converted into empty hiding places on Amazon.

Present "bait" to any burglars: Some physical security professionals laugh at me when I mention this, but I stand by my recommendation. I believe every home should have items which solely serve as bait to a would-be criminal. My favorite consideration is the small fire safe filled with heavy objects. I keep two Sentry fireproof boxes (amzn.to/2HPfyD2) in my home at all times. One is under my bed and the other is in my bedroom closet. Each are filled with four 5-pound plates taken from a set of old dumbbell exercise weights, a few rolls of pennies, and some loose change. They are locked with no keys in sight. When a burglar looks in these two places, which is extremely common for a thief, the safes will rattle and be heavy. Most will assume that a firearm or bullion is inside, and these two items will be top priority for taking. This serves a few purposes. First, it wastes the energy and time of the burglar. Hauling out two 20-pound boxes is plausible, but not fun. Since most burglars do not bring a vehicle to the scene of the crime, they must carry this weight some distance. For bonus points, remove the plastic handles from the boxes to make carrying more difficult. If desired, a larger safe could be used with more weight. Next, this tactic may prevent a burglar from taking something more valuable. If they believe that a prize is already in hand, a second trip back may be viewed as an unnecessary risk. Finally, it serves as a clear indicator that a crime occurred. Many burglars enter and retreat undetected. They leave no sign of foul play until you discover the theft weeks later. This presents a good chance of avoiding capture. If you see that one of these boxes is missing, you know something happened.

Install a large safe: This is mandatory for any home in which I live. A large stand-up gun safe can hold a number of valuable items and can be made very difficult to move. They are never completely burglar-proof, but we can take actions to make them extremely difficult to compromise. First, only consider safes which have the option to be bolted into a floor. There are many installation variables, but the idea is that you bolt the safe from the interior into the flooring below. Ideally, this would be a concrete surface, but bolting into a wood floor is also an option. Proper safe installation is outside the scope of this book, but free information is plentiful online. While I demand my safe to be bolted into a floor within the interior of my home for easy access, I respect this is not always an option. Therefore, I offer a few suggestions for placement and weight which may burden a thief enough to move onto something else.

First, consider the location of the safe. I see many people place them in garages due to size and weight, but I do not approve of this. If it was easy to move into the garage, it will be just as easy to move out. I want to make it a struggle for the thief. I also want the safe within the home in case I need to access it quickly. If you keep your firearms in a safe due to the presence of children, you should be able to easily access them within your home in the case of an emergency, such as a home invasion.

For most clients, a large gun safe is placed in the basement. If the basement does not have an exterior door, this makes the safe especially difficult to remove. Carrying an empty 400-pound safe up the stairs is quite a challenge. Fill it with heavy items and you have a bigger problem. I have also placed safes behind false walls, but this usually requires carpentry abilities. Recently, I placed a safe within a closet in which the safe was wider than the closet doorway. Removing the trim and door allowed just enough room to squeeze it in. Securely replacing the trim and door created a scenario where the safe could not be slid out of the closet without repeating the process. Numerous three-inch screws through the solid wood trim into wall studs creates a frustrating experience for a burglar looking to escape quickly.

Many gun safes possess various gun racks in order to vertically store long guns. I usually remove these in order to possess an open box. On a few occasions, I have added custom shelving or premade short book cases from Ikea in order to take advantage of the space. My next goal is to make the safe as heavy as possible without exceeding an appropriate weight for the flooring. If within a basement with a concrete floor, I see no limitations. The heavier the safe, the less likely a burglar will try to remove it. I have used the following techniques on behalf of clients.

- Ammunition: I admit I am a bit of an ammunition hoarder. I am not a doomsday prepper, but I believe every gun owner should have more ammunition than they think they might need. My home safe contains over 100 pounds of ammunition which makes it extremely difficult to move.

- Bullion: I had a client who collected 10-ounce silver bullion bars. He believed this was a protection from a collapsing dollar, and had boxes of it. Lining the bottom of his safe with these bars added over 150 pounds of weight.
- Worthless Materials: If you simply want to add as much weight as possible to your safe, you can find numerous options at your local home improvement store. 50-pound bags of sand are less than $5.

If you possess a gun safe which only contains a few guns and a small amount of ammunition, two people can easily carry it out of your home. A 400-pound safe which contains 400 pounds of content creates a surprise for a criminal duo. While not impossible to remove, it will be very difficult and take some valuable time. Consider the desired content and location of your safe before purchase. Once in place, consider storing any valuables within it and have some piece of mind while away from the house.

Utilize lamp timers: A home which is dark for 24 hours is probably empty. If it is dark for a few days, the residents are likely out of town. Placing an interior light on a timer can give the impression that someone is home. However, creating a pattern of specific times during which it is turned on and off can create an illusion of automation. Because of this, I prefer programmable timers which can be staggered. I currently recommend the BN-LINK 7 Day Digital Programmable Timer (amzn.to/2HlLTgCc). It allows programming of two lamps at different times over multiple days. It also has a vacation mode which randomizes the times in which lamps are activated. Always test your settings before execution.

Consider fake television visuals: Many people leave lights on when they leave the home. This does not deter many desperate burglars. However, evidence of a television being watched is usually a sign that someone is home. A television left on constantly while you are away can be harmful to the device and a sign that this is a ruse to deter burglars. This is where I recommend a "Fake TV". This small device emits random lights which simulate the look of a television being used in a dark room. An example for less than $20 which I have used can be found at amzn.to/2vYalGx. Adding this product to a lamp timer can create a desired effect which can fool many into believing someone is home.

Consider audio applications: If you do not want to invest in timers and visual decoys, a simple AM radio can accomplish a lot. Pick a talk station, increase the volume enough in which it can be heard from every room, and leave. If a burglar enters, the audio may be enough to make him choose another home.

Install exterior lighting: Exterior motion lights are more affordable and brighter than ever before. If you do not have existing lights pre-wired and do not want to risk shocking yourself during installation, battery-powered and solar options are plentiful. Most burglars will move on if lights activate when they get near a home. This is a small sign that the homeowner takes security seriously and that there are likely additional security measures in place inside the home. This is a small layer of protection, but I see no reason to ignore this strategy.

Activate an alarm system: Alarms can be quite a deterrent. They can also be a huge privacy invasion, which I explain at the end of this section. First, let's focus on the benefits. If a burglar enters a home and triggers an audible alarm, he knows his time just became much more limited. He does not know if you subscribe to an alarm service which has just notified the police. A nosey neighbor may hear the audible alarm and choose to investigate.

Either way, you are no longer an easy target and there is added pressure for him to leave quickly. Audible alarms wirelessly connected to sensors on doors and windows are plentiful. All have security weaknesses and are targeted toward the local amateur burglar. A sophisticated adversary will know ways to defeat standard protection, but that threat is fairly rare, especially if you are not a heavily targeted individual. I do not typically recommend any type of monitored alarm systems. I have many clients in Los Angeles who insist on this, and private security vehicles continuously respond to alarm activations day and night. My concern is due to false alarms which trigger a police response. Imagine you are in your anonymous home without any association to your true name. While working in the garage, your alarm malfunctions or is accidentally triggered. Your alarm company cannot reach you by phone to confirm everything is fine and dispatches the local police to check on

things. An officer pulls up and determines you likely belong to the home. You will be asked to provide identification, and your name will forever be connected to your home within a report. I simply cannot risk this for myself or my clients. I encourage them to use audible alarms which are not monitored by any outside agency.

Display signage of protection: Whether you possess a functioning alarm or simply want to convey that you do, alarm signage is an affordable and effective solution. Small alarm notification stickers strategically placed on doors and windows likely to be used for illegal entry may deter a random thief. Signs near the driveway and home announcing the use of an alarm system can also be helpful. Both Amazon and your local hardware store offer many options.

Replace locks, strike plates, and screws: This is another mandatory action taken on any home for myself or a client. Changing the locks is standard practice when moving into a new home. If renting, you may receive resistance from a landlord over this, but I believe the battle is worth the reward. If you can afford expensive locks such as those made by Medeco or Abloy, that is great. However, most of my clients simply do not want to spend over $200 on each door. Instead, I encourage them to look for the grade of the lock. Grade 1 is the highest rating a consumer lock can receive. Grade 1 deadbolts were once primarily limited to industrial buildings but are now abundant for residential use. However, the grade of the lock will become useless if you do not reinforce your strike plates.

A typical lock strike plate is a small piece of metal within the door frame. It is the "hole" in which the locking mechanism secures into the frame of the door. These are usually secured with two short screws and can be compromised easily with a swift kick to the door. Because of this, I highly recommend two strategies to better secure your exterior doors. First, replace the strike plate with a larger version requiring four screws (amzn.to/2VcIjS9). This may require you to modify the frame by chipping away room for the plate. Next, secure the plate with three-inch screws. This ensures that the plate is securely connected to the studs of the wall and will make forced entry much more difficult.

Remove external keys: We have all seen a TV show or movie in which a person visits the home of a family member or friend and finds the front door to be locked. After a quick look around, the person picks up a false rock or finds a hidden box which contains a backup key. Those days of innocence are over. Every burglar knows to look for a hidden key near the door and can spot a fake rock quicker than you or me. My stance is firm. Never place a backup key anywhere exterior to the home.

Install a fence for security (not privacy): Six-foot privacy fences are appealing. They prevent street traffic from seeing into your home and isolate you from the nosy neighbors sitting in their yards. However, this comes at a price. The same fence which prevents visibility into your home provides concealment for anyone committing crimes on your property. A steel security fence is ideal for those wanting to keep people off of their property while a solid privacy fence is appropriate for those wanting visual isolation. I am "on the fence" a bit on these. Identify your own priorities and proceed accordingly.

Secure utility boxes: Many homes possess a utility panel outside the home which is maintained by the power company. This could be on an exterior wall of the home or attached to a pole near the street. When open, it usually presents a single master switch which disconnects the power to the entire home. If you possess a box like this, please consider securing it with a high-security padlock. This will not prevent a prepared thief who brings bolt cutters, but it may thwart a burglar looking for any easy opportunity.

Modify patterns of behavior: The final recommendation to is to change things up. If you leave at the same time every morning and return at the same time every afternoon, you set a pattern of behavior which can be abused. While you may not be able to control departure times due to a rigid work schedule, there are other things you can do. Returning home during lunch on occasion may break up a routine being monitored by a criminal neighbor.

Misleading Props: Randomly leaving dirty work boots outside a front door may convince a passerby to move on. Even without a pet, a large dog food bowl and half-full water bowl near the door may be enough to convince a thief to move on. Combining this with a thick rope attached to the deck may create the appearance of a brutal guard dog within the home. Get creative.

In 2022, I assisted a client with a new anonymous home purchase. She moved to an area which is full of door-to-door sales people, political canvassing, and daily construction scams. She wanted to know the best way to stop anyone from knocking on her door. The "No Trespassing" and "No Soliciting" signs had no impact and seemed to generate more attention to her home than before they were posted. My advice was a barricade.

Her home had three entrances. One was through the garage, which was always closed and locked. The second was a rear door which was within a fenced yard. The problem was her front door. The city sidewalk led to a paved path which invited visitors to a small wooden deck with five stairs leading to her door. She never used this door and any invited guests were greeted in her driveway, then led to the interior garage door. She wanted the front door completely off limits to anyone.

I removed the bottom two steps and attached two pieces of wood to the posts, forming an "X" across the entrance. If someone wanted to knock on her door, they would need to either remove the barricade or jump over it while landing on the third step. I applied red duct tape in a "warning" pattern leaving space between each wrap around the boards. This along with her trespassing signs should suffice for a decent defense against a personal injury claim while trying to access her front door. She made it obvious no one was welcome.

This was quite extreme, and I do not recommend it for most clients. The sight of the home from the street can be considered ugly, and may violate your HOA rules. It could also hinder emergency aid to an occupant of the home. I present this only as an anecdote to the levels of creativity you may encounter during your own physical security assessment.

Travel Security

I have traveled extensively and experienced pick-pocketing, hotel room theft, and even an unfortunate physical attack. Criminals prey on visitors unfamiliar with their current environment. The following are some basic guidelines I follow any time I am on the move.

Empty Pockets: I never keep anything in the pockets of my pants, jacket, or other clothing. Bulging pockets are a common target for thieves. We all think we would notice someone entering our pockets, but I can tell you from experience this is not the case. While traveling, all vital items are stored in my backpack.

Secure Bag: Whether you prefer a backpack, messenger bag, or other type of satchel, keeping belongings in a properly secured bag typically provides more protection than pockets. I am less likely to lose an item if everything is in one bag while navigating airport security than if I have a wallet in one clothing pocket and a phone in another. Empty pockets allow you to focus on a single collection resource and prevent the "pat all the pockets and see if I forgot anything" dance we see after a security inspection. I prefer bags which possess numerous interior pockets, each with their own zipper. This requires more effort by thieves to steal your goods. I also prefer to lock the zippers of all exterior pockets. I make the two zipper pull tabs meet and lock them together. If it is a pocket which I do not need to access during travel, I may use a zip tie and cut it later. If I need access the pocket during travel, I may use a strong wire twist tie, Velcro cable strap, or even a small padlock. None of these prevent forced access, but each should provide an obvious alert that an entry attempt was being made while the bag was on your back or shoulder.

Always In-Sight: My bag is always on my person and never out of sight. If I remove any content, it goes straight back in immediately after use. In the hotel room, I never use any drawers or storage compartments. My bag stays packed at all times, ready for a quick departure if needed. This eliminates much risk of accidental loss or theft. When I leave the room, my bag goes with me. Hotel safes are not secure and should be avoided.

Demeanor: Always blend in as much as possible, especially in your dress and appearance. Do not have an appearance as a tourist, such as wearing a t-shirt from the local gift shop. Never view maps in plain view; always prepare for your journey in the hotel room.

Secure Room: Always lock your hotel room the best as possible. When inside the room, take advantage of all locking mechanisms on all doors, connecting rooms, and windows.

Copies: I recommend possessing digital copies of all important documentation, such as your license, passport, and credit cards. This can be very helpful in the event of stolen or missing items. I keep my files on an encrypted micro SD card sewn within a pocket in my pants.

Faraday Wallets

I previously explained my use of Faraday bags with mobile devices in order to prevent signals from being sent to or from my phone. I apply this same strategy to my wallets in order to prevent electronic chips embedded into my credit cards from being maliciously compromised. My three main concerns with credit cards are magnetic swipes, physical EMV cloning, and wireless RFID capture. Let's understand each.

The magnetic strip on the back of most credit cards contains static data. Any magnetic reader could collect the customer's name, credit card number, expiration, and card issuer details. The security code printed on the back of the card is not included in this data.

EMV, an acronym for Europay, Mastercard and Visa, is a global standard for credit cards equipped with computer chips and the technology used to authenticate secure transactions. Many U.S. card issuers have migrated to this new technology to protect consumers and reduce the costs of fraud. Unlike magnetic-stripe cards, every time an EMV card is used for a payment, the card chip creates a unique transaction code that cannot be used again. If a criminal stole the chip information from one specific point of sale, card duplication would never work because the stolen transaction number created in that instance would be declined. EMV requires direct contact, and wireless capture is not (currently) possible.

An RFID credit card is a contactless card which interacts with a card reader over a short range using Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology. RFID-enabled credit cards, which may also be advertised as "tap to pay" cards, have tiny RFID chips inside the card which allow the transmission of information. The RFID chip itself is not powered, but instead relies on the energy transferred by an RF-capable payment terminal. The range of RFID in this scenario is typically under three feet. Numerous security professionals have demonstrated various abilities to acquire RFID data from credit cards remotely. Discovered vulnerabilities within the encryption protocols are quickly patched, but this is always a game of cat-and-mouse.

While magnetic stripes and EMV chips are not a threat from wireless capture devices, RFID cloning has been proven possible. Because of this, I place all cards inside a Faraday wallet. I currently use the Silent Pocket Slim Wallet (amzn.to/3tmB7kl). I recommend different colors for each of your alias wallets, as previously explained. These wallets block all wireless signals, including RFID. This allows me to protect any credit cards, licenses, passport cards, or other cards which may possess this technology.

