PC

Find products, advice, tech news   🔍   ☰
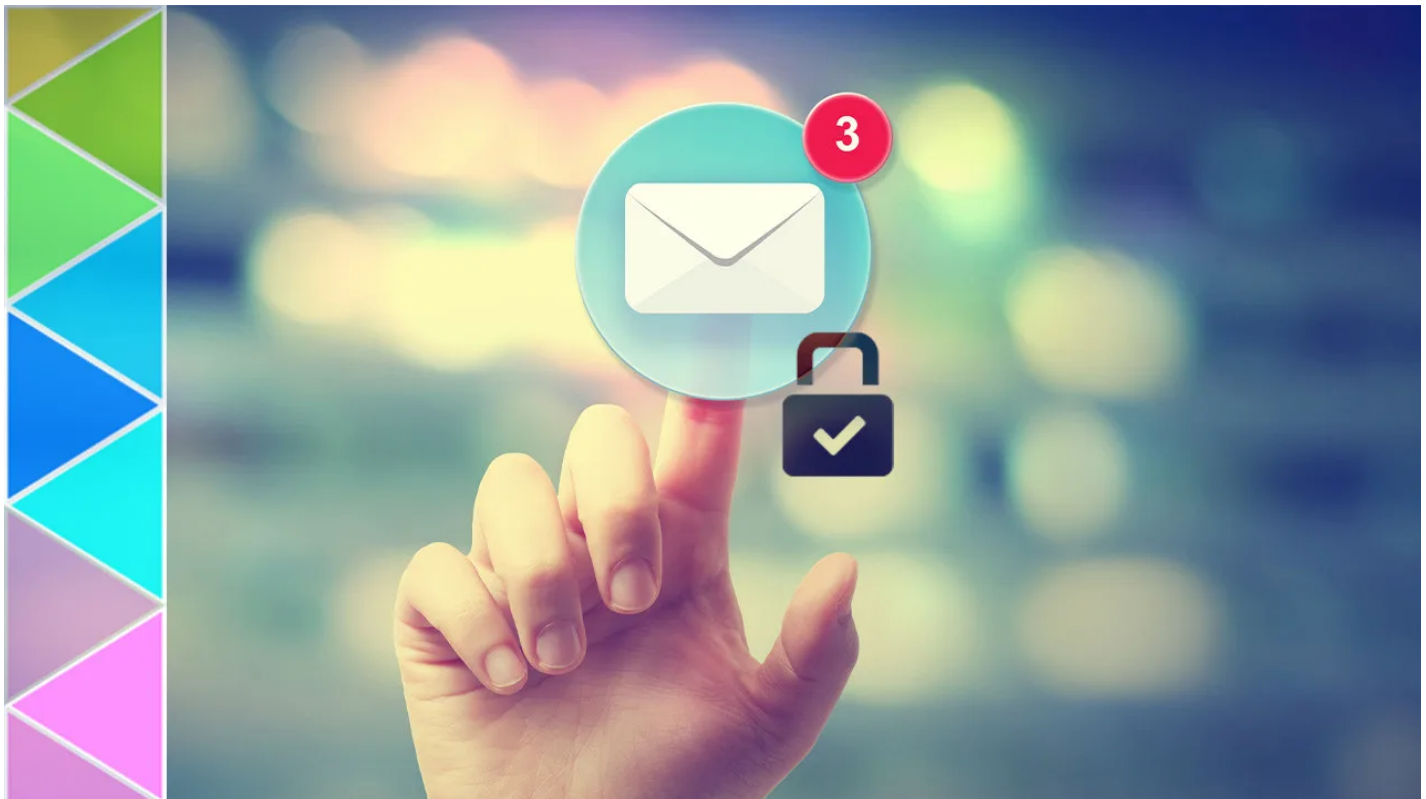
PCMag Asia > Feature

How to Quit Gmail and Reclaim Your Privacy

Switching from Gmail (or any free email service that monetizes your data) to a privacy-focused email provider might seem like a hassle, but productivity expert Jill Duffy shows you how to do it with minimal fuss.

By Jill Duffy

Aug. 12, 2019, 9:52 p.m.

In the past year, I've made real progress in getting my online life to better match my values. No one's perfect, but I'm taking steps. For instance, I deleted social media accounts from companies

that I haven't felt good about in years. I also convinced my partner to shop less with one of the biggest online retailers, since we don't want to support its business practices. One area in which I still need to improve is email. I know I should pay for private and secure email and move away from free services like Gmail that monetize my personal data. In fact, I'm making the leap now. If you're also trying to give up free email and move to a more private email service, let me share with you what I've learned about the process.

I owe my motivation here to a friend who emailed me last week. She had been reading deeply about online privacy and security and decided to move to "less data-miney" platforms. She was jumping ship from Gmail and had copied her new address. "I obviously still check my Gmail," she wrote, "but now you have another way to contact me."

1. Choose a New Email Provider

The first step is to decide what service you'll use for your new email.

You could run your own email server, if you have the technical know-how to set it up and make informed decisions about how to secure it. Frankly, that's over my head.

Instead, I looked for a provider that met these criteria:

- has a positive track record with privacy and security,

- encrypts mail end to end,

- offers two-factor authentication, and

- makes money by charging a reasonable fee ($50 per year is a good benchmark) rather than by monetizing user data.

If you're willing to read up on the laws of different countries, you might also consider the company's jurisdiction so that you know your rights in terms of what the company can and cannot hand over about you to any authorities.

