

HOW TO HIDE FROM GOOGLE IN REGARD TO NEW PRIVACY POLICY

Hide From Google



To increase your online security, don't put all your cookies in one basket. Photo by Chris Wetherell/[1]/CC

"If you're not paying for something, you're not the customer; you're the product being sold." —blue_beetle, [Metafilter discussion](#).

Google started off the new year by announcing that they will be [changing their privacy policies](#) so that they can create more detailed profiles of their users. Starting March 1st, 2012, [Google will combine](#) information from user's Gmail, Google Search history, YouTube, and other services. Prior to this change, Google profiled their users, but restricted the profile data use to the service from which the data was collected.

Because we have come to rely on web services so much in our day-to-day activities, it simply isn't an option to stop using search, webmail, and social networking. But there are ways for heavy users to keep a low profile so that, should Google turn decidedly evil, you won't be completely at their mercy. If you are concerned about the amount of information that Google knows about you for whatever reason, here are some techniques you can use to guard your privacy online.

This how-to was written by Ari Douglas, an engineer-turned-lawyer, who spends his time contemplating the nexus between law, technology, and society.

Distributed computing

A powerful tool to help you regain some control over your online privacy is to spread your information over several services. Think of each piece of your personal information as a puzzle piece. If you use all of Google's products, they have the ability to [complete the puzzle](#) and see the full picture. They know what you do online (Google Search), who you correspond with (Google Voice, Gmail, Google Plus), where you go (Google Maps),

and what you do (Google Calendar). With the privacy policy change, Google will be using data-mining algorithms to combine these sources of personal information to create detailed profiles of their users. By spreading your personal information over several services, you withhold puzzle pieces and ensure that no one company knows the full picture of your personal life while preserving the convenience of using those web-services.

Mix and Match Services

The task of segmenting your online activities amongst several sites may be painful if you're a creature of habit, but ultimately worth it for the peace of mind. For most people, this means making sure that your email and search engine are operated by different companies. Because it is a bigger hassle to change your email address, it is easier to change what search engine you use.

Google.com has long dominated the search engine category, but there's no such thing as a healthy monopoly. Recently, other companies have strengthened their offerings such that for common searches, you won't notice any difference in search result quality. Some alternative search engines are Ask.com, Bing.com, DuckDuckGo.com, and Yahoo.com. You can set any of these to your home page, and still return to Google for individual searches on the rare occasion that the alternative search engine does not return useful results.

Use a Proxy

Another method of search engine obfuscation is to use a service that proxies your requests to Google while removing your personal information. Scroogle.com does this, as does the [Google-Sharing](#) plugin for the FireFox web browser.

Segment Your Email Traffic

Another trick you can use is to set up single-purpose email addresses to segment your information. This means that you use your primary email address (that you have given out to people) only for email. Then you make new email accounts for other services. For example, you could make a new email account for your Picasa pictures, or Google Reader. This way, Google cannot correlate the contents of your email with the content of your pictures or what you like to read.

Multi-Browser Surfing

The final tool for information segmentation is to know that you can use multiple web browsers to keep your information separate. Whenever you are logged into a Google service, such as Gmail, all of your searches in that browser (even in other browser tabs)

are logged and associated with your Google account (which you can view in the upper right hand corner of the Google search page to see what account you are logged in with.

You can use separate browsers to log into two separate Google accounts at once. Or you can have one browser logged in to Google and the other browser not logged in. For example, if you have any combination of FireFox, Opera, Chrome and Safari open, you can use each to login to a different account system to complete different tasks, ie: log into gmail in one browser, while doing your web-browsing and searching in a separate browser.

Turning Off Google Web History

[Google Web History](#) archives all of your Google Search activity. You can review the information at that link, see what information Google is using to customize your search results. Google allows you to "pause" and/or remove Web History. This prevents your search results from being reviewed through the Web History interface, and stops Google from using the information to customize your search results. However, Google [retains your search history](#) for use in profiling.

Special considerations for mobile phones

Smartphones provide some special challenges for segmenting your information. It is more difficult to log out of Google on a smartphone because Google Contacts and Gmail integrate closely with the functionality of the phone. Because you cannot log out, it is difficult to use Google services without Google associating the usage with your account. The solution is to use Google alternatives where possible. Using an alternative web browser, search engine, and map software will prevent Google from collecting additional information about you.

Depending on our phone, you may have the ability to use multiple Google accounts, and may be able to choose what information to sync with Google's services. For example, you could have your primary Google account on the phone, which you allow to sync email and contacts, but also have a Google account created for a specific service, which syncs only that service's information (ie: you could set up a Google account solely for using the Google Reader blog reader, and only sync the Google Reader information while turning off the syncing of all other account information).

Finally, most smartphones allow you to control location services. If you're concerned about privacy, keep it turned off while you are not using it. Not only does this protect your privacy, but it saves your battery life as well.

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