Emergency "Go" Bag(s)

I believe everyone should have at least three emergency "Go" bags, sometimes called "Bug Out" bags, ready at all times. It is not because I suspect the apocalypse is coming or that I will need to escape zombies one day. My rationale is much more grounded. I am not a traditional "prepper", but I respect their readiness. Instead, I believe we all have the need to prepare for some type of immediate threat. We do not want to be searching through drawers and packing bags during an emergency. Everyone will have their own specific needs, but I offer the following.

Vehicle Bag: I keep a large duffle bag in the back of my vehicle at all times. The purpose is for emergencies when I cannot return to my home. This could be a wildfire which caused an evacuation while I was away or a snow storm which blocked the roads. If I am in my vehicle or have immediate access to it, I know I can survive for a short period of time. These items can allow me to sleep in my vehicle overnight, regardless of the emergency. Clients which have an immediate threat of danger from a stalker or abusive person can know they never need to go home when it might be dangerous. There are many reasons to have these items available in your vehicle. The following is the contents.

Thick Work Pants	Waterproof Coat	Police Scanner Radio
Thick Work Shirt	Waterproof Shoes	AA Batteries
Warm Socks	Toothbrush/Toothpaste	Light Sealed Snacks
Underwear	Toilet Paper	2-liter Bottle of Water
Thick Hoodie	Full First Aid Kit	AA Battery Flashlight
Sock Hat	$250 Cash	Sleeping bag

Departure Bag: In the event of an emergency departure from your home, you should be prepared to quickly exit with items which will allow you to stay away for up to one week. This could include a disaster evacuation or incoming physical threat. For me, this includes the following, and is packed near my garage. I keep enough food and water to last me at least a week. This includes canned foods and other items which do not need cooked.

Extra Clothes	Sleeping Pad	Extended Food
Tent	Blanket	Extended Water

Travel Bag: If you need to exit your home without the ability to return soon, you should have an empty bag which contains a printed list of items which you need to take with you. Do not assume you will have a clear mind at this time. My list follows.

Wallet	Passport / ID	$2000 Cash*
Laptop	House Keys	Paperwork**
Mobile Device	Human/Pet Medication	Data***
Power Cables	Glasses/Sunglasses	Gun/Ammo****

* - If possible, maintain $2000 in cash securely in your home. This can get you through a month on the road.
** - If you rely heavily on trusts or LLCs which own your assets, you may want these during emergencies.
*** - I keep a 14TB external hard drive with all of my media and important data. It is easy to grab and go.
**** - During an emergency, I want my handgun and two extra magazines of ammunition.

I offer one final opinion. We hear a lot about emergency bags which allow you to quickly leave your home when danger is approaching. While I agree with this in the event of weather or other environmental emergencies, I do not intend to flee due to danger alone. Our homes provide shelter, heat, and supplies. Whenever possible, I would rather stay in my home than flee in a vehicle. If I were threatened with a shootout from an adversary wanting to kill me, I would rather have that fight at my home than in my vehicle or at the grocery store. We have much more control and familiarity inside our homes than in public. Always use this to your advantage when appropriate. Never flee unless absolutely required. Always maintain at least a half tank of gas in your car. In an emergency, you want to roll past long lines at gas stations.

Firearms

I am an advocate for gun ownership and concealed carry of firearms. I rarely leave my home without a firearm properly concealed and accessible. This is not a book about firearm safety, training, or concealment practices. Instead, I want to focus on a scenario which has presented problems to privacy enthusiasts. Every state in the country possesses unique laws about gun ownership, purchase, and carry. South Dakota has its own nuances.

If your domicile is South Dakota and you possess a PMB address on your driver's license, you can legally purchase a firearm while you are inside the state boundaries without a permit. If sellers possess a Federal Firearms License (FFL), they will likely execute a background check through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). This usually results in a 48-hour hold on the sale. However, this is not required by state law and a private seller may not conduct a check. Overall, buying a gun within the state is fairly easy and straightforward. There is no official waiting period and weapons do not need to be registered with the state. While in the state, you can legally carry an unloaded handgun in the trunk or other closed compartment of a vehicle without any type of permit. Open carry is legal in South Dakota, which means you can carry a loaded weapon on your person without a permit, as long as it is visible to the public. Carrying a concealed weapon, especially in other states, is where it gets tricky. South Dakota offers three levels of concealed carry license, and I will only focus on the "Enhanced" option which allows concealed carry in 37 additional states. The enhanced license requires fingerprinting, a federal background check, and a firearms safety course. It provides the most features in terms of reciprocities with other states. However, there is a catch.

South Dakota requires that the applicant has "physically resided in and is a resident of the county where the application is being made for at least thirty days immediately preceding the date of the application". By the letter of the law, you must be physically present within the state for a month before you apply. This could be a hotel or RV park with a physical address. I have spoken with numerous Sheriff's deputies about this. Half insist on the physical presence while the other half stated that the PMB address is sufficient. If this is your scenario, I encourage you to do your own homework and contact the Sheriff's department within the county of your domicile. You can find complete current instructions for concealed carry permits on the South Dakota website at https://sdsos.gov/general-services/concealed-pistol-permits/default.aspx. Overall, I encourage potential South Dakota nomads to consider their firearm and concealed licensing needs when they conduct the rest of their transition to the state. If you are not a South Dakota nomad, you are at the mercy of the laws of your state. I recommend visiting https://gunstocarry.com/ccw-reciprocity-map for more information. Being a nomad will always have potential negative implications in your legal ability to carry a firearm. I encourage you to keep advised of any changes in the laws of your state.

Dealing with Drones

Assume you have established your perfect anonymous home which has no association to your real identity. You chose appropriate window treatments and made sure you have physical privacy from the street. You then hear the buzzing of a drone right above your house. What can you do? Some will say you can shoot it down, but in most states you legally cannot. Some believe it is illegal to fly a drone over another person's property, but it is usually not. These annoying flying devices are a huge privacy invasion, as almost all of them record and transmit high-definition video, but there are few legal protections which allow us to take action once they appear over our property. None of the following should be taken as legal advice. I simply present some personal thoughts on dealing with drones. More information can be heard on episode 194 of my podcast. Even more details about various state and country laws related to drones can be found at uavcoach.com/drone-laws.

- Never shoot a gun toward a drone. Bullets must land somewhere and we do not want innocent bystanders getting hurt. Some states classify shooting at a drone as the same crime as shooting at an occupied aircraft.
- If a drone is flying close to you or your home, a high-powered water hose or pressure washer can cause the unit to crash. If the unit lands on your property, you do not have a legal right to take control of it, but a No Trespassing sign prevents the owner from legally retrieving it.
- Small projectiles such as paintballs and BB guns are not very effective at knocking the devices down. However, a well-aimed football can quickly cause a crash.
- Signal jammers rarely work and are usually considered illegal. Most drones have a feature which sends it back to the original departure GPS location if it loses signal.
- Some people buy their own drones to fly into invasive drones hovering over their own property. This may destroy both devices.

- Some companies are creating drone-catching nets which can be launched on your own property. This seems excessive to me, but may be a last resort for you.
- U.S. federal law requires all drone owners to register their devices and display the registration number on the unit. However, almost no one does this. You can report your neighbor for violating this law, but do not expect much enforcement.
- Calling the police about drones will rarely result in any enforcement. Some states such as Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Kansas, and Louisiana have laws targeted toward improper drone usage. However, involving the police will result in a requirement to disclose your true identity and location. Police reports are often considered public information. Decide if your potential loss of privacy justifies your desire for revenge.
- You have no right to privacy from drones flying within public spaces. Be cautious.

I offer one final physical security anecdote based on an experience I had in early 2022. I went to a popular home improvement store which carried a large selection of gun safes. While picking out the appropriate unit for a client, I noticed many of them possessed "Sold" tickets. This warned customers that the floor model had already been sold to another customer and could not be purchased. When I looked closely at the tickets, I realized that the name, cell phone, and home address of the customer was either written directly on the ticket or included within an attached receipt. Figure 18.01 (left) displays one of the safes with a full layaway receipt including the (redacted) customer name and cell phone. Figure 18.01 (right) shows another safe which displayed the customer's name and home address. If I were a burglar, I would know of a good home to target in a few weeks. Even worse, one of the safes had the combination visible within the documentation on top of the unit. The lesson here is to always purchase security-related items with cash and never provide your name or address to the store. They might recklessly share your information with the public and make you a target.

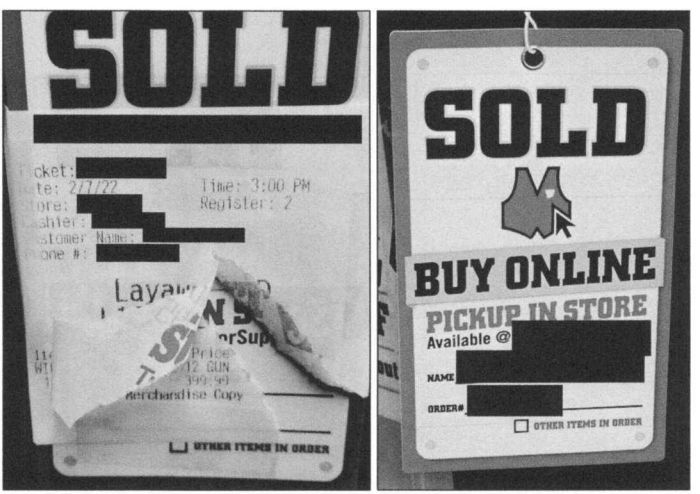


Figure 18.01: Gun safes displaying the customer's name, cell phone number, and address.

Summary

Physical safety is more important than any privacy strategy. Every client who desires a new anonymous home for privacy reasons receives the following summary list for physical security considerations.

- Vehicles should be parked in an attached garage with no clear windows.
- Never discard trash with items in your true name.
- Shred all sensitive documents.
- Apply proper windows treatments throughout the home.
- Consider removing personality elements from the exterior and interior of the home.
- Keep all valuables out of sight from the exterior.
- Properly hide small valuables within the home.
- Consider "Bait Safes" to attract burglars.
- Properly install a large safe for firearms and valuables.
- Properly utilize lamp timers, radios, and artificial TV lights.
- Install exterior lighting with motion sensors.
- Consider benefits and risks of alarm systems and signs.
- Replace all locks and add new strike plates and long screws.
- Consider fencing benefits and risks.
- Modify patterns of behavior to mask obvious schedules.

CHAPTER NINETEEN
MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES: JANE DOE

I wish I could tell you this life has been easy. I wish I had a guide for all of this while I was experimenting. I have been forced to test new strategies on myself, and occasionally clients. I have made my share of mistakes, and I have learned valuable lessons from each. These next few chapters serve as final tales of my various successes and failures when trying to make people disappear. I hope that these true stories provide insight which will aid the creation of your own privacy strategies, and give you a final confidence boost to achieve any level of privacy you desire. Obviously, all of the people mentioned have given consent to share these stories. I have redacted and modified many details to protect their identities. First, we meet Jane Doe.

I received an email through my website from a man that only asked if he could speak to me over the telephone about a sensitive situation. The name he used was the same as a fairly wealthy individual who served as an initial investor in a few successful businesses. His area code matched the general location of the investor, and his email address had a domain associated with a company that was registered to him. I scheduled a call for the next day. Those who have read my other books will know that I take every layer of my privacy very seriously. I would never call anyone from my actual cellular telephone number, and I try to avoid using Google Voice for anything too sensitive. Google keeps a log of all incoming and outgoing calls forever, regardless if the history was deleted by both parties. I also never call a cellular number of a potential client. I have no way of knowing whether the person's phone possesses malware that records calls and text messages, forwarding them to the adversary. The metadata of all calls and messages is stored by the service provider and a subpoena could make record of our communication admissible in a civil court. Instead, I instructed him to use the application Wire, which was discussed previously in this book.

I asked him to install Wire to a computer which he was confident had not been compromised, and not a mobile device. He would need to create an account and email me the username chosen. I would then call him through this app at a specified time for an audio call. While video calling is supported, I have no idea of what I am getting myself into. I do not want a stranger to save a screen capture of my face and later post it on the internet. I know that sounds a bit paranoid, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

We connected on Wire and made brief introductions. He was a savvy business person that knew how to get directly to the point. He stated that his daughter was in a true mess and he had no idea what to do. She had recently terminated a long-term relationship with an abusive man. The former companion was extremely upset and unstable. He confronted her at a friend's home where she had been staying and attempted to abduct her. She fought and was injured slightly during the process. She has always turned to alcohol and drugs to fight stress and was in a rut dealing with a boyfriend turned stalker. No matter where she stayed, he knew where she was. When she went out, he was there soon after. He even approached her in a grocery store demanding that she take him back before he "really" hurts her. She felt her world was out of control.

I asked the potential new client what level of help he was seeking. He immediately responded "the full treatment" and asked how quickly I could help. He wanted me to relocate her to a safe place where the boyfriend could never find her. He did not care about the cost, and assured me he would pay any expenses. We set up the details of establishing a retainer that would allow me to start getting things in place. While he was funding this adventure, I did not consider him to be the client. I advised that I needed to speak with her directly to start a plan and identify how exposed she was. He agreed to allow her to use his Wire account from his device and we arranged a call for the next day. Before we terminated the secure communication, I asked for the name of the boyfriend and as much detail about his life that could be provided. He only knew a name and occupation, which was plenty to start my own stalking.

"Chris" was a 30-something computer systems administrator who appeared tech-savvy. His Facebook and Instagram pages were decorated with photos of network cabling installations. This is often referred to as "cable porn", and high-tech people are fascinated by routers and switches which possess perfectly installed network cabling, often hundreds of strands of wires. He had a GitHub page which tells me he understands technology more than the average stalker. This was most concerning as it often means that malicious software was installed on the victim's devices.

I was glad that we would be communicating on her father's computer. Chris had a cellular telephone number associated with his Facebook account, and a password recovery attempt identified the last two digits of the number. A search of his Instagram username on the website FindMySnap.com, which is now retired, revealed that a SnapChat username existed identical to the Instagram account. Furthermore, this SnapChat name had been in existence since prior to 2013 when a data breach leaked user information to the internet. This revealed the first eight digits of his cellular number. Combining the SnapChat and Facebook results revealed a potential entire cell number. Placing this number with country code into the Facebook Messenger app confirmed that the number was connected to his profile. This confirmation allowed me to further investigate his online presence.

I created a virtual Android phone using software called Genymotion which allowed me to use mobile apps on my computer. I placed his cellular number in my contacts phonebook within Android and left the name as Chris. I then installed several popular social networking applications on the device and executed the "Find My Friends" feature on each. This revealed the networks where he has profiles as most require a cellular number to establish the new account. I now had a good understanding of his online activity which would later prove to be valuable.

During my call with Jane, she seemed extremely scared. She said that he will never give up and that I was probably wasting my time. She knew he would find her and continue to harass her no matter where she went. She had given up on me before I could explain my process. I asked her what type of phone she had and where she got it. She stated that she had a Samsung Galaxy S6 and it was given to her by her former boyfriend. She confirmed that there were no Samsung stock apps anywhere, which convinced me that he had "rooted" the device. I had a strong suspicion that he had installed malicious software (malware) on her phone which was allowing him to see her location at all times. He could likely monitor her communications which would identify the friends with whom she had been staying. I advised her to keep the phone on, and send it to me via overnight Fed-Ex at the hotel where I was staying. I told her to go to an Apple Store, with her dad, and pay cash for a new iPhone of her choice. After purchase, I instructed her not to open it and call me on Wire from her dad's computer when ready to turn it on for the first time. She agreed.

While waiting to analyze Jane's phone and talk with her on a secure line, I decided to also dig into her life a bit. Similar to how I investigate the offenders of the situations with which I assist, I also conduct a thorough review of the victims. Early in my new privacy career, I was approached by a woman in her twenties requesting help hiding from her abuser. "Martha" explained how he was mentally and physically abusive to her and their young child. She did not feel safe and knew he would try to track them down wherever they went. I was eager to protect her from a future attack.

