



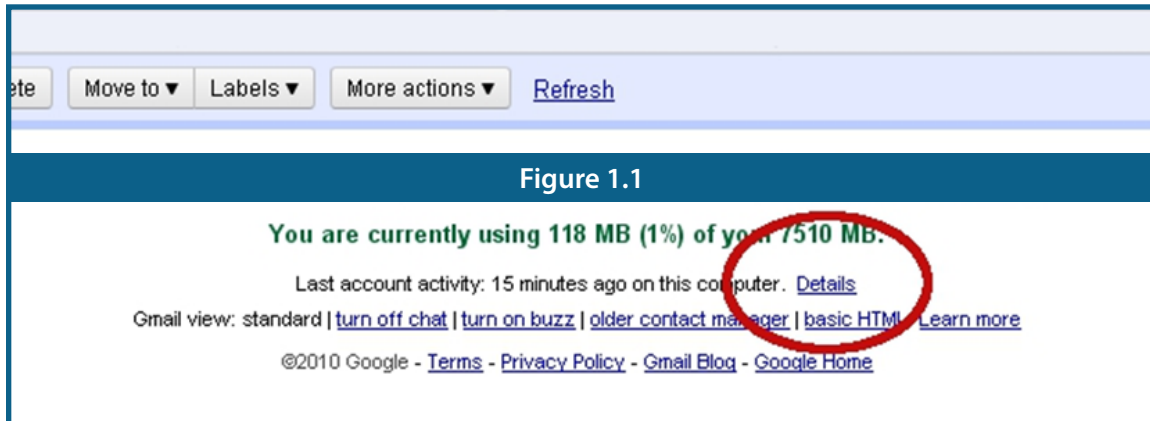
WHAT TO DO IF YOUR GOOGLE ACCOUNT IS COMPROMISED

Okay! I admit it! I got an Android Phone in May and have fallen completely in love with it. A couple of nights ago, as I was setting the alarm on my phone, an error alert was flashing in the corner of the screen. The message said the phone couldn't connect to my Gmail account, which I found odd as it has been syncing seamlessly with my mailbox ever since I got my Droid.

After a few unsuccessful attempts to reconnect my phone, I got my laptop out and tried signing into Gmail. Once I got into my account, Google alerted me saying unsuccessful activity was reported on my account and that I needed to adjust my security settings.

After reading the alert from Google, I noticed there was a spam message that bounced from all its intended recipients (about 10 contacts chosen from my Gmail account randomly). After checking the latest activity feature (Figure 1.1) I noticed an odd IP Address – which was registered in ... Kazakhstan.

How someone on the other side of the world got into my account, I'm not exactly sure, but I'm going to share the proper steps to follow, should this happen to you. I was able to reclaim my account. I also stepped up the security on my account, so hopefully I can avoid this in the future.



IF YOUR ACCOUNT IS COMPROMISED

1. IMMEDIATELY change your password.
2. Change your security question.
 - a. This can be done by clicking on the link below "Change Password" that says "Change Password Recovery Options."
3. Check your entire mailbox (all folders) for spam messages and remove them.

After you have adjusted your security preferences, the next step is to check your workstation/ computer for Malware and Viruses.

HOW YOUR GOOGLE ACCOUNT GOT HACKED

Markedly upset by having my account compromised, the first thing I did when I walked into work was contact our resident tech smarty, **Alexander Straffin**. Alex is a Senior Help Desk Associate here at **NSK Inc**, and I knew he would have at least some insight as to why/how my Google account was compromised.

I don't have any easy password. It isn't anything that can easily be cracked such as 1234 or my name spelled backwards (although "leahcim" does have a certain ring to it). Needless to say, I was itching to find out how someone on a different continent got into my account.

Alex says the # 1 Reason why accounts are compromised is due to guessing passwords.

Password complexity in general is not usually enforced, so they tend to be easy to hack.

Not satisfied with this answer as I don't think that is how they accessed my account (although I'm not dismissing this as a possibility); I asked him what other methods hackers use. Alex responded with "brute force attacks".

