

This week I'm on a series called "Privacy 101". After listening to a couple of podcast hosts for Huffington Post I realized people of all ages have the same basic questions about privacy. What is a VPN and do I need one? Should I accept cookies? What's the most important step toward protecting my information? This week I'm going to answer some of those basic questions and some I've received on my Facebook page.

Today: what is a VPN and do I need one?

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0-8 Jamey Tucker/whatthetech.tv

ON-CAMERA TEASE:

You've heard the online term "VPN" and how it's supposed to protect you. I'm Jamey Tucker coming up, we're going to look closer at Virtual Private Networks and whether you really need one.

ANCHOR INTRO

PROTECTING YOUR PRIVACY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT AND MORE DIFFICULT THAN IT IS TODAY. EVERYWHERE WE GO ONLINE LEAVES LITTLE BITS OF INFORMATION ABOUT WHO WE ARE, WHERE WE LIVE, AND WHAT WE DO.

ALL THIS WEEK OUR CONSUMER TECHNOLOGY REPORTER JAMEY TUCKER IS TAKING A LOOK AT SOME VERY BASIC PRIVACY STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO MITIGATE RISKS OF OUR IDENTITY BEING STOLEN. AND ONE OF THE QUESTIONS HE GETS MOST OFTEN IS ABOUT VIRTUAL PRIVATE NETWORKS.

PACKAGE SCRIPT

Would you go up to some stranger and give them your street address? Tell them where you live. Give them directions to your house. I don't imagine you would. When you're online, anyone who's looking can see where you're located through your IP Address.

Go to your web browser and type in: what is my IP address? That string of numbers is your location. When you're online, Anyone who knows what they're doing can see your IP address. A VPN, or Virtual Private Network, hides your IP address and location. It not only hides your location, but you can be virtually anywhere.

You're in your home office. But to anyone else, you'll be located in San Francisco, Dallas, the UK, or wherever else you want to be.

So do you need a VPN? In this day and age, it's a good idea. One advantage of having a VPN is the ability to watch movies and sports that are only available in certain regions.

If you're favorite baseball team games are blacked out in your area, you can be virtually in any city where the game is available.

Which VPN should you get? Stay away from free VPN apps. They're free for a reason as most share your activity. Nord VPN and Express VPN are about \$100 a year and can be loaded on all of your computers and smartphones.

I wouldn't say a VPN is critical for everyone, but if you're frequently on public WiFi or travel a lot, it's a good idea to have one to protect yourself on your phone and computer. Come on, let's go to Myrtle Beach, SC. Wouldn't it be great if we could really do this?

That's What the Tech? I'm Jamey Tucker

ANCHOR TAG

MOST PAID VPN SERVICES SUCH AS NORD VPN AND EXPRESS VPN WILL COVER UP TO TEN LAPTOPS, HOME COMPUTERS, AND SMARTPHONES WITH ONE SUBSCRIPTION

WEB STORY

Privacy has never been as important nor as difficult as it is today. Since most of our activity takes place online, information about who we are, where we live, and what we are interested in is readily available to advertisers and cybercriminals.

One of the questions I get most often is about VPNs or Virtual Private Networks. Who needs one? Which one to get? What are the drawbacks?

Imagine this scenario: you're walking down the street, and a stranger approaches you asking for your home address. Would you give it to them? Most likely not. Yet, when we navigate the digital world, many of us unknowingly expose information just as personal as our home address—our IP address.

Your **IP address** is a unique string of numbers assigned to your internet connection. It's akin to a digital home address, and it's visible to anyone online who knows how to look for it. Curious about what yours looks like? Open your web browser and search for "what is my IP address," and you'll see it displayed—a beacon broadcasting your location to the digital world.

Any website you visit has access to that IP address.

Enter the **Virtual Private Network (VPN)**. A VPN serves as a cloak for your online presence, masking your IP address and, by extension, your location. With a VPN, you could be sitting comfortably in your home office, but to the outside world, you're browsing from San Francisco, Dallas, the UK, or any other location you choose.

So, is a VPN necessary? In today's interconnected world, it's certainly beneficial, though not imperative for everyone. One of the perks of using a VPN is the freedom to access content like

movies and sports events that are region-locked. For instance, if your local broadcaster has blacked out your favorite baseball team's games, a VPN can transport you virtually to a city where the game is available for viewing.

As for downsides, a VPN can slow down your internet connection since it must run through other servers. If you log onto a VPN server outside of your country and forget, you may not be able to access frequently visited websites since they may be blocked in those countries.

The question then arises: which VPN should you choose? Caution is advised against free VPN services; they often monetize by sharing your browsing activity. Instead, consider reputable options like **Nord VPN** or **Express VPN**, which come with an annual fee of around \$100 and offer the convenience of being used across all your devices.

While a VPN might not be critical for everyone, it's a wise choice for those who frequently use public WiFi or travel extensively. It's an investment in your digital safety.

So, whether you're looking to secure your online activities or just want to enjoy a broader range of content, a VPN could be your ticket to a safer and more open internet experience. And who knows, maybe your next virtual destination will be Woolloomooloo, Australia.