I began planning her move and made sure that there would be no trail that he could follow. I assumed that only women could be victims in these types of scenarios. It never occurred to me that she might be the problem in the relationship. Fortunately (and accidentally), I found an old Facebook post made by the father of the child. It displayed a screen capture of a court order allowing him full custody of the child. I could not see the details of the order, but the father was very excited that this day had come. I finally located the full court order which detailed the mother's drug abuse, child neglect, and three documented occasions where Martha tried to abduct the child and leave the country. This led me to court documentation about her mental issues and previous confinement for parental abduction. I confirmed that the father had full custody of the child, and that a police report was made three days earlier about the mother failing to return him. I immediately contacted the father and local police in that area. I learned a valuable lesson, which is to always research both the victim and offender.

While researching Jane, nothing appeared out of the ordinary. She loved social media, and possessed very active Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Etsy pages. It was easy to see how she could be tracked based on postings from every location which she visits. If unable to find her based on live posts, her online history quickly developed a pattern of behavior that could be used to assume her current location. She appeared very close with her family, and a bit spoiled by her father. As a family with means, she obviously never went without any luxuries, and large gifts for every occasion were normal in her life. My immediate concern was that she would not be able to give up the online activity in order to protect herself. She was accustomed to immediate selfies the moment she receives a new gift or lands at a new vacation destination. She was in for a rude awakening.

That evening, Jane called me from her father's Wire account as instructed. This time, we connected via the video chat option. I wanted to assess her demeanor and look for visual signs of physical abuse. She was very shaken and had slurred speech. Her father warned me before the call that she had been drinking alcohol heavily lately, and today was no exception. He firmly believed that she would sober up once she was safe. As we talked, her father stayed right by her side, which was a problem. She was holding back details that she did not want him to hear. I politely requested to talk with her alone, which he prohibited. He quickly reminded me that he was paying for my time, and that he would be involved in every step.

I instructed her on how to turn on her new iPhone without attaching it to any previous accounts. I had already created her an anonymous Apple account that would allow her to download any basic apps and updates that she might need. We configured the Wire and Signal apps on her new device, which she could use over Wi-Fi only at this point. I had already ordered her a new Mint Mobile SIM starter pack from Amazon that would arrive at her father's house the next day. She was instructed to send me the details of the card, and I would activate it online for her. She would only need to enter the SIM card into her phone and have a clean device ready for communication. We would finish setting up the phone the following day.

Her father insisted that she would be safe at his home for the rest of the week. While the boyfriend likely knew she was there, he had never made contact at that location since the break-up due to the father. He was not shy to pick up a weapon at first glance of Chris entering the property. I knew that the father would likely be at work the next day, so I ended the conversation until then. I hoped that I would be able to talk to Jane alone in order to get the real scoop.

The next day, I received a Wire message from Jane stating that she had the SIM card and was ready to activate. We connected over Wire and finished the process. She was alone in the house, which gave us an opportunity to talk candidly. Over the next hour, I learned details about her life which her family would never want to know. I learned about the hard drugs, the weekly routine of passing out and waking in an unknown bed, and the monthly breakups with Chris. She told me of the two occasions in which he raped her, which she never reported. She showed me the scars from the cigarette burns purposely placed on areas of her body normally covered in clothing. I asked the difficult questions such as why she continues to go back to him. She answered honestly with "for the drugs". Chris was not only her lover, but also her drug dealer. She was allowed a non-stop buffet of various drugs in return for their relationship. Chris needed to go away for many reasons.

Jane was adamant that she was ready to go to rehab and leave Chris permanently. He had told her on numerous occasions that he would kill her if she ever left him and that he would never stop hunting until she was dead. He was mentally unstable, fueled with drugs, and possessed a large amount of cash from his illegal transactions. He was a valid threat. With her father funding the privacy campaign, I was ready to execute various strategies. The first priority was to get her the help she needs. It was time for rehab.

Sending Jane to rehab sounds like a simple task. Drive her there, drop her off, and send the bills to her father. It was not that easy. In Jane's part of the country, there were not many rehab options. Chris would have no trouble contacting each facility and using social engineering tactics to identify the location of her stay. For those that are not familiar with the term, social engineering is psychological manipulation of people for the purpose of performing actions or divulging confidential information. It can be simplified as lying during a con. I have used this tactic many times on behalf of clients.

A call by Chris to each rehab facility during a weekend evening, when newer staff is likely to be present and administrative personnel are not around, consisting of a few targeted inquiries, is likely to quickly identify her location. "Hi, I am Jane's brother. I was there earlier today to visit, and I left my inhaler there, do you have it? I can't get a replacement until Monday". This will be met with either, "We don't have a patient here with that name", or, "I don't see anything at the desk, let me go check her locker". Chris would be in her room within hours. She would be either dead, kidnapped, or sedated with illegal drugs before sunrise.

I convinced the father to place her in an out-of-town rehab facility that often caters to celebrities. These institutions are more likely to block amateur attempts at obtaining patient information. They know the tricks and are suspicious of every phone call. Their security is better than the average clinic and the place I chose does not allow any cellular devices within the buildings. He agreed, and she began packing. This was equally beneficial to me as it would give me time to set up her new life.

I purchased Jane a one-way airline ticket to the city of her rehab using a prepaid credit card purchased from a local CVS pharmacy. I chose the Vanilla Visa reloadable option. The maximum card value available is $500, but an additional $2,000 can be added to the card each day in $500 increments. Therefore, I can walk out of the store with a $2,500 balance on the card. Why not just use her real credit card? I must assume that Chris has access to her statements and activity. A simple keystroke logger on her laptop, or malware on her previous phone would give him her passwords. Monitoring her credit card activity would tell him the flight number, which would identify her future location. This would give him a great advantage. Today, airlines are more cautious with prepaid card purchases. If replicating this today, I would use a Privacy.com account.

I hired a car service to transport her from the family home to the airport. Before picking up Jane, the car would pick up Jane's escort, an off-duty police officer from a neighboring community. For several years, I had been teaching open source intelligence (OSINT) techniques to local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies all over the world. This has created a massive private list of contacts covering most areas of the country. I reached out to a woman who I had met at a class and asked if she would be willing to take a day off of work in order to make some side income. She agreed, and escorted Jane to the TSA checkpoint.

The reason for the escort was two-fold. First, I wanted someone with Jane in case Chris appeared during transit. I also wanted that person to be armed with a gun and have the training to use it. While this scenario of Chris intercepting transport is extremely unlikely, I prefer to be prepared. The more likely reason that this officer would be needed is to make sure that Jane makes it to her flight. I still did not trust that Jane would not willingly disappear looking for drugs. I would expect to hear that Jane never made the flight. Therefore, her escort was there for the entire process, and even waited at the only terminal exit until the flight had taken off. I was happy to give this officer twice her daily wage for a few hours of work.

Upon landing, I repeated the process with an off-duty officer working for the airport police department of that area. He picked her up at her flight's gate and escorted her to the vehicle service, then the vehicle, the entire ride, and to the front door of the rehab facility. I received text updates throughout the entire day. Everything went as planned, there were no hiccups, and Jane was safely at rehab. The security team there was now in charge of her. This is one of many reasons that I try to collect as many business cards as possible at my live training events. Contracting local off-duty police officers is my preferred option every time, especially those that I have met during my classes.

Now that she is safe at rehab, my work begins. I must secure permanent housing for her, as she may only be in rehab a few weeks. This is where I try to provide value to my clients. I establish a new life that they can simply walk into without much effort. I create new aliases and establish believable histories that allow people to feel safe in their own homes. It is vital that any actions I take associated with Jane's new life have no attachment to her previous existence. This is easier said than done.

The first step is to establish housing. Jane's situation is an ideal case for renting. Her father will pay the rent, and she will not stay at this new place long-term. When I create a relocation plan that includes a rental property, I

always plan for the client to be present at the location for one year. In most situations, they relocate to something more permanent before the year is up. On rare occasions, they need to extend their situation past the first year. Compared to the purchase of a new anonymous property, establishing a rental unit is much simpler.

Since I will not be providing my client's name or personal details, the thought of obtaining a commercial apartment is out of the question. These large complexes are always controlled by a third party or national chain. They will always require a full background check including the client's SSN and DOB. An occupancy permit will be filed with the city or county, and there is no way to establish privacy in these situations. Therefore, I always focus on properties available for rent by the owner. Preferably, I desire small homes situated on the owner's primary residence property. Since the owners will always be physically next to the unit being rented, they know that they can keep an eye on things, and have a stronger sense of control over the property. This tends to give them a sense of security and in return lowers their concerns to overly vet a new tenant. In a small town, finding these properties requires a drive and a keen eye for signage. Larger cities require the internet.

Zillow does not offer a specific search for rental housing available strictly by owner. However, a few tweaks can eliminate the larger commercial properties in which I have no interest. After selecting "Rent" from the main page, I select "In-Unit Laundry" from the "More" tab. This eliminates many of the multi-unit properties that share a common laundry area. I then deselect everything but "Houses" on the "Home Type" option. This works best on most areas, but will not work on extremely populated urban areas. I always guide my clients toward areas with a bit of privacy, such as a standalone residence. I then compare the areas of interest to various online crime maps in order to identify the safest area of town. Identifying homes that would be acceptable to the client is not the hard part. Finding landlords that will play nicely with my antics is the difficult piece.

Once I find a home of interest, I contact the owner in person. I arrive well-dressed and in a newer rental vehicle. I politely tell them that I am searching for a friend, and that we are ready to rent right away. I am usually met with an application at this point, which is when things will go one of two ways. My first few attempts at obtaining anonymous housing for victims were disasters. I incorrectly assumed that the landlords would be fighting over me and the money. I strongly stated that I would not disclose the name of the tenant and that we would be providing no identification. You can guess how that went. I slowly learned that a specific delicate approach tends to work most often. In this scenario, while home-searching for Jane, I found a perfect one-bedroom house tucked back in a wooded area. The home sat on the corner of three acres, opposite of the property owner's home. The home was vacant, and the owners proudly walked me through the recent updates. It was then time to lay out the situation.

I advised the couple, both retired and in their 60's, of the situation. I disclosed my real name, and offered them my retired credentials and badge to verify my identity. I also advised they could Google me and confirm the type of work I conduct. I informed them that I am seeking a small quiet home for a woman that has suffered a lot of mental and physical abuse. She has become fairly skeptical of the world, and has asked me to deal with housing. It is vital that her name is not associated with the home or this address, and it is a matter of her own safety. It could literally be life or death.

As I saw the brows of the owners display the concern on their minds, it was time to sweeten the deal with the following statements. "I realize that you will be very strict when selecting the tenant for this amazing property. I truly hope that you will consider her, as she would be a respectful and quiet tenant. I know the situation is unique, and I would share your same concern if I were in your shoes. This is why we feel the need to compensate you for your consideration. I am authorized to pay the rent in cash each month, plus a deposit, and prepay three months of rent as a gesture of appreciation". This usually converts the look of concern to images of cash in their pockets. While this does not work every time, it usually opens the door for further negotiation. On one occasion, a landlord responded with "Make it six month's cash, in advance!" I happily agreed and my attorney handled all of the paperwork.

This brings up an important point to consider. Obviously, the client's name does not get associated to the property whatsoever, but neither does mine. I have property attorneys on each coast that take care of all rental

paperwork and happily attach their own names and signatures to any forms. Neither of them cares about their own privacy, they each use their public office addresses, and neither of them ever know the identity of my client. They each receive a nominal fee for their two hours of paperwork (which they likely have an intern complete).

At this point, you may be thinking that this all only happens because the client has money to throw at the problem. While this is true in this situation, it is not always the case. I have had many clients that did not have a penny to pay, but still received my services without charge. I have also had extremely wealthy clients that pay the lion's share of the bills.

The owners agreed and I now had a rental property lined up for Jane. Two days later, I had the keys and legal possession. During the previous walkthrough of the property, the power, water, and gas was active. I knew that utilities were not included, but I incorrectly assumed that the bills would stay in the name of the property owners. This had been the case with my previous client relocation, and the landlord just added the usage to the monthly rent. This is always the optimal route to go. In hindsight, I was so excited that they agreed to waive the background check and application process, that I got ahead of myself and just wanted to get a contract signed. This was not a huge issue, but I was very disappointed that I had not clarified this. As I stood in the living room of Jane's new home, I was without power or water. All utilities had been terminated as of the move-in date.

The next morning, I first contacted the power company. This is never an easy call. Traditionally, establishing power to a residence requires a "soft pull" on a person's credit report, which demands a Social Security Number (SSN) of my client. Some may wonder why I would not want to share this information with them. The simple answer is that the details provided will absolutely become public record at some point. Data mining companies often obtain utility records in order to better populate their databases on practically every citizen. The name on the utility bill will likely be present on free people search websites within ninety days. Therefore, disclosing my client's identity to the power company is not an option. Instead, I will test the waters one piece at a time.

Since I record all of my telephone calls as they relate to a client, I am able to provide an exact transcript of the conversation. The following occurred in Spring of 2017.

Operator: Hello, how may I help you today?

Me: Hello, I need to activate power at my residence, can you assist?

Operator: Absolutely. What is the address?

Me: REDACTED

Operator: OK, I do see that this address is part of our coverage area, and that power was terminated on Tuesday. When do you want the power activated?

Me: Right away if possible, we are moving in today, and my daughter is so eager to get the PlayStation going.

Operator: What is your name sir?

Me: John Arthur Wilson

Operator: And what is your date of birth?

Me: Hmmm. I really hate to give that out, I was the victim of identity theft this year, and the officer advised to never give out my DOB or SSN. What are my options?

Operator: Sir, I cannot turn on the power without your information including your social.

Me: Oh boy, that is concerning. I am happy to pay a deposit to my credit card in order to bypass this valid requirement. Is there a supervisor that can authorize this?

Operator: Sir, I can tell you most certainly that we cannot turn on the power without your full information. A supervisor will tell you no different.

Me: Understood, let me call you back after my wife gets home.

This conversation was typical. Utility companies want to be sure that you do not rip them off and leave with an unpaid bill. By conducting a credit check, they can come after you when you owe money. In about half of my attempts, I am allowed to pay a $250-$500 deposit in order to bypass the credit check and SSN requirement. Usually, I can provide a credit card to pay this, but sometimes they will want a check mailed. I am prepared for either scenario with a secondary credit card that I maintain in an alias business name or a check with no personal name or details in the upper left corner. Both are valid payment, and connect to a business checking account in the name of an LLC that I maintain solely for this purpose. I then invoice the client for these expenses.

After waiting a few minutes, I called the power company again and was given a different operator. The conversation was similar, but I took it a new direction, as follows.

Me: Yes, I am trying to help a foreign exchange student obtain power at a rental home. My English is a bit better than hers, so I thought I would assist.

Operator: What is her name?

Me: REDACTED TRADITIONAL INDIAN NAME

Operator: Does she have an SSN?

Me: No, she says she has a UIDAI National Identification Number, can she give you that?

Operator: Sure, go ahead.

Me: 5485 5000 8000

Operator: OK, so, just so you know, she is going to have to pay a $200 deposit, which can be refunded after one year or when she terminates service, does she have a credit card for this?

Me: I am happy to pay that for her, are you ready for the number?

Everything was smooth after that point. Before you judge me too heavily as a fraudster, let me explain. The Indian government assigns a twelve-digit national identification number called a Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) number. On their website, an example of this number is displayed on a fictional card as 5485 5000 8000. This number will never be assigned to any individual. Furthermore, the U.S. utility companies have no way of verifying this number as valid. Operators likely just add it in the notes section to cover themselves.

Think about it. Thousands of foreign exchange students enter colleges and universities every year. They all live in some type of housing that requires utilities. Most of these require the student to pay the utilities directly. Therefore, it is a common occurrence for non-U.S. citizens to activate power at a residence. Starting with this excuse has been more successful than trying to make an employee understand that you prefer not to identify the homeowner. At the end of the day, all of the bills are paid, we have stolen nothing, and the utility companies are happy. No one ever checks up on this situation because there is no need. I make sure the bills are always paid in a timely manner.

