

WINDOWS PRIVACY HARDENING REPORT

Client System Sample – Windows 11 (24H2)

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1. Executive Summary

This assessment provides a comprehensive privacy hardening of a Windows 11 Home (24H2) system. The objective is to reduce telemetry, tracking, background data collection, and cloud synchronization while maintaining system stability, usability, and core functionality.

Microsoft Windows collects diagnostic data, personalization information, advertising identifiers, app activity, and search telemetry by default. This report documents the modifications made to enhance privacy, minimize unnecessary data sharing, and improve system control for the end user.

The system remains fully functional with all essential applications, browsing capabilities, and services operating normally following the privacy adjustments.

2. System Overview

Device: Windows 11 Home

Version: 24H2

Device Type: Laptop

User Focus: Privacy, reduced tracking, minimized cloud data usage

Assessment Goal: Disable unnecessary data collection without impacting usability

3. Initial Privacy Findings

Before hardening, the system exhibited:

- Default telemetry and diagnostic data collection enabled
- Personalized ads, offers, and content recommendations active
- Search history and highlights enabled
- Multiple app permissions active unnecessarily
- Background Store apps allowed to run

- Startup apps active without user need
- Browser privacy settings set to default (not optimal)
- Microsoft sync options storing preferences in the cloud

These findings align with standard Windows defaults and were successfully mitigated.

4. Privacy Changes Implemented

4.1 Diagnostics & Telemetry

Actions taken:

- Disabled optional diagnostic data collection
- Turned off inking & typing personalization
- Cleared all existing diagnostic data from Microsoft servers

Screenshots:

Find a setting

Privacy & security > Diagnostics & feedback



Diagnostic data

Helps to improve Windows and keep it secure, up to date, and working as expected

You're sending required diagnostic data

As a part of using Windows, your device sends Microsoft a limited set of data that is necessary to keep Windows up to date, and working as expected.

Send optional diagnostic data

Help Microsoft improve your Windows experience and fix problems more quickly by sending us a limited set of data that includes data about websites you browse, how you use apps and features, and enhanced error reporting.

Your device will be equally secure and will operate normally even if you choose not to send optional diagnostic data.



Improve inking and typing

Send optional inking and typing diagnostic data to Microsoft



View diagnostic data

View your data in the Diagnostic Data Viewer



Delete diagnostic data

Clear diagnostic data that Microsoft has collected about this device

Feedback



Feedback frequency

Find a setting

Privacy & security > Diagnostics & feedback



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Improve inking and typing

Send optional inking and typing diagnostic data to Microsoft



View diagnostic data

View your data in the Diagnostic Data Viewer



Delete diagnostic data

Clear diagnostic data that Microsoft has collected about this device

i Last delete request: 12/5/2025 8:36 PM

Once you delete your data here, we start removing copies from our systems. If you have a Microsoft account, you might have additional diagnostic data you can delete on the privacy dashboard.

These changes reduce Microsoft's telemetry footprint and limit behavioral data collection.

4.2 Advertising & Personalization Settings

Actions taken:

- Turned off personalized offers and promotions
- Disabled website language list access
- Disabled Settings-based recommendations and promotional content
- Disabled Start/Search improvement tracking
- Disabled Advertising ID for behavioral ad personalization

These adjustments significantly reduce targeted advertising and UI personalization tracking.

Screenshots:

Privacy & security > Recommendations & offers



Personalized offers

Get personalized tips, ads, and recommendations based on my Windows activity



Allow websites to access my language list

Let websites show me content in my preferred language by accessing my language list



Improve Start and search results

Let Windows improve Start and search results by tracking which apps I open



Show notifications in Settings

Required notifications will be shown even if this setting is off



Recommendations and offers in Settings

Let Windows show me product recommendations and offers in Settings



Advertising ID

Let apps show me personalized ads by using my advertising ID

Privacy & security > Recommendations & offers



Personalized offers

Get personalized tips, ads, and recommendations based on my Windows activity



Allow websites to access my language list

Let websites show me content in my preferred language by accessing my language list



