

Free unlimited photo storage is a thing of the past—thanks a lot, Google. So what to do?

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Don MacAskill has been trying for 18 years to persuade people to pay to back up and view their photos online, as an alternative to the home hard drives or keeping everything on the phone.

As the CEO of SmugMug things got "really hard" when Google came in and changed the dynamics in 2015. He had a similar conundrum with Flickr, but that was resolved when SmugMug eventually acquired it in 2018.

Google Photos, for its part, was all about free and unlimited storage, and for MacAskill, "how do you compete against free?"

You don't. Even Google this week changed its tune on that one.

Google said it had over 4 trillion photos and videos on the service, with 28 billion uploaded weekly. And "in order to welcome even more of your memories and build Google Photos for the future" the company backtracked on its unique sales proposition. Beginning in June, customers will have to pay a minimum of \$1.99 monthly, if not more, to store their new photos with Google.

"It's the end of an era," says MacAskill. "Google was the last of the free offerings. Everyone else charges now for photo storage."

MacAskill hopes that by Google making this move, consumers will awaken to the perils of putting all their eggs in a bait and switch basket that starts as no cost, "because there's just no such thing as free."

Earlier this week we, at USA TODAY, pointed out potential solutions for consumers who would like to put their images elsewhere, and not start paying Google. The obvious next best choice for many would be Amazon, which offers free, unlimited photo storage to subscribers of its \$119 yearly Prime services, for entertainment and expedited shipping.

Elsewhere, you'll probably need to pay extra, whether that's from Apple's iCloud or Dropbox, which both charge \$9.99 monthly for 2 TB of storage, or Microsoft's 365 offering, which offers 1 TB for \$70

yearly.

MacAskill has a way better deal. However, as a small company that's not on the home screen of iPhones, Windows computers or Fire TV streaming stick screens, most consumers don't know about it. His company offers unlimited storage starting at \$55 a year on SmugMug, which is aimed at pro photographers, or \$59 for Flickr. That means no nags urging us to upgrade storage because we've run out of room.

(He's offering a special for Google Photos switchers, with a year of SmugMug at \$33 and Flickr Pro at \$45.)

MacAskill says people are shooting more pictures than ever before, in high resolution. He gets over 10 million daily uploads to SmugMug and Flickr.

One thing he would like consumers to pay attention to is the industry approach to photo management. When Google, Apple and other companies urge us to delete photos from our phones, because they're backed up elsewhere, and then the companies changes the rules it "opens up a world of hurt," says MacAskill.

For years, the bargain Google offered was free storage in order for the company to mine our images for information it could later use to create personalized advertising. For instance, if Google knows from your photos that you like to visit Columbus, Ohio, and eat in the Short North district, it could start hitting you up with offers of places to frequent in those subtle pitches that appear near search results.

Should we charge Google for our photos?

On Twitter this week, several users spoke out about Google's move, asking if now that Google is charging us, whether we reciprocate.

Perhaps Google should start paying us when we upload photos to Maps and Google My Business. Ditto to Trip Advisor, Yelp and other sites that couldn't exist without our photos.

Meanwhile, what can consumers do, going forward?

You can throw all your photos on Amazon and hope to be able to find them. To make it easier, consumers should go in and create albums, to make them searchable. Even if Amazon doesn't become your go-to place, Prime members should check out the app, especially if you have Fire TV streaming in your home. With Amazon Photos, you can have a screensaver automatically generated from your most recent smartphone photos, which get uploaded automatically.

Apple's iCloud has a similar offering via its Apple TV streaming box, but again, you're looking at thousands of automatically uploaded [photos](#) from phones and tablets. Take the time to create albums and you'll have an easier time finding them.

I use SmugMug like a [hard drive](#), creating titled galleries after every shoot, and curating the "best of," first in Adobe Lightroom software, and then looking up the galleries when I need to find a specific photo, (from Manhattan Beach sunsets to Thanksgiving 2019) in the search bar. This works well for me, although there are limitations. I can't upload camera RAW files without paying extra, and videos can go up only if they're under 3 GB in size and 20 minutes in length.

(For those of you without access to pro software like Lightroom, which starts at \$9.99 monthly, use what you have to showcase your best work, whether that's creating albums in Apple's free Photos app or Microsoft's Photos app for Windows.)

But most importantly, beyond online backup is to have another copy of

each image somewhere else, says MacAskill—whether that be a hard drive, tons of flash drives or even memory cards. Remember that you can buy a hefty 8 TB spinning disk hard drive for around \$150, but those drives tend to fail as they get used more often. A solid state drive has no moving parts and is more reliable, but more costly. A 2 TB solid state drive sells for around \$200, which is two years worth of an iCloud or Dropbox subscription, so if plans change and rates go up, you have another backup option nearby.

"The main message," says MacAskill, "is to pay for safe storage somewhere and do not use anything free ever again, because the business model never works out."

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