BRUTE FORCE ATTACK

A brute force attack occurs when a hacker tries any combination of phrases, letters, or numbers to gain access to an account. The process is simplified by using brute force software which will throw every possible combination it can think of at the system in hopes of eventually gaining entry.

Google can usually thwart this type of attack thanks to the "CAPTCHA" system in place – you know the annoying little box that says "please enter the text below" and it is usually something ridiculous such as "LoUDer SiGNs." Again, I'm not ruling this out as a possibility, but I still wasn't convinced.

SPYWARE/MALWARE

Alex mentioned that a third method of entry is via malware/spyware. I believe it was malware that compromised my account. Even though I have an up to date anti-virus installed and a firewall on my laptop, malware can get into systems sporadically.

Alex recommends:

- **Windows Security Essentials (Free if you are using a Windows OS) for an antivirus.**
- **Malwarebytes (Basic Level Free – Fee for Enterprise Editions) for malware protection.**

I also personally recommend running a virus/malware scan at least once a week, just to make sure your computer is operating in a safe environment.

STEPS TO TAKE TO SAFEGUARD YOUR GOOGLE ACCOUNT

Luckily for me, I was perusing through my Google Account about two weeks before someone broke into it, and found that Google stores a plethora of personal information. You can adjust your settings accordingly to limit how much personal information is exposed on the internet.

YOUR ACCOUNT AT A GLANCE

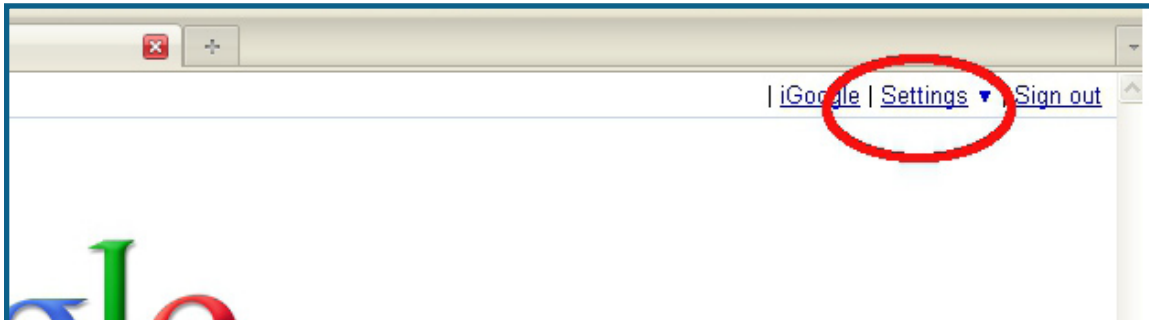


Figure 1.2

The first thing to do is to go to the Google Homepage and (while signed in) click on *Settings* then *Google Account Settings*. You will see a link underneath your *Personal Settings* for the *Dashboard* that says *View Data* on this account.

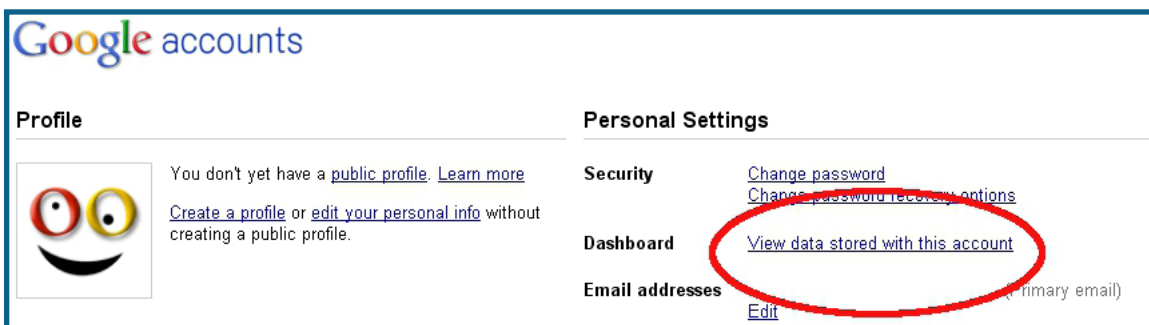


Figure 1.3

WEB HISTORY

I am one of the many who usually will stay logged into their Gmail Account, while working on other tabs/windows in my web browser. If you stay signed into Gmail while using Google, anything you search is stored in your Google account under web history.