Improve Start and search results

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Advertising ID

Let apps show me personalized ads by using my advertising ID

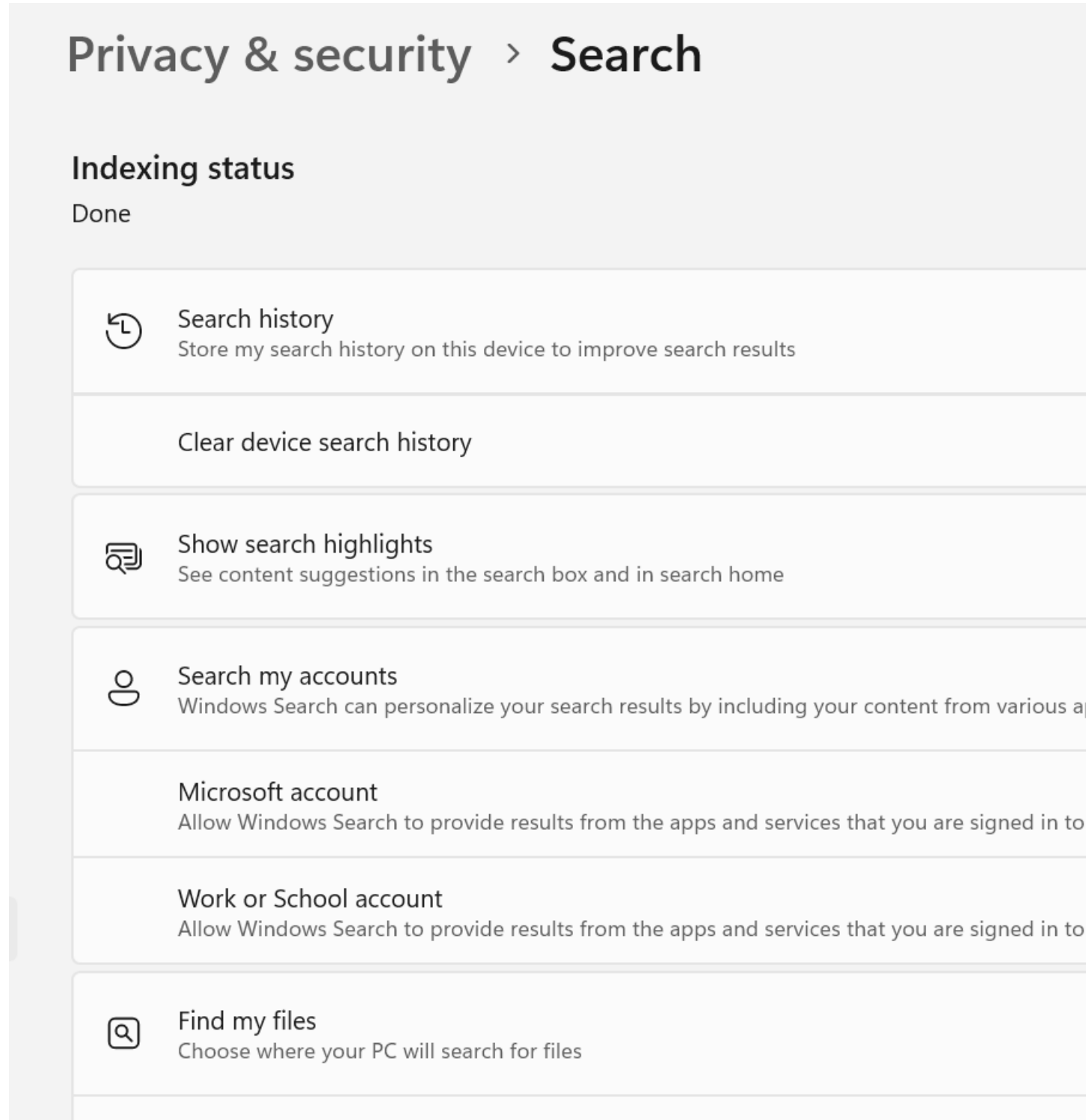
4.3 Search History & Search Privacy

Actions taken:

- Disabled device Search History
- Cleared previously stored search history
- Disabled Search Highlights
- Disabled cloud-based/search account integration

- Minimized Windows telemetry tied to search personalization

Screenshots:



Find a setting

Privacy & security > Search



Search history

Store my search history on this device to improve search results

Clear device search history



Show search highlights

See content suggestions in the search box and in search home



Search my accounts

Windows Search can personalize your search results by including your content from various

Microsoft account

Allow Windows Search to provide results from the apps and services that you are signed in to

Work or School account

Allow Windows Search to provide results from the apps and services that you are signed in to



Find my files

Choose where your PC will search for files

These settings prevent Microsoft from collecting and syncing user search behavior.

4.4 App Permissions Review

Permissions evaluated:

- Location

- Camera
- Microphone
- Contacts
- Messaging / Call history (if present)
- Additional sensitive categories

Actions taken:

- Disabled access for apps that do not require permissions
- Ensured only trusted apps retained access
- Limited visibility and background access of sensitive sensors

Screenshots:

Privacy & security > Location

Windows can use your device's capabilities like GPS or Wi-Fi to determine your location. Microsoft uses location services. Some desktop apps might not appear on this page or be affected by these settings.



Location services

When this is on, location will be available to Windows and anyone using this device can choose to use location services.



Let apps access your location

All apps can access approximate location, but you can choose which apps can access your precise location.



Camera



Mail and Calendar



Microsoft Teams



News



Start Experiences App



Weather

Privacy & security > Location

Windows can use your device's capabilities like GPS or Wi-Fi to determine your location. Microsoft uses its location services. Some desktop apps might not appear on this page or be affected by these settings.



Location services

Location is turned off and Windows and other users on this device will not be able to use location services.