While I'm in no position to recommend one service over another, there are many respectable, privacy-focused email services. A few examples are:

- ProtonMail,

- Tutanota,

- Hushmail Premium,

- Fastmail, and

- Mailfence.

PCMag is planning to do reviews of these services, but for now, you'll need to do some research to find the one that best suits your needs.

2. Use a Recognizable Name for the New Account

When you email people from a new account, they need to believe it's you.

While I was switching to a more privacy-minded email provider, I chatted with Max Eddy, who writes about security and privacy for PCMag. He drove home the point about getting people to believe

you are who you say you are. People typically believe that an address beginning with a name they recognize and ending in gmail.com is legitimate. Certainly, it could be a well-targeted phishing scheme, but it doesn't look nearly as shady as an address that ends in @iFuhW9WDiFuhW9WD.com. That's a real one I found in my junk folder.

When you pay for email, you usually can choose to use one of several domains that the service owns, or you can use any domain that you own. Do your contacts know what domains you own? Would they easily recognize them? Maybe not.

Using the domain of the email provider is a safe bet. As Max said, people can search for it online and get some insurance that it's not phony.

3. Import Your Contacts

Next, you'll want to copy your contacts from your old email service to the new one.

First, check what file types your new email provider supports for uploads, such as Outlook CSV or Apple's vCard format. Then, export your data from wherever you keep your address book. Finally, import them into the new email service.

If you use Gmail, go to contact.google.com. On the left side, look for More and click to expand it. Choose Export and select the file type you want.

If you use Apple's Contact app, open your Contacts app on your computers and select everyone you want to export, which might be everyone. Then go to File > Export > Export vCard. That will export all your contacts so you can import them into your new email service.

4. Start CCing Your New Address

Perhaps the easiest way to add an air of credibility to your new address is by CCing it on emails you send from the old address. It's a simple way of transitioning, though it's slow.

Don't feel frustrated if you continue to get mail at your old address. Give it time. After a while, you can start sending people email from the new address solely, which will help because people often reply to the previous message from your rather than starting a new one.

5. Forward Incoming Mail

Depending on how urgently you want to drop your old service, you might consider forwarding mail from that inbox into your new email account. It will help you wean yourself off the old service.

In Gmail, go to Settings > Forwarding and POP/IMAP and choose Add a Forwarding Address. Enter your new address and wait for a verification email from Google. Be sure to click the verification link to activate email forwarding.

Let's say one of the reasons you want to leave your old email account is because you get a lot of junk. You can add a filter to email forwarding so that you only get mail from people you specify or that meet some other criteria.

6. Consider Importing Your Mail History

Another way you can ease the transition between email addresses is by moving your old mail into the new system. Check whether your new email provider supports importing emails. If it does, you'll need the instructions. Usually, it's not as straightforward as uploading a contacts list because the mail archives will be a much larger file.

To export your archives from Gmail, start at Google Takeout (takeout.google.com) and deselect all. Then scroll down to Mail and only select it. Choose whether you want to download mail with all labels or just a subset, such as everything except Trash. After answering a few more prompts, you'll export your data. Then follow the instructions from the new provider to import it. Keep an eye out for the MBOX format, as that's what Google gives you.

7. Don't Delete Your Old Address

Unless you have a compelling reason to delete your old email account, don't. If you've used the address for anything important, such as tax filing or as the recovery address for other online accounts, you might need it.

Next Steps: Do a Privacy Checkup

If you're on a privacy and security kick, there are other simple actions you can take to help you along.

For starters, if you're not using a password manager, please get one! Having unique and strong passwords for all your account logins goes a long way to preventing your data from being compromised.

If you're still with Google, be sure to run a security checkup on your account. There's a lot to go through because Google sure does keep a lot of information about you. It's a worthwhile exercise, though.

When you're not actively using location services on your phone, turn them off. On iPhones, they're listed under Privacy for a reason. Your battery will thank you for making this switch, too.

In general, be mindful about the apps you download, surveys you answer, and all the other innocuous-seeming data that apps and websites suggest you give them. If the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook scandal taught us anything, it's that we can't always imagine the ways our own data can be used against us.

MORE INSIDE PCMAG.COM

- [Qualcomm's X65 Modem Might Pull the iPhone 13 to 10Gbps](#)
- [Super Bowl LV Shows the 5G World That Wasn't](#)
- [The Pandemic Will Delay New Games For Years, So Stop Complaining About Your Backlog](#)
- [20 Thoughtful Gift Ideas for Your High-Tech Valentine](#)
- [20 Thoughtful Gift Ideas for Your High-Tech Valentine](#)

About Jill Duffy

Jill Duffy is a contributing editor, specializing in productivity apps and software, as well as technologies for health and fitness. She writes the weekly Get Organized column, with tips on how to lead a better digital life. Her first book, *Get Organized: How to Clean Up Your Messy Digital Life* is available for Kindle, iPad, and other digital formats. She is also the creator and author of ProductivityReport.org.

Before joining PCMag.com, she was senior editor at the Association for Computing Machinery, a non-profit membership organization for computer scientists and students. She also spent five years as a writer and managing editor of *Game Developer* magazine, ...

More From Jill Duffy

- [Asana](#)
- [Microsoft Teams](#)
- [Zoom Meetings](#)
- [Microsoft To Do](#)
- [Want to Get More Done? Track Your Time Better With These Proven Methods](#)

COMMENTS