The water, sewer, and trash services were much easier. After they were notified that the power had already been activated, they seemed content that everything was legitimate. I set all three services to auto-pay to an anonymous debit card created specifically for this client, and provided a very generic name. I used Privacy.com, as explained previously, which connects directly to the victim's personal checking account. After association, users can create an unlimited amount of debit card numbers, each used for a single merchant. Any billing name and address can be used during payment, and the transactions are withdrawn directly from the checking account on file. The merchant (utility company) does not know the true name of my client. The service (Privacy.com) does know the name of my client, but does not know where she lives. They only know that she pays various utility companies monthly. There is obviously a paper trail here that could be identified with a search warrant or court order, but those are not my concern. I need her out of public view.

The house was ready for Jane in plenty of time for her release from rehab. It was now time to train her on the use of her new aliases. Choosing an alias name can be difficult if too much effort is wasted on finding the perfect option. I do not buy into that, and I do not get overly creative with picking aliases. Why does she need an alias name? She can never associate her true name with her residence. She will need something to use in place of her given name.

I almost always recommend that a client maintain their actual first name as part of their alias. The exceptions are very unique names which would be easy to find with targeted searching. Jane is a common name, so it will work fine. Also, she will naturally respond when called, and will not create an awkward situation when she cannot remember her alias name. She cannot ever use her last name, so I often recycle the last name of either the previous resident or the landlord. In this case, assume that the previous resident was also named Jane Doe. This would not work, as it is too similar and mail could be accidentally forwarded to the previous resident. If the previous resident was named Jim Watkins, then Jane Watkins could be a good choice, unless Jim has a family member with the same name. A quick search through various people search tools immediately identifies relatives' names. If the previous resident's last name is not working out, or is very unique, I will focus on the landlord's last name. In this case, the landlord was Matthew Parker. Therefore, Jane Parker will work great.

Why not choose a random last name? There are a few reasons, but the most important is familiarity. If Matthew Parker owns the property, and is publicly listed on many websites, another person there with that last name is not suspicious. The mail person will not think twice about delivering mail to a person with a last name matching the property owner, who also receives mail on occasion. Also, it helps hide the fact that a new resident is present. If this is a small town, it would not be difficult to search for any new residents within the past month. This could unnecessarily expose my client. Maintaining the last name of the property owner or previous resident is just much simpler. There is one other reason.

In a perfect world, my client would only pay with cash, buy all necessities from the local store, and never attach her real name with any purchase ever again. We do not live in that world. We require Amazon accounts with Prime shipping, and practically every big-box store will require a name and other details for large purchases and deliveries. It is almost always certain that the databases that store these details will be breached, sold, or somehow released publicly at some point. Therefore, we must be prepared.

First, I created a new Amazon account in the name of Jane Parker. I supplied the real address to her home, and Amazon conducted a public records search as part of its fraud prevention actions. Having the last name of the property owner can often bypass any red flags present when it cannot verify Jane Parker is a real person. Amazon seemed happy with the details, and the account was ready for funding. I did not provide a Privacy.com masked debit card number to this account, as these are detected by Amazon as suspicious when attached to a new account. Instead, I purchased an Amazon gift card from the closest grocery store to the residence. Amazon knows where these accounts are purchased, and buying in one state while using in another is also a red flag.

I attached the Amazon gift card to the account and made a small purchase. This is below the threat model that scrutinizes first purchases, and I selected the option for a free month of Amazon Prime. The item arrived quickly, and my client now has history with her new alias and new address within their system. I chose the option to

purchase Amazon Prime for an entire year and used the remaining balance of the Amazon gift card to pay the fee. This makes Amazon happy, and their systems become much less cautious of the account. At this point, I add a new Privacy.com masked card to the account and make it the primary form of payment. Jane can use this account to buy anything she wants from Amazon, and the transactions will be withdrawn from her personal checking account behind the scenes.

This process can be replicated with any other online shopping options, choosing a new Privacy.com card for each purchase. Within a few months, data mining companies will assume Jane Parker is real. She will even start receiving junk mail at the house. I see this as a sign of success. She has committed no crimes, compromised no one's identity, and paid all of her debts. She has no photo identification including this name (yet) and will never identify herself as an alias to any government official. She knows the rules. More importantly, she will never tell anyone she does not know that she is Jane Doe.

Using an alias on the internet is easy. Online shopping is an interaction between your computer and another computer. Neither cares about much except whether you have a valid form of payment or you are a fraudster trying to rip someone off. As long as we keep the systems happy, we will likely never be stopped. In-person purchases are a bit trickier. In my youth, I paid a cash deposit for my first apartment, and wrote a check at the local furniture store for a couch and kitchen table. I was never asked for identification. Today, paying cash for large items is criticized and any large purchase requires a valid government ID. Let's tackle both of those issues.

Now that Jane was healthier, I snapped a few boring face-forward photos of her standing in front of a white wall. Each had her wearing a different shirt and her hair in a unique style. These will be my starting point for creating her first ID in her alias name. Before you get bothered by this, please let me explain. There will be very rare instances that she will need this, and we will be sure not to break any laws during the creation or utilization of these IDs.

When we think of "Fake IDs", we often have thoughts of underage kids buying a poorly made driver's license with an unbelievable date of birth. That illegal act is never tolerated by me in reference to alias IDs for my clients. Instead, I strictly use the following guidelines which are repeated from an earlier chapter. Please note that some state laws vary, and that I am not an attorney.

LEGAL: Non-government identification in an alias name can be legal. There should be absolutely no mention of any state or the word government. There should be no mention or reference to any real businesses. It should not identify you as an employee of a legitimate company.

NON-LEGAL: Any false identification that displays the words city, county, state, government, police, license, driver, court, agent, et cetera is a crime. This should be obvious. Any reference to employment by any government agency is also illegal. If any part of you thinks that you might be crossing the line, you probably are. Please stop.

I hesitate to discuss the option of printing my own alias identification cards in detail because people may try to break the law and create fake government IDs. Lamination machines and holograms are very affordable on Amazon and local print shops will happily laminate anything you print yourself at home. There are many templates of various styles of photo IDs online, but most are illegal. For Jane, I have a legal solution in place that will assist with convincing others of her new alias name. I made her my employee.

I own a legal LLC business entity that accepts no income whatsoever. Therefore, it does not require an EIN with the IRS and there are no tax reporting requirements. It has a very generic name that could apply to many different industries, similar to Premier Solutions LLC. Jane became a volunteer assistant for this LLC and received no compensation. As an associate of Premier Solutions, I demand that she possess an employee identification card with her photo and name. Since we are a very fun company, every employee chooses a "stage name", and Jane's happens to be Jane Parker. I created a new identification card through a template on my

laptop, inserted one of the photos I captured, and printed the file to my IDVille card printer purchased from Staples. The ID was printed onto plastic card stock which had the same quality as many government issued IDs. Possession of this card is not illegal but attempting to falsely identify herself as her alias to a government employee is a crime. Where would she need this? Checking into hotels and receiving packages first come to mind. I advised her to keep it hidden in a wallet, and never remove it unless absolutely necessary.

Aliases possess an unfair reputation as being shady or criminal. While this unfortunate use occurs, an alias itself is not illegal. As long as you do not cross the line of any sort of government identification, you can be anyone you want. It is not a crime to give another civilian a fake name. If I were to visit a Starbucks, I would not give out my real name. There is no benefit. If I entertain a group of clients at a restaurant, I do not provide my real name to the establishment. They do not need that. They only need payment for the services in the form of cash or a secondary credit card. I do not want my clients' true identities within their databases and guest books that will eventually be breached and leaked online. While this may seem overly cautious, I am aware of the daily breaches and intrusions into sensitive data stored by third parties.

When a client has a legitimate need for identification in an alias name, I encourage them to seek out their own IDs that can help "pad" a wallet. I have found many national chains of gyms that issue a photo identification card that can be shown for entry into any gym location nationwide. I have had great success using this as a valid proof of identity at hotels. Many of these businesses will give you a 30-day free trial in order to evaluate the property. Of those that I have tried, some of them issued the identification card with photo. I have also found a handful of spas in affluent areas that possess a monthly usage business structure. These also mandate that members show their spa ID upon arrival, most with photo on the card.

Animal shelters are becoming more aggressive about security and often ask volunteers to wear an identification card while on premises. Obtaining an alias photo ID from a shelter as a volunteer has many benefits. First, volunteering and caring for the animals is a nice thing to do. Also, showing this ID when checking into a hotel often sparks a conversation with the receptionist about their own animal history, and it creates a calm and welcoming environment sure to pacify corporate policies about valid photo identification.

Now that Jane had her invisible home, new alias name, and photo identification, it was time to issue her a new credit card. This is actually one of the easiest steps, which surprises many people. We wrongfully associate our credit cards with a belief that they can never be legally used by other people. Any of us can give a credit card to someone else and authorize them to make a purchase. While a merchant may not accept use without identification, there is no fraud. Similarly, we can use a credit card in someone else's name. However, there are some very serious caveats to this, as explained previously.

Many married couples possess two credit cards that are connected to a single account. They may possess the exact same account numbers and expiration, but they display different names for each spouse. One of these cards is associated with the PRIMARY account holder, while the other is a SECONDARY issue card. This can also be true for children. Many parents add a secondary card to their account, place the child's name on the card, ship them off to college, and hope for the best. If you have ever ordered a secondary card for an account, you have likely noticed that there was never an inquiry for an SSN for the cardholder. This is because it is only a secondary card. There is no need for a credit check because the primary card holder is responsible for all charges. Theoretically, you could add a secondary card in practically any name to an account, and any purchases with that card would simply appear on the primary credit card statement. We can use this as a strategy for privacy.

There are only a few major credit card companies that offer secondary cards without much resistance. Of those, Chase and American Express are two of the easiest. Unfortunately for me, Jane does not have either of these cards. Instead she only has a US Bank credit card. The major banks, such as US Bank and Bank of America, will not issue secondary cards to an account without a full vetting of the new cardholder, including SSN. Jane was willing to apply for a Chase card, but I had just established her credit freeze, which prevents any new inquiries. This important strategy was previously discussed. Therefore, I had to un-freeze her credit, apply for the new

card in her father's address, and then re-freeze her file. This is not a huge deal but added a few days to the process. Once she had a new Chase card delivered to her father's address, it was time to add a secondary account.

An important step to this process is to never use the original card in the real name. Any secondary cards will have the same account number, and we want to keep a bit of distance between the names used. I immediately destroyed her card to prevent temptation. After instruction and a rehearsal, I had her call Chase about her account.

Chase Operator: Hello, how may I help?

Jane: Hi, I just received my new credit card, thank you so much! My previous provider issued me a second card for my step-daughter in college, is that possible with this card? I just want her to have something for emergencies.

Chase Operator: Absolutely, what is her name?

Jane: Jane Parker. She has my first name and her father's last name.

Chase Operator: Before issuing this card, I must make you aware that all purchases with this card will be charged directly to you and you will be responsible for all activity. Do you still agree to having a secondary card issued to your account?

Jane: Yes.

Chase Operator: OK, the card will arrive at the address on file to your account, it will be addressed to you, and will arrive in a plain white envelope.

In three days, the card arrived at Jane's father's residence, and she now had a credit card in her new alias name. There is obviously a connection between these two names now, but only Chase knows this. Chase will eventually include this new alias as a possible associate of my victim, but that cannot be avoided. Having a credit freeze in place will prevent the majority of this leakage.

I do not advise all clients to obtain a secondary credit card. The wealthy clients have many more options such as invisible LLCs with business checking accounts. However, Jane does not have the resources for this. Also, she will definitely need a credit card for daily life, and I do not want her using anything in her real name in the new town where she lives. Therefore, the convenience of having an alias credit card outweighs the risks associated with connecting a secondary card to an alias name.

The final step in Jane's plan was to establish a post office box in her real name at a small post office a couple of towns away from her. She will need access to mail and her bills, and nothing should ever be delivered to the house in her name. I helped her complete the form and supplied only legitimate information. I used her previous address, where she still receives mail, and her real name. The post office does not know her true physical address. Jane was instructed to only use this address for anything that she needed to receive in her real name. It should never be used for her alias. That would connect the two names together further and could jeopardize her home address by associating her real name to any alias utility bills. She could use this PO Box as her address for tax filing and any other government related services. It cannot be placed on her driver's license, but that is not necessary for her at this time. She was still listed under her father's address. Other clients have had to obtain a new driver's license address, often referred to as a ghost address, which was previously explained.

Jane was now in good shape. I was finished. She was clean and sober, lived in a house with no ties to her real name, possessed an alias ID and credit card, and most importantly had a strong understanding of the reasons for all of this fuss. I wished her well, and incorrectly assumed we would never see each other again. She would later reach out to me when Chris showed up.

I take responsibility for this. When I gave her the secondary credit card, I told her to use it sparingly, and only when a credit card was required. I focused on things such as hotels. I did not make it clear that the card should not be used as part of her daily life. As time passed with no sign of Chris, she relied on this secondary card heavily. She used it every week at the local grocery store and for fuel from the local gas station. The credit card possessed a very detailed history pattern. Chris identified Jane's new ProtonMail email address from a common friend. He then sent Jane a phishing attack for which she became vulnerable. She provided her ProtonMail password, which Chris used to access the account. In the archives was her credit card statement. He now knew the general area where she resided. Since he is a psychopath, he traveled to the area and secured a local hotel. He parsed through all of the property tax records for the county and isolated those that matched the properties marked as rental units with the county occupancy division. He now had a list of rental homes with each owner's information. He contacted each owner via telephone and provided the following script.

"Hi, I am Jane's brother. I would like to make her rent payment for next month on her behalf. Do I have the right landlord? This is a gift and I would like to surprise her, so I hope you will keep this a secret for now."

He assumed she would keep using her first name, and he was correct. Most of these calls ended with confusion as the owner did not know "Jane". Eventually he reached an owner which confirmed he rented to Jane and even described her to make sure they were each talking about the same person. He now had a likely address. He conducted surveillance but did not ever catch her in transit. Her recycling bin was in the street, so he removed the contents and returned to his hotel. In the bags of papers and plastics, he located empty envelopes addressed to Jane at her PO Box. He knew he had the right home. That night he committed a home invasion and was waiting for her when she returned home. A physical attack ensued, he fled, and was later arrested by the local police. These details were gathered by a detective during an interview with Chris. The detective stated he seemed proud of his work.

I learned a lot from this incident, as I had made many sloppy mistakes. First, I underestimated the suspect. I now assume that every adversary is technically skilled and diligent. Next, I should have stressed more to never use any credit card, even a secondary alias card, near your home. This payment history displays a very unique lifestyle pattern that provides a great starting point to physical location. I should have had her purchase high-dollar gift cards from stores far from her home, and then use those if she needed digital payment. Better, I should have enforced the use of cash at all times.

Next, I now consider the alias first name. I usually like to maintain the first name of my client as an alias for appropriate response in social settings. This may not be wise for clients with extreme circumstances. This is especially important for those with unique names. I must now always include the landlord when considering the weakest links in my plan. I should have also stressed the importance of shredding or burning anything with her name the moment it needs to be discarded. Personally, I burn anything with sensitive information, but only after it has run through my cross-cut shredder. This makes for great kindling if you have a fireplace or wood stove.

Jane and I learned a lot. She was one of my first abuse clients. I was working in uncharted territory. This is no excuse; these were amateur mistakes with advanced adversaries. Jane has since moved to another home anonymously using similar methods as previously stated. She had one close call when her home address was published to an online marketing website which gathered "leads" through malicious methods. Her name and home address were leaked to this database because she requested a quote from a questionable online renter's insurance provider which shares data with numerous third parties. The data was later sold as leads for future business. This site had no opt-out policy and requests to the business owner went unanswered. My response was to file a COPPA complaint. I informed the website owner, copying the abuse address for his web host, that he was in violation of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) by publishing the name and address of a child under the age of 13. I provided my adult client's details. The next day, the entry was removed. This was a bit shady, but warranted in my opinion. I have little sympathy for these types of sites, and I hurt no one. Surprisingly, this tactic works often when websites otherwise refuse to remove personal data. Chris served less than a year in county jail for the home invasion, and he likely continues to hunt her. While I have much higher confidence in my new strategy for her, he still keeps me up at night.

