

## Protonmail vs. Gmail

Growing up, I used earthlink--it was clunky, with limited storage, but it worked. It also didn't steal all of my data, like gmail does everyday! But maybe steal is too strong a word--after all, I signed off on Google's privacy agreement; only, I didn't, not really. Like most people (I assume), I took one look at the dozens of pages of the agreement and just clicked agree.

What I didn't know (or I did, just not the details) is that I was more or less handing Google a trove of my personal data. On their website, Google says they collect data to "provide better services", but they never clarify which services they mean. YouTube? Gmail? What goes unmentioned is Google's ad business--which is worth billions precisely because it holds so much user data, allowing the company's true clients to buy and sell the true product--my data and yours.

Protonmail, by contrast, is designed to keep your data safe. According to their privacy policy, the company is based in Switzerland, famed for protecting private banking. (In a sense, Protonmail is sort of like the Swiss bank account of email.)

Their privacy policy, unlike Google's, is pages--as in, not a dozen, not even ten. The language is clear and simple. There are no hidden menus and pages. It spells out quite clearly the precise situations under which your data must be shared with outside parties (as when the company is served a warrant by Swiss law enforcement) and even details the cryptographic methods used to protect your data, so that not even Protonmail knows what you are sending.

Of course, the differences between these two privacy policies is really the difference between two business models. Gmail is ad-supported, so the users *are* the product, being sold to advertisers. Protonmail, by contrast, is subscription-based, so they survive off paying users, and don't need to harvest your data to sell to advertisers.

I know that Jaron Lanier, among other tech thinkers, has argued that to really change how privacy orks online, you need to give everyone back control of their data. But what's so insidious--and wonderful--about Gmail (not to mention Google's other services) is that it *feels* free. Who wouldn't want free email? At this point, it feels almost expected that what you use online is free.

But, as the comparison of these two privacy policies shows, free is anything but in this case. Google stores everything from your location to your contact history (whom you contacted and vice versa); Protonmail collects virtually no information. Both services

say that you can delete your data, but with Google, this is a much less transparent process--their privacy policy states that some data may be kept indefinitely for “financial record keeping” but this is never clearly defined.

Clearly, if you want more privacy, you should choose Protonmail, but for users of fewer means (or less privacy know-how) this might not be an option.