

It's time for a social media spring cleaning

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There are plenty of other social media options out there—but remember Facebook owns some of them. Credit: Adem Ay/Unsplash, [CC BY](#)

In denying news content to its Australian users, Facebook is arguably overplaying its hand, behaving as a big company that thinks it can intimidate governments.

If it keeps doing this, it will ultimately lose customers, and that's the last thing Facebook wants.

Perhaps you're already considering breaking up with Facebook, whether in reaction to the news ban, or out of a broader unease about its business model, which profiles its users with the goal of earning revenue from targeted advertising.

If so, the good news is it's definitely possible to delete Facebook. Or, if you're not ready to go the whole hog, you can certainly minimize your footprint on the platform.

From Facebook's arrival page, there's a drop-down menu in the top right corner (marked with a downward arrow icon). Click on this icon, then hit Settings & Privacy > Settings > Your Facebook Information > Deactivation or Deletion.

If you deactivate your account it goes dormant but all the data are still there. This is a good option if you want to just take a break, or if you're the kind of person who fancies a "detox" from Facebook and is back on it two weeks later.

Selecting "delete" from the same menu is a stronger option. If you do this, Facebook says it will delete your account, but it's a little bit unclear about what happens to the data. This means we can't say definitively that all data gets deleted, never to be seen again.

In the European Union, the General Data Protection Regulation ([GDPR](#)) includes giving users the "right to be forgotten" from the internet, so no one can dig up awkward information about what you did 20 years ago. This extends to EU citizens living in Australia.

Australia's [Privacy Act](#) guarantees a person's right to request their

records and to request corrections to inaccurate records. It also guarantees protection against unwarranted invasion of their privacy resulting from the collection, maintenance, use and disclosure of their personal information.

What if you have a change of heart after deleting your Facebook? Data is always recoverable if you really want it, although it would be very difficult.

Good housekeeping

There is a third way: a "social media spring clean," which goes a step further than the standard "cull" of Facebook friends. It involves rebooting your entire Facebook presence by replacing your existing account with a new one that connects only with your most trusted friends.

First, decide which of your friends you want to stay in touch with, and then tell them you're replacing your old account and to expect a new friend request from you soon.

Then set up a new account, with the settings set to the privacy level you are comfortable with, and your connections limited to just a few trusted people.

The whole purpose of Facebook—in Facebook's view, at least—is to collect enough demographic data about users so they can use clever AI to target advertising. It's awesome how good they're getting at that, and the more data they get, the better they get.

Their whole modus operandi is to keep you on the platform for as long as possible so they have more chances to show you advertising. That's the whole reason they want you there.

By just hanging onto your closest friends, and starting with a clean slate, it's possible to slim this enterprise down.

Keeping prying eyes away

Via your settings, you can also ask Facebook to show you which third-party apps are currently using data from your Facebook account. Some people have dozens or more of these, and all of them are potentially accessing your data to profile you. I'm personally not comfortable with that, and I have very few third-party apps looking at my data.

If you see Facebook posts containing phrases such as "if you want to know who's been looking at your profile, click here," some of these are little more than Trojan horses for data harvesting.

It goes even further than that: your friends' settings can also allow third-party apps to gain access to your personal data. This kind of practice sits in a gray area in terms of ethical informed consent.

You might be very careful about what apps you use, but some of your friends might be more reckless. If you're doing a social media spring clean, it's probably wise not to re-[friend](#) that old work colleague who always posts personality quizzes with titles like "which household appliance are you?"

Life after Facebook?

There's no shortage of [other platforms](#) that people can use. Popular alternatives include LinkedIn, Twitter, Reddit, Parler and MeWe. Bear in mind that Facebook also owns WhatsApp and Instagram. There has been talk recently about data being shared across all Facebook-owned platforms.

Over time, Facebook accounts accumulate more and more dross, and it's all data for the platform's algorithms. Facebook wants you to build up hundreds and hundreds of friends, and it's all grist to their mill.

It's good to do a periodic spring clean of all your social media accounts—not just Facebook. Take out contacts who are no longer relevant, or who you can't remember how you ever came to be friends with them.

If you want to take it to the next level, deactivate your Facebook account and take a break. Or delete it and set up a new account with only the friends you really want.

The ultimate is to simply take the entire [account](#)—and the probably gigabytes of data Facebook has accumulated on you—and cast it into oblivion.

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