CHAPTER TWENTY
MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES: JIM DOE

When I became a police officer in 1997, I had absolutely no concern about personal privacy and safety. My home loan and property taxes were in my name, and all utilities were sent to me at the house. I was very publicly associated with my home and was even listed in the phone book. A few years later, I was involved in a high-profile case that made me question my transparency. While it took me a few years to get completely off radar, I was lucky that I never actually needed the protection. This is not the case for many police officers today.

I often get panicked emails or phone calls from cops that either attended my training or know someone else that had. Something has happened in their lives that has created a spotlight on them, and they realize too late that their entire lives are available online. This was the case of Jim Doe. Jim was a police officer in the U.S. who was involved in the shooting of an armed suspect during an investigation. The shooting was later found to be justified after video from a witness displayed the offender pointing a gun at Jim, but that did not matter much at the time of the incident. Before a thorough investigation could be conducted, the public and the media assumed that the officer was wrong and demanded immediate answers. Protests began and media coverage fueled the hate expanding through the city. The focus quickly turned to Jim.

Jim's department refused to identify the officer that was involved in the shooting until the investigation was complete, but that did not help him. Anonymous "hackers" began investigating the incident themselves. They identified all of the police officers from that city through public payroll records. They then eliminated those that were not on duty after personal social network posts displayed them in family settings. The officers on duty the night of the shooting were quickly identified. Calls to the station asking to speak with each of them resulted in the same officer never being available. Officer Jim Doe must be the shooter.

People began spreading Jim's name throughout social media, which the press picked up right away. Online searches through various people finder websites easily identified Jim's home address, phone number, and family members. News crews were stationed outside of Jim's home, hoping to capture a video clip of him walking to his car. Jim was stuck, and his family was afraid to leave the house. At night, protesters began throwing objects at the home and yelled threats toward the entire family. Jim's children could not attend school as they also received threats over the internet. Jim reached out to me for help.

This is a difficult situation. I cannot make him and his family invisible overnight, and I cannot make the world forget his home address. All I could offer was to help him obtain temporary anonymous lodging and some peace. Later, we could create a strategy to get his life back in order. The first order of business was to get him and his family safely out of the house without anyone following. This could be difficult as the group of people standing guard at his house was growing every day. Simply driving him away from the home was not an option.

I contacted the local fire chief and explained the situation. He was very sympathetic, as the police and fire departments work together closely. He confirmed that the fire department possessed an ambulance crew as part of the service to the community. He agreed to assist with the safe relocation of Officer Doe. We identified a time during shift change when an extra crew would be available. This was to avoid any disruption of normal emergency service response. At that time, an ambulance with two medics responded to Jim's house. The lights and siren, which were only enabled upon arrival at the home, cleared a path through the aggressive crowd. The ambulance backed into the driveway until it reached the attached garage. At that point, an off-duty officer opened the garage door, which was almost touching the ambulance, leaving only a small opening that allowed visibility inside. Jim and his family loaded into the ambulance and it departed.

While the ambulance drove away, a police car followed slowly, creating a large gap between the ambulance and press attempting to follow. No one would pass the police car on the two-lane road, and the ambulance eventually disappeared. It responded to a pre-arranged meeting spot where a family member was waiting with a minivan.

The family loaded into the van and then continued to a hotel the next city over. An unmarked detective car monitored the situation and confirmed that no one had followed the minivan. Step one was complete.

Jim's department photo was leaked onto the internet, and his face was plastered on practically every television in town. I did not want him recognized by anyone at the hotel. All it would take was one careless employee to tell the world where Jim was staying. Traditionally, this could present a problem, as Jim will need to check into the hotel and pay by credit card. Fortunately, there are alternative options for this.

Before Jim's arrival, I created a new Hilton Honors account online in a new alias name. I then made a reservation at the desired hotel using this account and alias. I used my own secondary credit card in order to hold the confirmation, but did not want to place the expenses on this card. Within moments, I received an email from Hilton with the option to check-in online and select a room. I completed this process through the Hilton website, which eliminates the need to present identification upon check-in. It is designed as a time-saving option, but rarely is. A physical credit card is still required upon check-in, which I did not have attached to Jim's new alias. Fortunately, this Hilton property offers electronic locks that can be opened through the Hilton app on an Android device. Jim downloaded the app to his new burner Android phone, and logged in with the credentials I supplied to him. I needed to work on anonymous payment.

I could not simply use his real credit card as attached to his real name for the hotel payment. That was too risky. In order for him to rest safely, it was vital that no one could connect him to the hotel. Many of his co-workers offered their own cards, which was no better in my opinion. Instead, Jim sent me his credit card details, and I created an account with the online masking service Blur. Blur generates one-time use credit card numbers for any purpose. At the moment of creation, the chosen dollar amount is immediately charged to the real credit card. The benefit of this new masked credit card number is that any name and zip code can be used during any purchase. The disadvantage is the associated fees. This would work fine in a pinch, but not long term.

I created a new virtual credit card in the amount of $500 and supplied this card to Jim's two-night stay. This action allowed me to prepay for Jim's room, which authorized his phone to unlock his room's door without ever stopping by the front desk. Jim and his family walked in the hotel, went straight to their room, and his Hilton app used his Android's NFC connection to unlock the door. The family was now staying in a hotel safely and anonymously. Very few trusted people knew their whereabouts. There was no media hounding them, protesters screaming at them, or rocks smashing their vehicle's windows. It was quiet and created an environment that could be used to regroup. I arrived the next day to begin planning his new privacy strategy.

Jim was obviously shaken, but not nearly as much as his wife. She was a wreck. Jim had the nerve for these types of situations, but it was killing him to see his wife scared. Earlier that day, she had received messages on her Facebook accounts that included manipulated images of her children inside coffins. Combine that with a family of four stuck in a typical Hampton Inn hotel room sharing one bathroom, and you have a stressful weekend on your hands. I do not know any parent that would not be upset.

There is no easy solution to this scenario. They cannot stay at the hotel forever and will need to assume regular lives at some point. My immediate concern is always physical safety and short-term anonymous lodging, which I had achieved. The next step is mid-term housing which usually goes one of two directions. Either I establish an option that allows for a longer stay, or I identify friends or family that can support them while I figure out the next steps. Jim had no family homes where he would be comfortable staying, and his wife's parents had passed many years ago, with her as an only child. All of his friends were cops, which would never work. Placing them at a co-worker's home could either jeopardize the safety of that officer or further expose attacks to my client when angry protesters decide that any local cop is fair game. It was time to consider extended stay options.

In 2014, I was the keynote speaker at an insurance risk conference, where I met the CEO of a national chain of extended stay hotels. Out of pure luck, I was sitting at his table in a hotel ballroom while I awaited my speaking slot after a few introductions and awards. When I saw his name tag and the company name, I made him promise

me that we could talk after my session. He happily agreed and waited for me in the lobby after the event. The free open bar with top-shelf spirits could have also had an impact on his commitment.

I gave him a very brief overview of the disappearing services that I provide, and he was very intrigued. While displaying genuine interest, I could detect a hint of concern from his face over why I was sharing this information. I told him that I often run into check-in issues at his hotels due to strict identity verification protocols. These places can be stricter than a traditional hotel since guests will often stay weeks or months while working locally in various industries. They always want to know exactly who is staying there and who should not be present on the grounds. They also want to make sure they get reimbursed from the companies that are providing lodging for their employees.

He interrupted with, "How can I help?". I knew we would be long-term friends. I told him that there are two things that can help me and numerous clients that find themselves in danger. The first is a fast-track check-in option that requires no identity verification, and the second is the same discount that he applies to his big customers. When typical travelers show up to rent a room, they may have to pay $160 a night while the fracking employee in town for a few weeks is quoted $55. He was adamant that he would make sure that I get the absolute bulk rates but was not sure how to tackle the identification issue. I did not necessarily need his plan, as I already had my own. I just did not know if he would agree.

My proposal to him was to add my company as a customer within his online billing system. I had a legitimate LLC that was not tied to my name, but possessed purchasing power and had a reliable funding source. His company would issue me a customer number and allow me to book rooms online through their partner portal for the discount. I could book rooms that would not require payment from the person checking-in, and my company could be billed after checkout. This was all fairly straightforward and would allow me to receive the lowest pricing. The real power in this proposal was that he would add the following within the notes section, visible during the check-in process.

"This reservation was conducted through the office of our headquarters. Mr. (CEO NAME) has personally assured the guest that check-in will be expedited without the need for any verification of identification or payment. The customer is to be billed Net-30."

He agreed and had his office set me up the week following the conference. It was nothing more than a typical commercial account, but that small note made all the difference. Most employees saw it while checking-in my clients and immediately offered a higher level of service without ID requirements. On one occasion, my client received great aggravation due to the resistance on providing ID. She asked the reception desk to look for a note on the account, and it was smooth sailing from there.

I logged in to my online portal for this extended stay hotel chain and located a hotel an hour outside of our location. I made a reservation for 30 days and received a rate 75% lower than retail price. I was able to secure a room with a full kitchen, two isolated bedrooms, and two bathrooms. It would not be the Ritz, but it would be better than the current accommodations. Jim and his family began packing.

You may wonder why I did not just start at the extended stay hotel and avoid the temporary stay at the Hampton Inn. The reason is out of respect to my friend that owns the extended stay hotels. I promised him that I would never send a client that would cause any type of issue toward his company or employees. I wanted to make sure we were clean from any followers that would notify the world that "enemy number one" was at a property owned by my friend. Therefore, I never start at one of those locations. That step needs to offer a clean spot that can be used long-term if necessary.

Jim's co-workers safely escorted him and his family in their off-duty vehicles to the new extended stay option. As expected, they were never prompted for any type of payment or identification, and only had to show the printed reservation confirmation and purchase order created by my company to pay the bill afterward. Neither

Jim nor his wife checked the family into the hotel. One of his friends took care of everything and spent less than five minutes in the lobby. They now had a place to call home for a while.

I gave Jim a week to tackle his own issues with his employer and the situation he was in. When he reached out to talk about long-term plans, he asked if I would come see him personally. I would have it no other way. When I arrived, he went straight to the point. "I put my house up for sale, my friends moved all of my belongings into storage, and my wife never wants to set foot in that neighborhood again", he explained in a very monotone, factual voice. "What do we do now?" he asked, understanding that walking into a new home was not feasible financially. I asked him if he ever considered being a nomad, which he did not answer. "Hear me out", I requested, and I started to explain the concept of the official nomad in terms of home domicile in the United States. I gave him the following pitch.

"Imagine you are retired, your kids are grown and out of the house, and you are ready to downsize. Maybe you live in a cold area, and the idea of chasing the sun is appealing. You decide that you and your spouse are going to sell all of your belongings, buy an RV, and follow the weather. You hang out in Florida in the winters and explore the national parks in the summer. You live in your RV and do not have a state to really call your own. This scenario occurs to thousands of people every year, and those couples chase their dreams while enjoying the freedom of the life as a nomad. In fact, there are three states that recognize a defined 'nomad' and provide a home state without any physical residence within the boundaries."

The skepticism started to break, but he still did not understand how this applied to him. I continued my proposal.

"Think about those retirees. They must possess a driver's license and an official mailing address which can be used on any government document. These people still exist and must have an address lined up to receive mail, file taxes, obtain a passport, and maintain credit. Florida, South Dakota, and Texas fill the void for these retirees needing an official home base. The beauty of this option is that being retired or possessing an RV is not required. Anyone can become a nomad, as long as you obey all of the laws surrounding this option."

My ideas were starting to click with him, and the questions began to fly out of Jim such as, "Is it affordable? Can I have a driver's license without my home address on it? Would this buy us some time to figure out the next steps?", and many others. I responded "Yes to all".

Jim was the perfect candidate for nomad conversion. He was in a tough predicament and needed time. It would be months before any investigation was complete. He had nowhere stable to stay. He was not sure what the future held. He did not know if he would need to move out of state or if the day would come where he could return to the town where he worked his entire career. Ultimately, he was in no place to make any type of commitment and needed to float for a bit. I laid out the entire process of becoming a legal nomad and the entire family agreed to cooperate with the plan. The remaining content of this chapter details every step, including my mistakes made along the way.

I had personally become a legal nomad a couple of years prior to this incident. I always make myself the guinea pig for all of my weird ideas, and this one needed to be bulletproof before I offered it within my menu of services. In 2014, I took an early retirement from my law enforcement job as a cyber-crimes detective. I sold my home and accepted a new position that would have me traveling extensively. I would no longer be an Illinois resident, but I would also not be connected to any other state. I would be a bit abandoned. I could have easily kept my Illinois driver's license and used a local PO Box, likely not drawing any skepticism, but it felt odd. I had always used the address of the local police department on any government identification, and that seemed inappropriate after retirement. The last thing I wanted was to ruffle any feathers with my previous employer as I started a new venture. After much research, I settled on becoming a nomad within a nomad-friendly state.

My four goals for Jim were as follows, with the reasons for each included.

Obtain a new physical address. Jim will be selling his home, and he would be legally required to provide his new address to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) upon sale. The moment he supplies the actual place he is staying; it is public information. Most states offer some type of option to purchase various databases. Third-party data mining companies love this, and the state makes a nice profit from our personal details. Within thirty days, the address provided will be available on premium people search websites at less than $15 per query. I cannot allow that. Therefore, I need a physical address that can be used on a driver's license, passport application, tax return, or any other legal document. It must also be an address where Jim will never visit. Finally, it must all be legal.

Possess a reliable mail forwarding service. I will be forwarding Jim's postal mail away from his home to a commercial mail receiving agency (CMRA). This will also be public information. Therefore, I need a service that will securely accept all of his mail and send in bundles to any address I specify. This middle-man protects the final destination from public view.

Mislead anyone hunting him or his family. I must purposely pick a physical address that would never be used as an actual residence. I have met privacy seekers that pick random houses and claim they live there. This is irresponsible. I do not want an activist to fire-bomb some innocent person's home thinking they are getting revenge on Jim. His new "home" must be an obvious commercial property that will confuse anyone that spends the resources required to identify the location. He will never set foot anywhere near the location.

Buy as much time as he needed. Finally, I need a solution that will give Jim some breathing room. Becoming a legal nomad can be temporary or permanent. Jim and his family will not need to rush into any long-term commitments and can let this whole situation unfold naturally.

For the sake of this chapter, assume that Jim chose South Dakota. The first step toward establishing residency in a nomad-friendly state is to purchase a Personal Mail Box (PMB), as previously explained. I was able to create an account online in his real name and use a Privacy.com masked debit card to pay for the purchase. Every PMB service I have found possesses awful online security, and I suspect that each have had a data breach of some magnitude. Therefore, I never provide a personal credit card number.

For $300, I obtained a new physical mailing address, mail collection services, forwarding options, and enough postage to easily cover outgoing shipments of mail for the next year. This is a vital first step toward obtaining true privacy with a "ghost address". From this point forward, any time that my client is asked for a physical address by any government or private entity, he will provide this new PMB address. While most PO Box addresses are not allowed on personal documents, such as a loan or driver's license, a PMB is allowed.

Once the PMB is established, it is very important to conduct a test. I sent a letter without a return address to my client at the new PMB address. The package I chose for Jim included a mail scanning feature which emails him an image of the cover of every piece of mail as it arrives. This is a great feature that I enforce with all clients. It is important to know when mail arrives and needs to be addressed. Within a few days, he received notification of the letter, and we were in business. On one occasion, I simply assumed that a PMB was properly created for a client. Due to a bug in the outdated online system, she was given a different box number which did not exist. She missed some important notices from a government agency which caused quite a headache. This was my fault for not testing. Fortunately, a letter to that agency directly from me accepting fault was sufficient to get her back on the right track. I now test all new PMBs.

As stated previously, these PMB services are mostly used by retired couples traveling the world in an RV or pop-up trailer. The privacy policies associated with customer accounts possesses the same security that you would expect from your grandparents. On numerous occasions, I have called the PMB company of my clients, stated I was them, and asked them to read the return addresses of all mail pending in the box. I have never been denied this invasive request. As a test, I once called the service and provided a random PMB number and stated that I was missing an outgoing shipment. The representative quickly provided me the last shipment date and

that technically reside in this county, that the bulk of their business is out-of-towners that have no clue what to do. This is very helpful, as it removes the scrutiny on our plans. I opened the dialogue immediately with "Hi Tom, good to see you again!", before the greeter had a chance to speak. He vaguely remembered me but was not sure why. I continued with "I brought Jim and his wife with me to get them set up as nomads since they just bought their first RV, and our first stop is Mount Rushmore!", which lit up Tom's face.