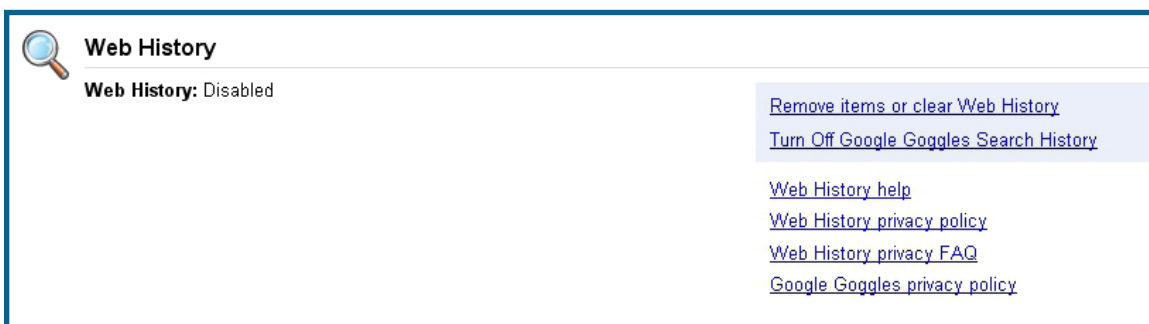


Figure 1.4

Solution – In order to better protect your privacy (because other people don't need to know you search for images of kittens in sweaters, that's your business), you should pause this feature.

First go through and clear out any history that has already been saved and then.

Then go to the left hand side of the screen. There is a link that says "pause." Click on the link and your Google Account will no longer save any web searches in your account.