Let apps access your location

All apps can access approximate location, but you can choose which apps can access your precise location.



Camera



Mail and Calendar



Microsoft Teams



News



Start Experiences App

This restricts data exposure to unnecessary applications.

4.5 Background Apps & Startup Optimization

Actions taken:

- Disabled background permissions for non-essential Store/OEM apps
- Disabled unnecessary startup programs to reduce hidden processes
- Reduced the system's background telemetry and data requests

Screenshots:

Find a setting

Apps > Installed apps > Weather

Specifications

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------|
| Publisher | Microsoft Corporation |
| Version | 4.54.63029.0 |
| App | 0 bytes |
| Data | 16.0 KB |
| Total usage | 16.0 KB |

App permissions

Location



Background app permissions

Let this app run in background

Power optimized (recommended) ▾

[Learn more about the options](#)

Apps > Installed apps > Weather

Version 4.54.63029.0

App 0 bytes

Data 16.0 KB

Total usage 16.0 KB

App permissions

Location

Off

Background app permissions

Let this app run in background

Never 

[Learn more about the options](#)

Apps > Startup



CCleaner

Gen Digital Inc. | Not measured



ChatGPT

OpenAI | No impact



Copilot

Microsoft Corporation | No impact



EA

Electronic Arts | Not measured



EpicGamesLauncher

Epic Games, Inc. | Not measured



Intel(R) Management and Security Status

INTEL CORP | Not measured



Intel® Graphics Command Center Startup Task

INTEL CORP | No impact



Microsoft 365 Copilot

Microsoft Corporation | No impact

Apps > Startup



CCleaner
Gen Digital Inc. | No impact



ChatGPT
OpenAI | No impact



Copilot
Microsoft Corporation | No impact



EA
Electronic Arts | No impact



EpicGamesLauncher
Epic Games, Inc. | No impact



Intel(R) Management and Security Status
INTEL CORP | Not measured



Intel® Graphics Command Center Startup Task
INTEL CORP | No impact



Microsoft 365 Copilot
Microsoft Corporation | No impact

4.6 Browser Privacy (Microsoft Edge)

Actions taken:

- Tracking Prevention set to **Strict**
- Enabled Microsoft Defender SmartScreen
- Enabled blocking of potentially unwanted apps (PUA)
- Reduced browsing-based tracking and content filtering issues

Screenshots:

Privacy, search, and services



Clear browsing data



Typo protection



Clear browsing data on close



Tracking prevention

Manage how websites use trackers to collect info about your browsing



Clear browsing data

Clear history, passwords, cookies, and more from this profile



Privacy

Manage your privacy settings for Edge



Security

Manage your security settings for Edge



Cookies

Save cookies and data on your device in order to facilitate continuous browsing between sites and ses



Site permissions

Manage permissions that are applied across all sites



Search and connected experiences

Manage Edge search, connected experiences, and services

personalized ads. Some trackers collect and send your info to sites you haven't visited.

Enable tracking prevention

Blocks known harmful trackers

Basic

Allows most trackers across all sites

Content and ads will likely be personalized

Sites will work as expected

Balanced (Recommended)

Blocks trackers from sites you haven't visited

Content and ads will likely be less personalized

Sites will work as expected

Strict

Blocks trackers from sites you haven't visited

Content and ads will likely be less personalized

Sites will work as expected

Blocked trackers

View the sites that we've blocked from tracking you

Exceptions

Allow all trackers on sites you choose

Always use "Strict" tracking prevention when browsing InPrivate

4.7 Account & Sync Settings

Actions taken:

- Reviewed all Microsoft Account sync settings
- Disabled unnecessary syncing of preferences & app settings

- Limited cloud storage of user configuration data

Screenshots:



OneDrive folder syncing

The folders you select will be protected and available across your devices



Remember my apps

Get quick access to your apps on any device



Remember my preferences

Quickly access your preferences across Microsoft experiences



Privacy resources

[About these settings and your privacy](#) | [Privacy dashboard](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)



OneDrive folder syncing

The folders you select will be protected and available across your devices



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Privacy resources

[About these settings and your privacy](#) | [Privacy dashboard](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

5. Results & Recommendations

✓ Results

After completing the privacy-hardening procedures:

- System telemetry was significantly reduced
- Personalized tracking and ads were disabled
- Search and cloud-synced data collection was minimized
- App permissions and background execution greatly restricted
- Browser privacy enhanced
- System performance remains stable and fully functional

✓ Recommendations

To maintain a strong privacy posture:

1. **Review permissions monthly**
New apps may request access to sensors or data.
2. **Keep Windows updated**
Some updates reintroduce default tracking behaviors.
3. **Review browser privacy extensions**
Consider adding uBlock Origin or DuckDuckGo Privacy Essentials.
4. **Avoid signing into unnecessary apps with Microsoft Account**
Reduces cloud syncing and personalized tracking.
5. **Perform annual security & privacy audits**
Especially after major Windows version updates.