Big Tech Exit Guide

Big Tech Exit Guide: One Rebel's Journey of Digital Sovereignty as Non-Violent Direct Action

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Why Make The Switch?

Recently, I started a journey to improve my digital privacy. Along the way, I discovered something powerful: **moving away from Big Tech isn't just a personal choice - it's an act of Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA).**

Big Tech has us in its grip: fueling inequality, threatening democracy, and practicing surveillance capitalism. **We need to rise up collectively to defeat it.** But how? By **ditching Big Tech together, one swap at a time.**

Privacy and avoiding Big Tech are synonymous. Why? Because Big Tech's business model *relies* on capturing your data to sell ads and predict behavior. Decentralized tech, by contrast, is built on the principle that **you own your data**, not a corporation.

Privacy-focused tech is not only better for *me*, it's the **ethical, anti-capitalist choice**. It can be cheaper overall, performs more smoothly, and ensures our money goes to non-profits rather than billionaires. **I have personally saved a significant amount of money** by switching to these alternatives, avoiding subscription traps and hidden fees.

But more importantly, **every time we switch, we shrink Big Tech's power and grow our own.**

The Extra Benefits:

- **Support** independent, decentralized projects.
- **Block** ads and trackers.
- **Boost** device performance (longer battery, faster running, less data-hungry).
- **Save** money while funding ethical alternatives.

A Note on Payment & Privacy: while many decentralized tools are free or low-cost, some require payment. **It is valid to pay for decentralized tech**; your money supports a better future so you may want to pay/donate. However, for activists doing activist work, **digital payments can**

be a privacy loss unless you have secured your financial identity (e.g., using masked credit cards with false names or crypto). Standard digital payments link your identity to your activity. Until we solve this, **paying in cash** is the most secure option for high-risk individuals (which isn't possible for digital services).

A Note on Hardware: I use Mac hardware (MacBook and iPhone), so some tips are Mac-specific, but I've chosen apps and services compatible across all platforms.

How to Start: I recommend swapping **one thing at a time** and having a "crossover period" where you run both the old and new tools while you settle in. For example, I kept Google Chrome for a while when I switched to Brave Browser. This was lucky because the first time I tried to join a video call on Brave, I couldn't figure out how to enable my camera and had to go back to Chrome until I solved the issue.

Don't be deterred by glitches. When I switched to Chrome years ago, that process also included troubleshooting. Remember: a safer, smoother internet experience is yours if you persevere. And by doing so, you're **part of shaping a better world where Big Tech has less of a stranglehold.**

Some things have been a gain, and some a loss, but the "losses" often turned into unexpected gains. For example, I'm finding I get on better with a **paper to-do list** (something I didn't realize I needed), and paying in cash has led to **interesting conversations with people** and helped me get to know my town better.

Even if you only make a few swaps, you are **increasing your digital safety by a huge amount** and contributing to the collective movement to **pull the plug** on surveillance capitalism.

If you want to know more about digital privacy in general, here's a good overview video: □□ Privacy 101, Naomi Brockwell TV.

The Swaps - My Personal Recommendations

□□ Messages, Audio Calls & Video Calls

...which are more secure than carrier calls/SMS/WhatsApp/Zoom etc. **Signal** is a good choice.

Simply download here, register with your phone number, and invite contacts.

For more info: □□ The Most Priavte Messaging Apps, Naomi Brockwell TV. Telegram is an

alternative, but less secure than Signal.

□□ Private Browser (Primary) & Search (Secondary)

Brave (download here) and **DuckDuckGo** (Visit here). I've installed both and use DuckDuckGo when Brave is too aggressively secure and won't allow what I need through. Both have their own search engines and both browsers block YouTube ads for free. An alternative search engine is Ecosia, although arguably less private and lower functionality.

□□ Secure Email

Proton Mail (sign up). Simply import Gmail contacts/messages and set Proton as default. □□ The Most Private Email Service, Naomi Brockwell TV.

□□ File Storage & Office Suite

...as an alternative to Microsoft, Apple, or Google. Unfortunately, there is no perfect option for a Google Drive alternative, but I personally haven't minded compromising on functionality for the sake of privacy in this area.

Option 1: CryptPad Create account at cryptpad.fr, save password securely (as there is no recovery method), use online.

- **Limitations:**
  - 1GB Storage only on free tier.
  - No offline mode/sync.
  - Sharing disabled between Proton accounts for free tier (dealbreaker for collaboration).
  - Full office-suite functionality currently only available for larger devices (e.g., spreadsheet editing not available on phones, but doc editing is fine).
  - Compatibility issues are noticeable with importing `.xlsx` spreadsheets.