I have found this demeanor to create a great vibe within the office, and Tom likes to tell stories about his own RV adventures. He also happens to be very fond of Mt. Rushmore. This introduction was no accident. Tom works part-time on Mondays and Wednesdays. His work schedule and dedication to the carved presidents is publicly available on his Facebook profile. I have no shame; I will use every resource to my advantage. When Tom is happy, he makes sure that my clients have no issues with their new nomad status.

Tom verified that both Jim and his wife possessed the following documents.

- Current out-of-state driver's license
- Secondary ID (passport or certified birth certificate)
- Verification of SSN (original card or 1099 form)
- Receipts with names showing lodging in the county within the past year
- Additional documentation of South Dakota address
- South Dakota Residency Affidavit

Most of these items should make sense for any DMV license transfer. The additional documentation of the South Dakota address is not absolutely required but has been very helpful in the past. Showing your PMB company paperwork with your name and new address is usually sufficient. However, I have had two situations where the DMV employee demanded to see something official associating the person in front of her with the address being requested for the license. This is where the vehicle registration comes in. Since I already registered Jim's vehicle in his and his wife's name at his new PMB address, I had official documentation from the state. Showing the title or registration verification has always been sufficient. If a car had not been registered, I could have presented an Amazon receipt as proof. The most important lesson is to have more than you need upon arrival.

Tom confirmed that their proof of a local PMB satisfied the state requirement for residency, and they could legally call South Dakota their home if they wished. He informed them not to worry about the notification of potential jury duty. If they would be selected, a simple call identifying themselves as full-time travelers who do not actually live in the state would remove them from any obligations. Jim and his wife eagerly signed, and they were ushered toward a DMV clerk. After a quick eye test and photograph, they both possessed South Dakota driver's licenses, and they were now officially residents of the state. While I wish I could discuss the fanfare surrounding this event, there was none. We quietly walked out and returned to the car.

"Is that it?" Jim asked. I confirmed that we were done. He and his wife giggled a bit and I saw a bit of hope in his face. He had been beaten hard by the events over the past month, but this was a sign of a silver lining. We drove 8 hours back to his extended stay lodging and had a closing conversation.

I advised him that the big steps had been taken to buy some time while still maintaining his life's responsibilities. He now needed to take the time to change the mailing addresses on file for every bank, utility, insurance, or financial company that he can think of where he may have an account. Basically, he needs to treat this as a move from one house to another. Additionally, he needed to visit a post office and submit an official change of address form, choosing the "permanent" option on the card. This would forward his mail for several months while he identified other accounts to update. As far as any entity is concerned, his new PMB address is his home.

I should pause a moment and reflect on what this really accomplished. On the surface, he simply possesses a new driver's license and vehicle registration. This alone does not physically protect his family from danger. The power of this strategy is the ability to use it as a tool for future protection. Please let me explain.

While Jim is in limbo and awaiting a verdict in reference to the shooting, he will be on the move. He still needs access to his mail. He still needs to use credit cards and pay his bills. He does not want to return to his home. This solution provided a secure repository for the collection and distribution of mail on his own terms. More importantly, he has a physical address to give to companies that apply scrutiny toward changes of address. If he simply acquired a PO Box and provided the new address to his credit card provider, that company would maintain his last known physical address on file. This PMB address replaces all addresses on file and passes USPS verification checks. Jim can use this address for the rest of his life if he chooses.

It is well documented that states sell driver's license data to third-party companies. The address on your license is publicly available within dozens of free and premium search services. When the next person wishing harm on Jim looks to see where he moved, the only data available will be a commercial receiving service where he has never been present. When he sells his home, the title and transaction forms will be public data. He must disclose a current address during the sale. He now has a safe address to provide where a check can be received. When this PMB is announced in the local paper within property transactions, he has no concern. Jim can still exist, but not be found.

Jim was very selective of the details he was willing to share publicly, and his wife was even less revealing. You may be wondering why I referred to her as "his wife" so much, and never provided a real or alias name. This was her choice. She asked to never be named at all, noting a passage in my previous book ***Hiding from the Internet***:

"Be careful when you select an alias name to use. Most people choose something they believe to be random but can actually be very revealing. It might be the name of a celebrity that you like or a distant relative that has passed. Either could be used to associate you to your alias or potential online security questions."

She simply asked to only be referred to as Jim's wife at all times. I respect her decision. Jim would later be cleared in this incident and the shooting was ruled as justified. He left law enforcement completely, and he continues to travel extensively with his family as nomads of South Dakota. The threats died off, but they are still always looking over their shoulders. I consider Jim a success. Things could always have been done better, and I learn from every experience. The protections put into place for Jim had unintended benefits later. The following happened several months after Jim became a nomad.

- An unknown individual attempted to place a "mail hold" on Jim's mail. This is common during scam attempts when the suspect does not want the victim to receive any notifications of financial transfers. Since Jim's mail is at a PMB registered with the USPS, a mail stop was not possible.
- This same individual then attempted a permanent change of address in order to forward future mail to another PO Box. Again, this was declined due to the mail being collected at a PMB. The PMB services do not allow permanent forwarding as you would conduct during a move.
- The suspect attempted to open a new retirement account in Jim's name with his DOB and SSN. Jim received a letter from this bank asking him to remove his credit freeze before any new accounts were requested.
- Someone attempted a SIM swapping attack toward Jim's cellular number which was released during a doxing attack after the shooting. Per the instruction previously, Jim ported his known number to Google Voice and adopted a new prepaid account. The SIM attack was unsuccessful.
- Unauthorized people attempted to make changes to Jim's personal checking account during social engineering attempts toward the bank. The attackers could not identify the telephone number for the account when asked. When the bank called a verified number on file, it forwarded to Jim's MySudo app and he took the call, canceling the changes.

If you were targeted in this manner, would you be protected? I hope this provides enough justification for you to start making changes right away.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE
MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES: MARY DOE

During 2019 and 2020, I witnessed more extortion attempts toward my clients each year than the past decade's cases combined. The ability to mask a true identity on the internet, and the online presence of practically everyone's breached passwords, has created an opportunity for mean people to easily act on their criminal impulses. My online extortion investigations usually fall into one of the following categories.

Stolen Photos: This is the most common scenario. As I write this, I have three pending emails asking for help. Typically, a criminal gains access to online backups of personal photos, usually automated via a mobile device, and identifies any images containing nudity or sexual acts. The suspect then threatens to release the images unless the victim provides either payment or additional nude photos. The summary on the following pages provides more details.

Hidden Cameras: I have represented clients who have been the victim of hidden cameras placed in hotel bathrooms, locker rooms, and other places of potential nudity. The recorded videos are then used for extortion. In one scenario, the victim refused to pay, and the video of her showering was sent to all of her co-workers. In another scenario, a woman seduced my client, brought him back to her hotel, and recorded a sexual encounter. She then threatened release of the video if he did not pay her $100,000. It was a targeted and well executed setup.

Past Mistakes: In 2020, I assisted two clients with issues from their past. In one, a wealthy business man was contacted by a stranger who claimed to possess a VHS video from 1987 depicting him in an "unflattering way" which could have an impact on his reputation with his company. In the other scenario, my client was sent images scanned from old photographs showing him in "blackface" while in college. After refusing to pay $10,000, the images were published online and forwarded to the board members of his company.

Stolen Accounts: Occasionally, I meet a client who has lost access to a popular online account to a hacker. This includes celebrities who possess social network profiles with millions of followers. There is a huge black market for these accounts, as they can be used to send spam or harm the reputation of the account holder.

These types of extortion attempts seem to be getting worse. The following pages present my work with "Mary". She and I hope that the details shared here will help others in similar situations.

I met Mary through a Hollywood acquaintance. She is not a household name, but is a very talented actress with an impressive filmography. She reached out to me and we scheduled a call over Wickr. Over the hour-long conversation, she explained the hell she was going through and I began creating a strategy to gain control of the situation. The following outlines every detail of her encounter.

During a Saturday evening out with friends, she received a SMS text message on her iPhone from a strange number. It simply stated "I have your nudes, want proof?". Before she could respond, the suspect began sending images of her to her phone. These included intimate photos she had taken and previously sent to her boyfriend. She responded with "Who is this?" and the suspect began making demands. He threatened to publish the photos to the internet and send copies to all of her friends and family if she did not pay him $50,000 in Bitcoin. He advised she had 24 hours. An hour after these messages, she had contacted me for advice.

My first suggestion was to cease all communication and ignore any further messages. In general, I always recommend this. The moment you respond to extortion, the offender knows you have seen the messages and almost always becomes more aggressive. Preferably, no one should ever respond to these. There is usually nothing you can do or say to prevent publication of the images. We were past that, so it was time to begin the investigation.

The telephone number of the suspect displayed a Los Angeles area code, but that alone means nothing. I queried the number through dozens of online search tools which only revealed "Los Angeles, CA" as the subscriber information. This confirmed my suspicion that this was a VOIP number which was not assigned to a cellular account. I logged in to a free trial account at Twilio, opened the dashboard, clicked "Lookup", selected the "name" and "carrier" options, and conducted a search. The result identified the VOIP provider as "go-text.me". This site, located at https://go-text.me, confirms the number to be associated with a mobile app which allows "Unlimited texts and calls to the US & Canada from your own real phone number". These numbers are commonly used to harass victims without disclosing a true identity. I now knew the service, but had no details to identify the suspect.

Next, I wanted to determine the way that the suspect accessed her photos. I confirmed that she synchronized all of her iPhone content to iCloud, including photos. I had her log in to her Apple account through a web browser and click on the Devices option. This displayed only her iPhone and MacBook laptop. This eliminated the possibility of another device associated with her account. However, it does not disclose access to her iCloud via web browser. While logged in to her iCloud account, I had her click on the "Sign out of all browsers" option and change her password to something randomly generated by a password manager. Next, I had her conduct a search within the email account associated with her Apple ID for "Apple ID was used to sign in". This revealed a message in her spam folder announcing that someone had successfully accessed her iCloud account which included the date, time, time zone of the user, and browser details. She confirmed that she has never accessed her account from a browser.

I now knew that someone had accessed her account at a specific time, and could make assumptions about the activity within her account. He likely already downloaded all of her photos, contacts, email, and other details. A quick search of her email address within my own data breach collection identified two commonly used passwords. She confirmed that one of them was her previous Apple ID password. I now assumed that the suspect found her email address online, identified a known password within a public breach, accessed her iCloud account using those details, identified her telephone number via her Apple account, downloaded all of her content, and then began the extortion attempt.

The suspect continued threatening her via text message and became more aggressive as she ignored the communication. She seemed willing to pay money to the hacker, but I always discourage that. I have hesitantly assisted ransom payments for clients, but the outcome was always the same. Even after the suspect received payment, they went ahead and published the content. There is no honor among thieves. I explained that there was a very good chance that these images would be published online regardless of meeting any demands, and there was little to nothing she could do at this time. If she paid the extortion, the attacker would keep the images and probably post them later. It would also make her a bigger target. If she paid once, she would likely pay again. Paying into ransom and extortion demands is never a solution, it is usually the beginning of a bigger problem.

The next morning, she woke to find a slew of text messages from the suspect. Although her 24 hours had not expired, he began posting content to the internet. This confirmed my assumption that he would publish content regardless of payment. One of the messages contained a link to a page on Pornhub.com. The page presented a video which cycled through her stolen sensitive images. Her name was present within the title of the video, similar to "Mary Doe naked and exposed". She was devastated to say the least. His text messages indicated that he had not sent this link to anyone yet, but demanded immediate payment in order to keep it private. He sent her a list of all contacts from her phone, which had been previously synchronized to her iCloud account. He informed her that she had two hours to send the Bitcoin or else all of these contacts would receive this link.

Mary and I discussed the options. She said that she could raise the $50,000, but it would take some time and would cause financial strain. I again informed her that paying the ransom would not eliminate the potential of public exposure. The premature posting of images and childish language convinced me this was an immature young adult who simply knew enough about internet security to be dangerous. I discouraged any payment and convinced her to focus on damage control.

During our conversation, the suspect began sending the link to various members of her immediate family. Again, he was dishonoring his own deadline for payment. He sent the messages to the email addresses of her mother and brothers from a ProtonMail address in her name, similar to therealmarydoe@protonmail.com. The messages included the text of "Hey, check out my new promo pics for my next movie!" and a link to the pornographic images. While Mary began contacting her family in order to warn them about the abuse, I focused on removing the content from Pornhub.

Fortunately, removing content from porn sites is extremely easy. Most of them immediately remove the requested URLs and perform a manual review afterward. I submitted a request through the Pornhub removal page and cited the following reasons.

"Revenge porn, blackmail, & intimidation through a video published without authorization."

Almost immediately after the submission, the Pornhub link began forwarding to an error page. The content was no longer available, for now. I know from experience that this suspect was not likely to go away, and he would probably become more aggressive. However, the messages currently waiting in people's inboxes would not expose my client. We did not respond at all to his messages, and waited for his next move, which came about an hour after his previous contact. He sent Mary a new link to an online blog hosted on a free WordPress profile. This page contained three of the pornographic images of Mary, but the pictures were somewhat sanitized with small black bars covering vital areas to prevent them from technically portraying pornography. I had never seen this modification step before.

I immediately submitted a removal request to the appropriate page on the WordPress platform. I cited the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) since Mary owned these images and WordPress may not deem them to be pornography. Within an hour, I received the following response from WordPress.

"We have reviewed your DMCA notice and the material you claim to be infringing. However, because we believe this to be fair use of the material, we will not be removing it at this time. Please note that Section 107 of the copyright law identifies various purposes for which the reproduction of a particular work may be considered fair, such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research. You are required to give consideration to whether a use of material is fair before submitting a takedown notification, as a result of the decision in Lenz v. Universal. Please note that you may be liable for damages if you "knowingly materially misrepresent" your copyrights – and we may seek to collect those damages."

Not only did WordPress refuse to remove this inappropriate content, they threatened to seek financial damages from me for submitting a removal request, as I briefly explained within a previous chapter. I was shocked and quite angry. I submitted a second submission, but avoided the DMCA process. Instead, I navigated to the abuse reporting site at https://wordpress.com/abuse. I chose the option of "This content contains my private information" and provided the URL of the exposure. WordPress notified me that the company does not believe "Photos of people", "Publicly available physical addresses, email addresses, or phone numbers", or "Names" to be private information. In the box designated for further information, I entered the following.

"Nude photos on this page depict a person (me) who was a minor. Child pornography is defined as nude photos of a person under the age of eighteen. Please remove these illegal images immediately."

Hold your hate mail. First, my client is an adult in her 20's. The nude images depicted what appears to be a young woman in her late teens or early twenties. Second, I found it unacceptable that WordPress would defend this type of extortion behavior. Finally, I said nothing untrue. The page does contain nude photos. My client was a minor at one time, just not now. Child pornography is illegal. These images are illegal as they were stolen as part of an online intrusion and extortion attempt. Notice I did not state that the images posted were child pornography. Within an hour after submission, the page was removed. You may disagree with my strategy, and I do not recommend that you replicate any of this without legal counsel, but the ultimate goal was reached. The inappropriate content being abused was removed.

The suspect was irate. He did not know with certainty that we had removed the page, but he knew it was gone. His response to our cat-and-mouse game took things to another level. He purchased a domain name and hosting account in order to continue publication of the nude photos. He then forwarded the new web page address to the same contacts as the previous attempts.

This presents the most difficult type of content to remove. Since this is a personal website, I cannot submit a request to the host, such as Pornhub or WordPress. Obviously, a removal request to the suspect would be pointless. The suspect had enabled privacy protection which hides the identity of the owner, which was likely false information anyway. A query of the domain, which was similar to marydoeexposed.com, identified the web host, which offered the first month of service for less than $1.00. From the host's website, I identified the appropriate abuse contacts. I sent the following email to the abuse team.

