

# Microsoft's new Recall feature is both interesting and dangerous

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We take the search function for granted when it works well. If you search for a specific email, photo, or document on your PC and it appears immediately, you don't have to think twice about it. But if you have to spend 10 minutes searching your hard drive looking for a certain file, you will really go crazy. That's where Microsoft hopes its new Recall feature can help - even if it comes with some major security risks.

## What is recall?

Recall, at its core, is simple: It quietly takes screenshots of what you're doing on your PC throughout your session. Whenever you do a search with Recall, it pulls from all these screenshots to find relevant moments in your PC's activity history that might be what you're looking for, Merge them together into a scrollable timeline. For example, if you're looking for a slideshow created for work, searching for it can pull up the time you spent working on PowerPoint as well as the presentation given with it. The same thing happens with an image: If you're looking for a photo of your dog at the park, you can see it from the moment you open it in your camera roll as well as in the messaging app you used to Send photos to friends and family.

Recall also links these screenshots to the active app: As you scroll through your timeline, not only can you see which window you're looking at, but Recall also shows which apps are running and when any. So if you know you want a PowerPoint session from February, you can skip any screenshots from Teams.

While this is certainly a new feature, Microsoft isn't the first to roll out a feature like this. Rewind offers a similar experience on macOS, recording all activity, making everything you do on your Mac searchable. Of course, the big difference here is that Recall is a feature built by Microsoft, while Rewind is only offered by third-party developers on macOS.

You also won't be able to use Recall on any PC, even if it runs Windows 11. Instead, it's the new AI-powered standard of Microsoft's proprietary PC Copilot+. These devices are equipped with Snapdragon X Plus and Snapdragon X Elite chips, which have dedicated NPUs to handle local AI processes. Unless you have one of these new machines, like the new Surface Pro or Surface Laptop, you won't be able to try Recall when it launches.

## Is Recall safe to use?

The answer, from Microsoft's perspective, is yes. Because it only runs on the Copilot+ computer, Recall is completely processed on the device without needing to do it in the cloud. That means everything from AI processing to screenshots happens on the PC. Microsoft says screenshots used for Recall are also encrypted on the PC, even from other profiles on the machine: If you lock your PC, Recall screenshots are also locked.

Additionally, you have control over which apps and websites Recall takes screenshots of. If you don't want Recall to take screenshots when using WhatsApp, you can tell it not to. You can also choose to pause Recall for a period of time and delete recently taken screenshots or all screenshots stored on the device. InPrivate browsing sessions in Microsoft Edge and DRM content, like Netflix shows and movies, will also not be recorded.

However, although Microsoft is always concerned about Recall's security, it is not perfect. First, Recall will take screenshots of almost everything you do on your PC (assuming you haven't adjusted these settings yourself). That means it won't stop taking screenshots when you type or access sensitive information like passwords, social security numbers, or banking data: If you can see something on the screen, chances are Recall is recording it. While it's great that these screenshots are encrypted when locking the device, if someone breaks into your PC, they will be able to access the entire Recall history, including sensitive information. It's scary to let a potential hacker open Recall and see all of your relevant credentials and personal information.

In fact, this feature has been monitored by the government. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), the UK's data watchdog, has contacted Microsoft for more information about Recall. The watchdog said all companies must "assess and mitigate risks to people's rights and freedoms" before offering new products to consumers. Because it's still so early (Microsoft only announced the feature two days before this investigation), it's unclear how watchdogs will handle this issue, and it's unclear whether government agencies will whether to conduct their own investigation or not.

For the average Windows 11 user, Recall probably won't get them into trouble, unless you have a photo of your social security card in your camera roll or keep all your passwords in a Word document. It's important to understand exactly what you're agreeing to before turning this feature on. Whether it's a hacker wanting to break into a financial account or a nosy friend snooping around your PC, you don't want to make it easy for anyone with your computer's password to search your entire computer. works on PC.

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