Option 2: Proton Drive Download the desktop client from proton.me/drive, log in, use Proton Drive folder.

- **Limitations:**
  - 5GB Storage limit only on free tier.
  - Sharing disabled between Proton accounts for free tier.

- Full office-suite functionality currently only available for larger devices.
- No built-in notes app/function.
- Compatibility issues with importing `.xlsx` spreadsheets.

□□ Encrypted Cloud Vault

If, like me, you're locked into an unsecured cloud for now (e.g., Dropbox), you can work around the problem by creating an encrypted space inside that cloud called a **Vault**, using **Cryptomator**.

Download from cryptomator.org. Whilst it's free at a basic level, a £10 lifetime licence is needed for additional mobile functionality. The vault encrypts everything locally, so the outer cloud only sees random ciphertext. You can access the contents of the vault from any device that has the free Cryptomator app installed.

- **Limitations:**
  - You can't access your files from any device instantly, you'd have to download Cryptomator to that device and set up the vault. This is less convenient, but locking the data to the app is the whole point.
  - Travel Tip: setting up a ProtonDrive or Cryptpad "Passport" Folder with your ID and details inside for emergency use could be a lifesaver if you get stuck away from home and lose your phone/laptop. Memorise the password and make sure you can recall it.
  - Sometimes Cryptomator loses access to the vault- that's scary but it's ok, you just have to reset it. Search online to find out how if this happens to you.

□□ Notes

Notesnook (about £20 per year). Install app, migrate any notes you need from your existing platform, then use Notesnook for all new notes. Notesnook is encrypted and cheaper than most paid suites - it's not possible to find a free truly encrypted notes system.

- Tip: If you're using the Notesnook browser interface on Brave, you need to manually allow cookies for `notesnook.com`.
- Alternatives: Standard Notes (more expensive), Obsidian (less secure, more expensive, or a free version for 1 device only).

  □□ Why I Ditched Other Note Apps for Notesnook, DASgeek.

□□ VPN

To conceal your device's location which is otherwise broadcast when you connect to the internet. **Proton VPN** – install the app, sign up, sign in, toggle the connection on, and pick any server location you prefer. Sometimes VPNs can be too aggressive, so you can

either turn them off part of the time or learn to adjust them.

- Tip: Proton's free VPN service only runs on one device at a time. If you want their VPN on e.g., a phone and laptop simultaneously, you can always set up 2 free accounts and log in to one on each device.
- Limitations: can choke bandwidth a bit, so may need disabling for quick uploads/downloads.

□□ AI Assistant

To use **Proton's AI Assistant Lumo**, either open the Lumo app or sign in on a browser at lumo.proton.me and start asking privacy-focused questions straightaway. There is a conversation limit per week, however.

Alternative: Brave Browser's "Ask" function is also a strong alternative with less personalisation but no conversation limit.

□□ Password Manager

...which is more secure than a browser-based one. **Bitwarden** – Install from bitwarden.com, create a master password, import browser-saved passwords, then disable the browser's own password manager.

- Alternative: Proton Pass is a competitor and may well be just as good, but I didn't find out about it until I already had Bitwarden set up.
- More info □□ Most Private Password Manager, Naomi Brockwell TV.

□□ Online Calendar

Proton Calendar – sign up at proton.me/calendar, create events, and share calendars (shared calendars require a paid Proton plan; offline editing isn't currently available, but the privacy gain outweighs the inconvenience).

- Tip: Get a shared calendar from Proton on the free tier using this hack (up to 3 users). Since the Proton free tier doesn't allow Calendar sharing with other users but does allow up to 3 calendars within 1 account, simply set up a Proton account specifically for your family/household/couple shared calendar (e.g., `JackAndJillCalendar@proton.me`). You can import multiple Google (or other) Calendar histories to that account and use it as a shared account moving forward. If you're only two people sharing, you could use the 3rd calendar option for "joint events/appointments". Because Proton allows users to log in with one account to the ProtonCalendar app whilst simultaneously being logged into other Proton apps (e.g.,

ProtonMail) with another account, there's no compromise to overall Proton use.

□□ YouTube

Avoid logging into Google accounts like YouTube. Even if you're just watching, being signed in feeds data back to Google's ad ecosystem. Here are some YouTube alternative platforms:

□□ **Odysee (formerly LBRY)** Odysee runs on a decentralized network where creators host their own files, so the platform can't delete any videos, making it censorship-free.