"The website located at marydoeexposed.com contains nude images of me which were stolen from my iCloud account. Distribution of these images through your servers is a violation of copyright laws and subject to civil litigation. I demand that these images are removed immediately."

The entire account was suspended within hours. Mary and I both knew that this game could go on forever. We agreed it was time to step up the investigation into the identity of the suspect. Mary filed a police report with her local police department while I began digging. While I have witnessed some law enforcement agencies take immediate action, the reality is that their resources are limited. If a local department does not possess officers trained in cyber investigations, they simply do not have the tools or knowledge required to tackle these sensitive investigations. Most departments refer victims to the FBI, which has its own complications. It can take weeks or months for a federal investigation to be approved and launched. While I am happy to cooperate with any law enforcement willing to assist, my priority is to remove content for my client in order to minimize exposure as quickly as possible. Filing the report was only a formality. It notified law enforcement of the incident and allowed them an opportunity to investigate. When I am criticized later during an investigation, which happens often, I can prove that I made an attempt to bring law enforcement into the case. However, I do not wait for them.

I began reviewing all of the online evidence I had captured before removal. This included screen captures of all pages and content. The Pornhub username for the original publication was similar to "ihackcelebs4fun". I began researching this username which mostly forwarded to other Pornhub pages identifying previous victims. However, I located several posts on Reddit from a person with the same moniker. The post matched the activity of posting stolen photos. I decided it was time to initiate contact. I located a Pornhub video which the suspect had posted a month prior to my client's content. I sent a direct message from a covert Reddit account to the suspect's Reddit username and referenced the older video, which was still online. I told him that I had a ton of similar images and asked if he was up for a trade. I offered to send content first so that he knew I was not trying to rip him off. This message was sent at noon on a Sunday, and I had heard nothing back by the end of the day. I assumed this was a dormant account and my message would go ignored.

While I was doing this on Reddit, Mary sent a response via text message to the suspect. She stated that she was working on getting money into Bitcoin, but assured that she had the funding. She insisted that he post no further images, and that she would refuse to send the funds if he did. He agreed to wait until the following day, which bought us some time. There was no intent to send any money. This was simply a ruse to stop the posting game and allow me to focus on the investigation.

At my direction, Mary sent a text message stating, "I tried to pay BTC to the address you gave me but it said bad address. I don't know what to do". The suspect became frustrated, but this is common in extortion. Telling people who are unfamiliar with Bitcoin to send large sums of digital currency is almost always met with problems. He asked which company she used, and she stated, "Coinbase", which is a popular Bitcoin exchange. He asked her about the error message and she played dumb. He then gave her a command for which I was waiting. He texted, "Send me a screen capture of the error". This excited me because he was opening an opportunity for me to send some bait. I advised Mary to respond, "It says file to large. What is your email? I can send it there".

I was not expecting him to share a personal email account in his real name, but communicating over email can have great advantages. My goal was to send him an image which included embedded tracking software which would disclose his IP address, computer details, and possibly approximate location. Once he disclosed his covert ProtonMail address, I took over all communication. I sent an email from an account through Gmail which I had created in Mary's name. It included a link to an image which I knew would appear as a Photo-shopped file depicting a Coinbase account with a $50,000 balance. The content was not important, but I hoped it would get him excited. Instead, I was counting on him clicking the link without much investigation.

The link was generated by a service called **Canary Tokens** (canarytokens.org). It allows me to send a URL displaying any image desired. When a target clicks the link of the image and views the content, a small script attempts to gather the information about his computer and connection as mentioned previously. This is always a gamble. Tech-savvy people know to look for this and will likely block the attempt. After analyzing all of his communication, he seemed like an anxious person just looking for a quick payday. Within a few moments after sending the link, I received a notification from Canary Tokens that the bait was taken.

The report stated that the offender was on an iPhone and disclosed the IP address of the connection. I had hoped that sending an email instead of text message would encourage him to check from his laptop, but this failed. After a quick search, I determined that the IP address was assigned to a VPN company, and was practically useless. This was also a failure. We were getting closer to him, but were far away from discovering an identity. The suspect responded via text telling Mary to try the payment again. Mary said that she will keep trying if he promised to stop uploading content. He agreed and we closed our investigation for the day. Mary ended the conversation with, "I can get this done first thing tomorrow".

I woke up Monday morning to find an alert of a pending message within my covert Reddit account. The message, from the same username as the suspect Pornhub account, confirmed he would be interested in trading stolen photos. The previous attempt to obtain his IP address through a trap embedded into an image failed, but I found no harm in trying again. This was a different platform and a new day. I created a new infected image and sent it to his Reddit username. I sent a poor quality still capture from a publicly available pornographic video. This was a grey area, as I did not own the image or have authority to distribute it. However, I feel the intent justified the risk. Within seconds, I received a response within the Canary Tokens website. This time, the IP address was not associated with a VPN and the link was not opened from a mobile device. Instead, the IP address was assigned to a national chain of banks and the computer used was a Windows 10 desktop with the Chrome browser.

I did not want to get my hopes up. While my suspect could be an employee of this bank, he could also be someone using public Wi-Fi at the business, a criminal connecting through a compromised on-site computer, or any other type of proxied association. My research into this bank indicated there were numerous buildings within the metropolitan area of the IP address block. This was a lead too big to ignore, but it would not be easy to isolate a specific offender.

I set my sights on the possibility that my suspect was a bank employee. Banks typically do not offer free Wi-Fi due to security reasons. Checking a Reddit message through a compromised business computer seemed to be a stretch. My hopes were that my offender was just sloppy. I identified the Chief Security Officer for this national chain of banks and contacted his office via telephone. After a few hops, I was connected to his secretary. I calmly and politely explained the situation without providing too many details, and made it very clear that an employee of this bank was using corporate assets during work hours to commit extortion. She seemed to take things seriously and promised to have someone contact me soon. An hour later, I received a call from an attorney representing the bank.

The call was awkward to say the least. It was obvious that the attorney did not want to implicate the bank in any way or acknowledge an internal issue. At one point, he asked, "What are you asking us to do?", which I eagerly answered. I clearly explained that my only goal was to protect my famous client. I had no desire to smear the name of the bank or go public with this information. If the bank was willing to cooperate in identifying the

employee responsible for this situation, I was willing to keep it quiet. If the bank refused to cooperate, I was willing to take my evidence to the local police, which would make the entire scandal public information. I expressed my opinion that we both had much to gain by keeping this investigation as quiet as possible.

The attorney quickly ended the call and refused any further contact attempts from me. Lesson learned. Much like my job is to protect my client, corporations only look out for their own best interests. This was a failure. Fortunately, I did not disclose any details which would help them identify the suspect and compromise our own investigation. I went back to the drawing board.

While I was contacting the bank, Mary was receiving additional messages from the suspect. He told her that time was up and either she must pay or he would publish all of her photos directly to her contacts and send copies to various tabloids. He further threatened to create a torrent file which could be seeded in a way which could never be removed. It seemed that we had stretched his patience. I had yet to hear back from any law enforcement personnel about the possibility of opening an investigation.

I revisited his online presence. I read through every post he had made on Reddit. In retrospect, I should have started there before trying to get his IP address. His post history seemed redacted. There were posts which had been deleted and some which appeared to have modified text. I replicated my search of his posts on a third-party archive called **Pushshift** (pushshift.io). I generated a custom URL which would display all posts made by him as they were archived soon after publication. The exact URL for this example username appeared as follows.

api.pushshift.io/reddit/search/comment/?author=ihackcelebs4fun&sort=asc&size=1000

The result was over 200 posts made by the suspect over the past two years. This presented much more content than I found on his live profile. I began devouring posts for any further clues. Within this treasure, I found posts about banking, which fit the employment at the bank identified in the IP address. I also found numerous posts within the Pomona, California Subreddit (reddit.com/r/Pomona), which was within the geographical area of the IP address. I was getting closer. The gold prize was the following deleted message.

2019 Acura TLX Tech Trim in like-new condition. 3457 miles. No damage.

https://imgur.com/a/XaOj4rC

The Imgur link displayed several photos of a vehicle, and the post was recent (2019). None of the images displayed a license plate, but this was my next solid lead. I replicated the search of "2019 Acura TLX Tech Trim" on Craigslist and received the following post.

2019 Acura TLX Tech Trim in like-new condition. 3457 miles. No damage. Call Matt at (909) [REDACTED].

The post included the full telephone number and the same photos as linked from the Reddit post. I now knew his name was potentially Matt, he might work at a specific bank in the area of Pomona, California, and he might own a 2019 Acura. I replicated my search on Twilio of this number which provided a potential last name. I searched this name on LinkedIn, but received no results. I eventually found a person with this name from Pomona on Twitter. However, there was no direct connection from that account to my suspect. I presented all of my information to Mary, and proposed one last desperate attempt.

Since time was not on our side, and we expected the suspect to blast her details to all of her personal and work contacts, I proposed we call him out. Tell him what we "know" about him and hope it is right. If we are wrong, it may make him laugh and go crazy online. If we are right, it may scare him. In my mind, we had nothing to lose. I was confident the suspect planned on publishing her photos regardless of payment. She agreed with my plan, and I sent the following email to the ProtonMail address received earlier. I placed [REDACTED] in place of the actual details which I disclosed to him.

"Hi Matt,

I am assisting Mary Doe with the investigation into your extortion attempts. My final report has identified you as Matt [REDACTED]. You work at the [REDACTED] branch of [REDACTED] Bank. You drive a 2019 Acura which you are having trouble selling. I have evidence that you have used computers owned by your employer as part of this crime. Since these are bank assets associated with a corporation covered under FDIC rules and laws, there are substantial federal offenses for which you can be charged. Mary and I are still determining our next actions. For now, we are demanding you to cease all distribution of content while destroying all related data. In return, we will consider keeping our evidence to ourselves. If we receive no response from you, we will forward this content to your supervisor, [REDACTED], as well as Detective [REDACTED] at the Pomona Police Department. Extortion sucks, eh? You can respond here or contact me directly at [REDACTED]."

This is where I want to tell you that he was scared. I want to close this chapter with a victory and messages from the suspect pleading with us to show mercy toward him. That would be untrue. He did not respond to me at all. Instead, he released all of the images as promised and sent links via email to every contact on my client's phone. Mary was officially exposed to the world.

You may believe I reacted foolishly. You are right. It was a desperate attempt, and it failed. It expedited us into the position in which we would have likely found ourselves, even if we had cooperated and given money. I began removing the online content he published, which was fairly successful. He simply replicated his methods of publication from earlier, and I reactively tackled each exposure. He never posted a torrent file, but the damage was heavy. Numerous friends, family members, associates, co-workers, and business interests of Mary viewed the sensitive photos. All of them will say this event had no impact on their relationship with Mary, but I do not believe that. Today, all of the content has been removed.

A few days after the final exposure, a detective from Mary's local police department announced she would be opening an investigation. I made full disclosure of my actions, and accepted all responsibility for the outcome. I was chastised for a few minutes, but we then began strategizing about the next steps. The detective was very sharp, but had no experience with computer crimes. However, she had something more powerful. The detective could request court orders.

She first targeted Pornhub for information about the uploader, but they are a Canadian company. Her U.S. court orders would be of little help. She then reached out to a liaison with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and they agreed to create a Canadian order on her behalf. This is quite common in law enforcement. While she waited, she issued a court order to Reddit demanding information on the target account. Reddit confirmed the user's IP addresses and Gmail address provided during creation. A court order to Google confirmed the identity of the suspect. A warrant was issued and he was arrested.

I am intentionally leaving out some of the details at the request of the detective who worked the case. However, I can disclose where I was wrong. My fatal mistake was assuming the vehicle posted on Reddit belonged to my suspect. It did not. In fact, we have no idea why he posted those images. Getting this wrong led me to disclose a name to the suspect of which he had likely never known. My education from this is that any suspect can really throw off an investigator by posting a vehicle for sale which has no connection to him. The suspect did work for the bank, but not at any local branch. Enough of my email was wrong that he felt confident releasing all of the photos. A search warrant for his laptop, which had been seized during his arrest, indicated that this was the seventh incident of attempted extortion. Five, including my client, never paid. Two paid the full amount requested. All seven victims had their photos released publicly. Because of this, I do not have regret in my actions. It was a lose-lose situation. However, I now handle these extremely differently.

I tell all of my clients, regardless of the situation, absolutely cease all communication with the suspect. There is nothing to gain. Furthermore, no response to the extortion at all has been the most successful strategy I have found. If you ever receive an extortion attempt, I encourage you to completely ignore the demands. Paying the

ransom usually results in published data anyway. Responses confirm that the suspect has your attention. Notify law enforcement, and hope that your local agency has the resources to investigate.

After this event, Mary obtained all new hardware, online accounts, mobile plans, and alias profiles as explained throughout this book. The Apple account was completely deleted. The suspect was charged with several counts of extortion, released after posting bail, and is awaiting trial during the writing of this chapter. Neither Mary nor I have seen or spoken to him and he has made no attempt to contact either of us. I watch the case closely, and I will be present when Mary testifies.

I want to close this chapter with some lessons learned which may help readers digest the recommendations presented toward the beginning of the book. My focus here is to simply present the methods which could have prevented the entire mess. Please know that I am not blaming Mary. I have executed very similar digital blunders toward my own profiles before I jumped into the privacy and security game. Ten years from now, I might be disgusted with my current strategies presented here. Treat all mistakes as an education.

- Mary's Apple account was in her real name and associated with a mobile device serviced in her name. Ideally, Apple (or Google) should never know your true identity. This way, social engineering attacks toward Apple are very difficult. If a suspect does not know the name you used to create an account, abuse of telephone, email, and in-store support should be quite difficult.
- Mary's email address to access her Apple account was a publicly identifiable personal address. Most of us have at least one email address which is publicly associated to our name through online people search sites, data breaches, or social networks. The email address connected to an Apple ID or Google account should always be a unique dedicated generic address. It should not be used anywhere else. This prevents attempted password resets and login attempts.
- Mary recycled a password from another online service to her Apple account. I have done this before, but I was lucky to avoid any compromised accounts. Every password should be unique for each service. Password managers can generate random options and store them for easy usage.
- Mary's iPhone was configured to enable iCloud synchronization, which is the default option. This copied her contacts, photos, videos, documents, and other details onto Apple's servers. Once the suspect accessed her account, he had his own copy of her data. I insist that any mobile Apple device is never allowed to access iCloud. I also check the online iCloud account associated with an Apple ID on occasion in order to verify that no data is present.
- Mary allowed her mobile device to be the primary storage of personal photos and contacts. Even if she had disabled iCloud, it could have been re-enabled after a major software update. Because of this, we should never store contacts in the default device address book, nor photos on the device's internal storage. Instead, store all contact details within ProtonMail and copy and paste from there when needed. Photos and videos should be occasionally moved to secure storage within a VeraCrypt container and removed from the mobile device.
- The telephone number associated with the Apple ID was Mary's true cellular account. This allowed the suspect to initiate conversation through her native messaging application. If he had attempted a SIM swap or malware attack, he could have had success. If Mary had provided Apple a VOIP number, any attempted attacks would have been minimized. Avoid giving Apple ID (or Google) accounts any number when possible by signing up through their website (instead of from the device). Apple still knows the cell number assigned to the device, but it would not be visible to the suspect within the iCloud account.

Today, Mary has exceptional digital operational security. Occasionally, she forwards ideas which I had never considered. The entire GrapheneOS section within Chapter Two contains heavy input from her, as she has completely moved on from Apple devices.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO
MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES: JOHN DOE

Valid criticism of this book is the complexity of choice. There are many paths one can take to customize their own privacy playbook. Within this chapter, I try to summarize some specific steps. In 2021, a new client requested a full privacy reboot. This incorporates all of the overall strategies presented within this book. The following pages present an abbreviated chronological summary of every step we took together. My hope is that this series of events helps digest the ideal order to the numerous steps previously presented. Refer to the entire previous text for details of each step presented here.

