Virtual Private Networks
Privacy Factsheet

A VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORK (VPN) is one way to keep your online activity safe. A VPN helps you access the internet privately and more securely. VPNs offer security from unsecured public Wi-Fi, from prying eyes, hackers or data thieves. A VPN gives you extra confidence that whatever you do online, be it shopping, banking, working or socialising is protected.

What is a VPN ?

When you use a VPN you connect to the internet via a server provided by the VPN company you have chosen to use, rather than via the Internet Service Provider (ISP) your mobile phone provider, work or home Wi-Fi provider.

A VPN creates an encrypted connection. This means your data will be turned into unreadable code as it travels from device to device. It will only become readable when it arrives at its destination. For more information see our Encryption Factsheet

A VPN makes your internet activity untraceable by assigning a different IP Address to that of your device. A VPN makes sure you cannot easily be traced back to a specific location or a specific Wi-Fi network.

How does a VPN work?

A VPN is a group of devices connected together via the internet to form their own virtual network.

Data transferred across the internet via the network is encrypted and so cannot be viewed while travelling between devices.

Is a VPN the same as a proxy service?

No, a proxy service just changes your IP address so you appear to be at a different location.

A VPN masks your IP address but it also encrypts any data travelling to or from your device.

A VPN provides privacy and security, a proxy service just gives you a different IP address.

Why should I use a VPN?

The encryption used by a VPN helps keep your online activity safe and secure from prying eyes.

By assigning different IP addresses a VPN prevents anyone from being able to pinpoint your location or your device.

If you use public Wi-Fi you may be putting your data at risk. Using a VPN can help to keep your data safe and secure. For more information about public Wi-Fi see our Public Wi-Fi Factsheet

You can turn a VPN on and off so you can browse the internet without it whenever you like if you want to.

Virtual Private Networks
Privacy Factsheet

Who can see my data when I use a VPN?

The VPN provider has the potential to see your internet activity. But many paid for VPNs make clear that they do not log any of their user's traffic. You should research providers to see what they offer.

By not logging internet activity a VPN is unable to provide a document of any of the websites users visit.

This means a VPN cannot hand over an Internet Connection Record (ICR) if requested by the UK Intelligence Agencies, law enforcement or government as part of the new Investigatory Powers Act (IP Act). For more

* *

Are VPNs legal?

Yes VPNs are legal.

How you use a VPN may be illegal though. For example some VPNs permit you to geo-spoof or use a proxy service.

Geo-spoofing is when you pretend to be in another country in order to work around a geographical block on content which is not licensed for the country you are in.

Using a VPN with geo-spoofing to access content in this way may be considered illegal activity.

* *

What should I consider before getting a VPN?

Avoid free VPNs they may not be secure. Research shows that free VPN services actually track users.

If you want to be sure your online activity stays private make sure you choose a VPN which does not log your internet activity and online traffic.

Your internet connection may be a little bit slower using a VPN.

Some VPNs can limit your data. If you like to download large files or engage in online gaming be sure that the VPN service you choose will handle all the data you need.

* *

What else can I do to keep my data secure?

VPNs only protect data when it is being sent to and from a device, a VPN does not protect your data when it is stored on your device.

If you want to secure data whilst it is resting on your device you will need to ensure your device is encrypted with a pin code.

Make sure the websites you visit have https at the start of the address, if you see https you can guarantee the website is encrypted.

If you want to protect your email or instant message communications a wide range of encrypted services are available for download.

* *

Don't forget

- VPNs are private networks that encrypt data to and from your device.

- Not all VPNs are the same. Make sure you do your research before choosing a VPN.

- VPNs are legal but using them to geo-spoof to access licensed content may be illegal.

- A VPN will protect your privacy and security when you use public Wi-Fi.

BIG BROTHER WATCH
DEFENDING CIVIL LIBERTIES, PROTECTING PRIVACY