

The unusual perils of growing up online



Photo credit: [Lj-42 on Flickr](#).

Recently, fuelled by a glass of wine and a good old fashioned thirst for procrastination, I stumbled across [the Internet Archive's 'Wayback Machine'](#). As a fairly tech-savvy 23 year old I'm part of a generation that grew up online, documenting my life through website builders and early social media. Here was the perfect opportunity to flick back through the online scrapbook of my younger years.

Unfortunately that pleasure was soon replaced by crushing embarrassment. Oh god, who let tiny Sophie near a computer? I need to invent time travel and transport myself back to the dial-up days of the early noughties to leave my landline permanently off the hook. If I throw my laptop out the window right now will all of this go away?

Unfortunately not. Even the long dead websites of decades-past can often be found archived somewhere. Those faux horoscopes you wrote. That Johnny Depp fansite you created. They're probably still there, waiting to be unearthed. (... Just me? Okay.)

From a historical and sociological point of view this is amazing, of course. Websites like this can provide a great insight into culture and its relationship with technology.

Psychologists could also have a field day – especially if they ever stumbled across any of my old creations.

It can also be an intimate glimpse into your own past, if you care to look. You might find your old words immortalized long after your childhood diaries and notebooks have been lost (or wisely destroyed).

But this doesn't stop it from being horrendously embarrassing, and maybe even a little incriminating. The idea of a job interviewer enquiring into the livelihood of my Neopets keeps me awake at night. (Does he know that they're dying of starvation? He's going to think I'm so irresponsible.)

Perhaps as children we should have been warned about the internet's longevity. I was always told not to talk to strangers or publish personal information online, but protecting my future self from shame and embarrassment was never high on my list of priorities as a kid.

When 12 year old Sophie was commenting on screenshots of Johnny Depp's sexiest moments she never envisioned herself stumbling across them a decade later, sobbing gently into a glass of red with the realisation that pretty much anyone else could find them too.

The fragility of internet privacy is constantly being brought to the forefront of our collective minds, each unsettling news story driving the point further home. But even if you don't have illicit online activities to worry about that doesn't mean that the internet hasn't got dirt on you – you might just have to look back a few years.

Realistically though, I'm incredibly privileged to be able to complain about this. Growing up online has given me a voice that many people don't have, so I'll no doubt continue to take advantage of this by embarrassing myself online for some time to come.

Sorry future Sophie.