June 1, 2021: I initially meet the client within his home. He has identified a home he wishes to purchase and wants to make it completely anonymous. After moving in, he wants to eliminate his current digital life and embrace new devices and networks. He will sell his home after he has moved. This is a true full reboot.

June 2, 2021: I establish mail forwarding service through a PMB provider in South Dakota. He will not become a nomad of this state, but this service will be used as his ghost address and official mail drop. A letter is sent to the service as a test.

June 2, 2021: A new trust with a generic name is created and he serves as the trustee.

June 3, 2021: I purchase a new Linux laptop and Pixel mobile device for the client. The Pixel is wiped and replaced with GrapheneOS. I complete all custom configurations on both devices. I activate a prepaid SIM card within the phone, but never connect it to any cellular network. I only associate it with a clean Wi-Fi behind VPN. I establish new VOIP service with Twilio and configure Linphone on both devices for full telephone use. I install his chosen password manager on both devices and begin populating new randomly-generated passwords for each service I configure. I create his new ProtonMail and ProtonVPN accounts and configure his new custom domain. I begin the porting process for his old cellular number into Twilio. I issue a temporary "burner" mobile device for daily communications with one month of prepaid cellular service. I configure VOIP texting through VoIPSuite. A premium SimpleLogin account is activated. I configure secure communications on both devices. All webcams are covered and microphone ports are physically blocked. 2FA options are configured for both hardware and software tokens. I configured a pfSense firewall with his new ProtonVPN account. This full day completed his new digital life, but nothing was issued to him yet.

June 5, 2021: The PMB service confirms receipt of the test letter and a scan confirms the address is functioning.

June 5, 2021: Local mail service is established with an independently owned packing and shipping business. A fee will be paid any time a package is received in the client's real name.

June 5, 2021: The mail at the PMB is scheduled to be sent to the new local mail receiving service.

June 5, 2021: A new LLC with a generic name is created through the South Dakota website. The PMB address is provided. The digital documents are downloaded. An EIN is created through the IRS associated with the client's DOB and SSN.

June 7, 2021: The package from the PMB is received. This confirms mail routes through the PMB.

June 8, 2021: We visit a local credit union in order to open two new accounts associated with the clint's DOB and SSN. The first is for the trust with the client serving as trustee. We provide the certification of trust to remain on file and allow the bank to view the entire trust. We do not allow documentation of the entire trust within the bank's system. The second account is for the LLC. We provide the LLC paperwork and confirmation from South Dakota. The address provided for both accounts is the PMB in South Dakota. We provide the mail

received at the PMB and the South Dakota LLC certificate as proof of residency. Checks for both accounts are ordered. Only the trust name and LLC name will be visible on them. A debit card is secured for each account.

June 9, 2021: A Privacy.com account is established in the name of the client. The LLC bank account is connected to the service for masked debit card payments.

June 9, 2021: The client transfers the role of trustee to his niece. She has a different last name and no online association to the client. All documents are created and executed in front of a Notary. He is still the beneficiary of the trust, but he can no longer sign on its behalf.

June 10, 2021: An offer is made (and accepted) on the home. A cashier's check from the trust account is presented as earnest money. A new certification of trust is created and signed by the new trustee, and provided to the title company. The niece digitally signs the paperwork through DocuSign and no wet signatures or Notary is required. A closing date is set for July 1, 2021. A letter of funds is due from the bank within seven days.

June 11, 2021: Inspections on the home are scheduled and performed the following week. No major issues were found and the offer stands.

June 11, 2021: Money for the purchase of the home is transferred into the trust checking account.

June 12, 2021: We establish a new American Express business credit card in his true name. We request a secondary card in his alias name for an "employee". **We provide his current true (old) home address.** The cards arrive in two days.

June 16, 2021: A letter confirming the funds is drafted by the bank and given to the title company.

June 16, 2021: The trust and LLC checks arrive at the PMB. A package is requested to the local mail drop.

June 18, 2021: The trust and LLC checks arrive at the local mail drop and are retrieved.

June 21, 2021: A wire is initiated at the bank to send funds from the trust account to the title company. We ensure that the client's name is not visible on the wire paperwork. Only the trust name is visible.

June 22, 2021: Power, gas, internet, water, trash, and sewer utilities are ordered for the new home. All accepted the trust name, similar to "Financial Holdings Trust", for billing with exception of the power company. They absolutely demanded an SSN or EIN in order to establish power, which is provided by a municipal (government) agency. Because of this, alias names are dangerous and potentially illegal. We register the client as a Sole Proprietorship, "Doing Business As" (DBA) "Financial Holdings", with the IRS and immediately receive an EIN. The new EIN and DBA name are provided to the power company and approved (pending funding). We provide the Trust checking account, which is very similar in name to the DBA, for all electronic bank payments. We confirm a test transaction for $0.87 and the account is documented as "Approved". We do not know if the power company confirmed the EIN through the IRS, but we were honest and ready to defend our details if challenged.

June 23, 2021: Home owner's insurance is established in the name of the trust with the client as the secondary insured. The PMB address is provided for all billing and mailing.

June 24, 2021: I arrange a moving truck under the client's true name but do not provide any destination address. Local movers are hired to meet at the current home on July 1, 2021 and load the truck which would already be on site. All reservations are held with the client's true credit card. Different movers are hired to meet at the new house that same afternoon, and are provided an alias name. A Privacy.com virtual card, associated with the trust debit card, is provided for the reservation and eventual payment. These two events are separate with two different moving companies.

June 24, 2021: New appliances are ordered from a nearby home improvement store. A check from the trust is issued for payment. Appliances will be delivered on July 2, 2021.

June 30, 2021: The trustee signs the final closing paperwork in front of a Notary in another state. The paperwork is sent overnight to the title company.

June 30, 2021: Client notifies the DMV that he will be selling his home and has yet to move into another home. This is all true. He asks to add the local shipping store's address as a mailing address until he has established permanent residency in a new home. He provides received mail at that address proving he has access. This change is allowed and he is asked to notify them of his new address whenever he has one. He requests an ID card with this new address, which is granted. Some states will refuse this.

June 30, 2021: My client begins the process of closing all unnecessary accounts while at his current home. This includes Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Apple, Microsoft, and others. We forward all email from various addresses into his new ProtonMail account.

July 1, 2021: Closing date for the new home. The title company has the required notarized documents. All final closing paperwork is sent digitally via DocuSign, and signed by the trustee. Power, gas, water, sewer, and trash service is activated.

July 1, 2021 (8:00 am): The client watches as movers pack the moving truck which he reserved and obtained.

July 1, 2021 (12:00 am): Client takes possession of the home. He drives the loaded moving truck himself. His mobile "burner" device is powered off and we meet the internet installation team at the house. Internet service is established and a modem is provided. The Wi-Fi of the modem is disabled and it only serves as the wired source of internet access. His pfSense firewall is installed and Wi-Fi device is connected. The Wi-Fi in the home is now protected by a VPN and firewall. His new Linux laptop is provided and connected to the network. His VOIP numbers are configured and he can now safely make and receive phone calls from within the home.

July 1, 2021: His new GrapheneOS device is issued to him with anonymous prepaid service. This device will only be used during travel and never near the home. His Faraday bag is ready in his vehicle and he is trained on his behavior with this device. His laptop can be used for all voice calls, secure communications, and email. He has no need for a mobile device in the home.

July 1, 2021: While waiting for the movers to arrive, we began training on his new digital life, following the guidance within this book.

July 1, 2021 (2:00 pm): Movers arrive and unload the truck.

July 2, 2021: We request the following address changes:

American Express to PMB address
Employer to local mail receiving company
Current bills from old home to PMB provider

July 2, 2021: Appliances arrive and are installed. No ID was requested. The purchase had already cleared.

July 3, 2021: He establishes a new Amazon account which ships to the local mail receiving business. He provides his business name, which is on file to receive mail. The business American Express card in an alias name is used for a few small orders. After arrival, this is switched to a Privacy.com masked debit card. No deliveries are ever made to his new home address. His packages will safely await his pickup at the shipping business.

July 6, 2021: We confirm that the county website displays the trust name on the tax record, with no mention of the trustee. Various internet searches of the address reveal no concerns. We conduct no data removal associating him to his previous address at this time.

July 10, 2021: I deliver his old equipment including the laptop, iPad, and iPhone which he used at his previous home. The contents are all erased and the devices are powered down. He will keep them in storage.

July 15, 2021: The client transfers the duties of trustee of the trust back to himself.

July 16, 2021: His former home is listed for sale.

July 31, 2021: His former home is sold and he later completes all closing documents himself.

August 1, 2021: We begin the process of transferring his vehicle registration into the trust name. Whenever he purchases a new car, we will consider the South Dakota option. He currently does not qualify for this as he is a full-time resident of a state outside of South Dakota. The shipping store address is provided for all paperwork.

November 1, 2021: Client uses the online removal workbook to remove his name and former home address profiles. Now that his PMB is established and recognized as valid for him, he does not need any public history with his prior address.

Failures

There are plenty more failures that could fill twice the pages currently in this book, such as the following, which all happened to me over the past five years.

I worked with a CEO dealing with death threats, staying at a hotel under an alias, but attending a convention next door under his real name. It did not take long for his adversary to find him and his room using the methods discussed previously. Surprisingly, the suspect did not confront my client, but his restaurant bills were enormous thanks to the culprit's taste for expensive steaks (all billed to my client's room). The intruder creepily stalked my client from a short distance, and I had no clue. At one point he introduced himself to the client's daughter at the hotel pool. I learned about this after the event. This was the last time I tried to run counter-surveillance for a client. I now hire professionals to do the job right.

I assisted a victim of extreme physical abuse received from her husband. She was hospitalized due to his violence. Her mother hired me to remove her from the hospital and take her somewhere safe and away from him. The husband was always by her side to make sure she did not talk with the police. When I saw an opening, I executed my version of an extraction. I tried exiting with the victim in a hospital gown through a fire escape, and hospital security detained me until police arrived. I was questioned for over an hour. Not my best execution.

Another domestic violence victim contacted me desperate for assistance leaving her abusive situation. She had no money, and a relocation would not be cheap. I was working with a celebrity at the time on an unrelated matter and spoke generically about the situation she was in. He insisted on paying her costs and she was safely relocated under a new alias using the techniques discussed here. She insisted on meeting him to thank him. He wanted to meet her as well. With both clients' consent, I arranged a secure communications channel which either of them could destroy if desired. They hit it off. Too well. She was photographed having lunch with him in Los Angeles, and the photo was published in a tabloid. My job was to create a private world for the client, not place her photo in a magazine. This was a valuable education.

In early 2019, one of my clients received a text message with an attached photo. It was a selfie from her former lover displaying luggage and an airline ticket to the airport near her "anonymous" home. She had been hiding from him after suffering years of physical abuse. Somehow, he had discovered the city she was in, and he appeared determined to come find her. I needed to buy some time, so I turned the tables on him. I could see

the airline carrier from the ticket and the departure and arrival details. Out of desperation, I began sending him text messages stating that his flight had a three-hour delay. He bought it and stayed at home while continuing to send her text messages. He arrived at the airport an hour after his flight had left and discovered there was no delay. He missed his flight. I still receive hate mail from him after the client bragged to him about my services (Hi Jerry).

I have been on the receiving end of a felony stop after a stalking suspect called the police and reported me as a kidnapper. I was once declined nomad enrollment on behalf of a client on a late Friday afternoon due to missing paperwork, requiring us both to stay in town until Monday. Once, while impersonating a client during an email attempt to remove online information, I was asked "Is this Michael Bazzell?" by the customer support for the service. While these situations were all quite embarrassing, they were also educational. I will never forget the mistakes I made which led to these failures, and I will never repeat them.

I have also made mistakes in reference to my own privacy strategies. Years ago, I initiated a contract for a new personal home and provided earnest money to the title company from a trust. After everything was accepted and both parties agreed to all contingencies, I had to back out. While visiting the home on several occasions, I realized I had my work phone with me, actively connecting to cell towers. I slipped and took a business call in front of the listing agent. She heard enough of the conversation to know my unique business details. Worse, I made an initial call to the power company from a VOIP number associated with my real name, which was likely added to the profile for this address. It is very possible none of this would have compromised my privacy publicly. I could not take that chance. I likely overreacted out of paranoia fueled by my past. The lost earnest money was the expense for that education. I was ready to do it right the next time.

I disclose all of this to stress one important final thought. Achieving extreme privacy is an art. Books full of tutorials such as this lay a good foundation for achieving a level of privacy appropriate for your situation. However, no book will provide everything you need to live a completely invisible life or create a new life for others. My best education has been through experiences and failures. My failure rate at various tasks was very high early in this game. I have been denied utilities in an alias name on behalf of clients more than I have been granted anonymous accounts. I happily admit that I have failed more than I have succeeded, but that ratio becomes lower every year which goes by. In the past year, I have had a 99% success rate with achieving anonymous homes for clients. It took time to develop the proper execution of each technique. Experience will go further for you than any written text. I hope something in this book helps you achieve your privacy goals.

There are many other less-than-ideal scenarios which I can never disclose publicly. I will only say that I am honored to have been trusted by so many clients over the past several years. This has created friendships with amazing people, all of which are bonded by the secrets which we have all sworn to keep private. Because of these promises, I have reached the end of the details authorized for publication by my clients. I sincerely thank all of them who allowed me to provide an insight into the need for privacy and security.

CONCLUSION

I truly hope you never need the strategies discussed here. The best-case scenario is that you had an interesting read about the lengths some people go through to protect their privacy. As stated in the beginning, there will be no time to fix things if something bad happens. Extreme privacy is not reactive. It only works when you proactively protect every level of your own exposure. This requires a lot of effort. However, once everything is in place, you can experience the comfort of knowing you possess a private home for you and your family, secure digital habits, and the knowledge to create a private bubble whenever needed. If any negative incidents come your way, you have a safe retreat which no one knows about. Journalists, private investigators, enemies, and criminals will have no way of finding you. Stay safe, and stay private.

If you have adopted the strategies within this book, congratulations. You are sitting in your anonymous home with no affiliation to your name. The car in your garage possesses license plates which cannot publicly be tracked back to you. You have a ghost address, and appear to be a normal person on paper. You have never been to your "official" address on file. You have trusts and LLCs executed and ready to be used for privacy protection. You possess anonymous payment sources and can tackle daily purchases without exposing yourself. Your email accounts are private and secure, and everything in your digital life possesses unique and randomly generated passwords. You have an extremely hardened life, and will be a very difficult target if anyone should come after you. You are practically invisible.

If you would like to stay updated in reference to the latest privacy, digital security, and online investigation strategies which I teach, please visit **inteltechniques.com**. On this site, you can access my weekly podcast, blog, and contact information for live events, plus information about my privacy-related services and personal consultations. Thank you for reading. I wish you the best in your privacy adventure.

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MY SUCCESSES AND FAILURES WHILE MAKING PEOPLE DISAPPEAR

Michael Bazzell has helped hundreds of celebrities, billionaires, and everyday citizens completely disappear from public view. He is now known in Hollywood as the guy who "fixes" things.

His previous books about privacy were mostly reactive and focused on ways to hide information, clean up an online presence, and sanitize public records to avoid unwanted exposure. This book is proactive. It is about starting over. It is the complete guide that he would give to any new client in an extreme situation. It leaves nothing out, and provides explicit details of every step he takes to make someone completely disappear, including document templates and a chronological order of events.

The information shared in this book is based on real experiences with his actual clients, and is unlike any content ever released in his other books. The stories are all true, with the exception of changed names, locations, and minor details in order to protect the privacy of those described.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Bazzell investigated computer crimes on behalf of the government for over 20 years. During the majority of that time, he was assigned to the FBI's Cyber Crimes Task Force where he focused on various online investigations and new Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) collection techniques. He has trained thousands of individuals in the use of his investigative methods and privacy control strategies.

After leaving government work, he served as the technical advisor for the first season of the television hacker drama 'Mr. Robot'. His books 'Open Source Intelligence Techniques' and 'Extreme Privacy' are used by several government agencies as training manuals for intelligence gathering and privacy hardening. He now hosts the weekly 'Privacy, Security, & OSINT Show', and assists individual clients in achieving ultimate privacy, both proactively and as a response to an undesired situation.

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