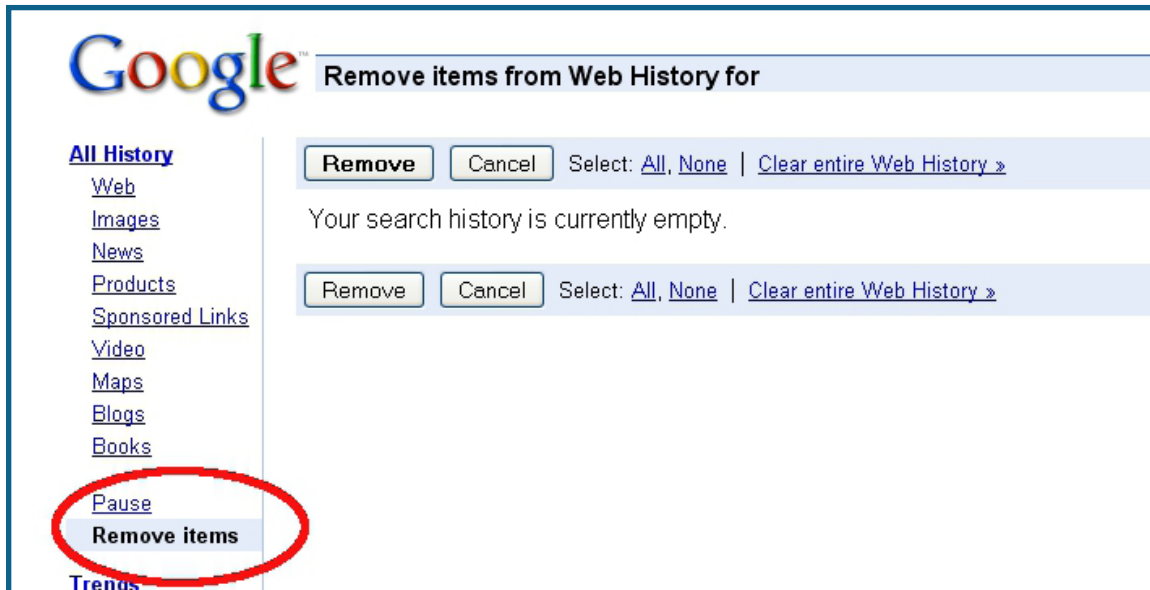


Figure 1.5

CHAT HISTORY

We all love Gchat. It is now what AIM was ten years ago – the "it" way to communicate with others. However, I didn't realize that Google stored ALL of my chats. I thought it only preserved the ones you unexpectedly signed out of while the person on the other end was sending you a message.

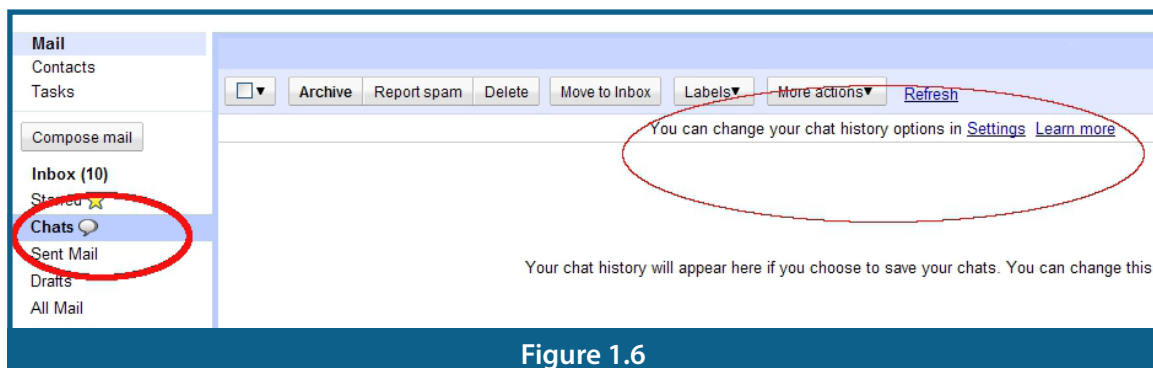


Figure 1.6

Solution – To clear out any stored chat sessions, click on the *Chats* Icon (see Figure 1.6) on the left hand side of the page (you may have to click on the drop-down arrow next to *More*). You can then delete all of the archived chats.

If you look at the top of the section, there is a link which will take you to your *Chat Settings* where you opt to not save your chats.

GOOGLE CHECKOUT



Google Checkout is a wonderful time saving device that allows customers to shop at the simple click of a button. It automatically fills in shipping and billing addresses as well as the payment information so all you have to do is pick, click, and then wait for the item to ship.

Google Checkout is great but it will store the last four digits of your Credit Card and your address, so a hacker could do some serious damage to your Credit Score.

Solution – You can either remove the Credit Card and input the information every time, or just stay clear of Google Checkout all together.

Please note that these steps are not foolproof. However if you take the right precautions now, you can avoid having your account compromised in the future.

For more information about Google Account Security, please visit: <http://www.google.com/support/accounts>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael joined the NSK Marketing Team as an Intern in January 2010 and was promoted to Marketing Associate in September 2010. A renaissance man, Michael has experience in Advertising, Public Relations, Journalism, Information Technology, Media Production, and Social Media Marketing for industries ranging from Digital Media to the Performing Arts.

As a Marketing Associate, Michael is in charge of maintaining media relations, press materials, blog content and monitoring NSK's social media presence. Prior to NSK Inc, Michael was a Student Manager and Help Desk Associate for the Emerson IT Help Desk.

Michael graduated Cum Laude from Emerson College with a BS in Marketing Communications.

ABOUT NSK INC

NSK Inc is an Information Technology Consulting Firm, with a focus on IT management for SMB companies. Headquartered in Boston, MA the company offers a wide array of IT services for business driven information challenges. We provide service and support for small and medium-sized businesses and groups working within large organizations.

For more information, please visit <http://www.nskinc.com>.

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