Visit odysee.com.

- **Censorship-resistant:** Content isn't taken down by a central authority unless the uploader removes it.
- **No app needed:** You can watch everything right in the browser, no extra downloads. □□ Intro to LBRY.
- **PeerTube:** visit joinpeertube to find instances.
- **Privacy-first:** no tracking cookies or ad-tech collecting your data. □□ Example video: Mothing to Hide documentary.

□□ **Warning: Stay Private While Watching**

- Use a privacy-focused browser – DuckDuckGo or Brave are great choices because they block trackers by default. You may need to "disable shields" on Brave to play Odysee videos, but even with shields disabled, privacy is still high.
- Turn on a VPN. Yes, you may notice a slight speed dip as a result, but streaming is still smooth for most videos.

□□ Device Hardening

This means setting your laptop/tablet/phone to its maximum privacy settings. Search "device hardening tutorial" on Brave or DuckDuckGo (or ask Lumo AI e.g., "how do I harden my MacBook/iPhone?") and follow the guide. □□ How To Make Your Mac Private.

□□ Package Management (Software Install)

...to bypass the App Store and keep your activity private. **Homebrew** – Run the installer script in Terminal. Instructions at brew.sh.

□□ Why I Don't Use the Mac App Store (and What I Use Instead).

Clean-up

Uninstall unnecessary Google, Microsoft, and Apple apps (Chrome, Office, iWork, iCloud Drive, etc.) since you now have alternatives. Apps often cause privacy issues even when not open, so best to get rid of them.

Unresolved / Ongoing Areas (And How I Solved Them)

Maps

Google Maps is not very private but unfortunately offers the freshest traffic & transit data. Apple Maps is a slightly safer alternative but lacks real-time alerts. **Organic Maps** is privacy-focused and works offline (great for rural areas where signal can be spotty) but needs very precise address info and often suggests weird routes. Download from organicmaps.app.

My current practice is to use Organic Maps first, switching to Apple Maps if I get stuck. However, neither app would be able to tell me if there was a serious delay up ahead that I could detour or reschedule to avoid. After 2 months of going without Google Maps, I am pleased to report that I haven't had any journey delayed by not having up-to-date traffic news.

The Unexpected Gain: since I didn't want to download Citymapper for when I was in London or other big cities, I actually took to **asking people about routes more**. This led to **smoother journeys** as people still know the best routes better than mapping apps in cities. It also forced me to interact with my environment in a way I hadn't before.

Reminders

No privacy-first replacement for Apple Reminders that fits my workflow has been found yet. Super Productivity is recommended, but the known issue of reminders not always going off is a dealbreaker. **The Unexpected Gain:** In the end, I found I **preferred switching to pen and paper** from Apple Reminders. It's simpler, more reliable for me,

and I get on better with a physical to-do list, something I didn't realise I needed.

□□ Social Media

Bluesky looks promising because it's decentralized and privacy-focused. Visit bsky.app.

Mastodon is another strong option. Visit joinmastodon.org. I've made accounts for both but haven't made much progress yet.

□□ Finances / Online Payments & Identity

This was the hardest area to crack, but I've made significant progress:
Email Masking (Solved!): I have now successfully set up **DuckDuckGo Email Protection**. Use these anonymous "duck addresses" whenever I have to make an online purchase, sign up for a mailing list, or give a functioning email address to use for cafe Wi-Fi. This keeps my real inbox clean and my identity hidden from data brokers.
Anonymous Apple ID (Solved!): when I (eventually) upgraded to a new (second-hand) MacBook, I needed an Apple ID but didn't want to link my real identity. I bought a SIM card in cash from Tesco for £10, used that phone number to create an Apple ID, and filled in all other details (name, address) with fictional information. **This is as anonymous as it gets with Apple.** As long as you don't link a real bank card or phone number to the account, you can use the services without exposing your identity.
Cash Payments (The Gold Standard): since I haven't been able to solve *all* privacy issues on paying (especially for things that require a digital bank transfer), I decided to **start paying in cash wherever possible**. Three months in, this has had all sorts of secondary benefits:

- **Conversations:** having to have conversations with train staff on how I can pay in cash led to learning all sorts of other fare information from them, which will **save me a couple of hundred pounds per year**.
- **Community:** developing a better relationship with local independent shops when I ask them if it would be better for them if I pay in cash. They sometimes **throw in free produce** because I pay in cash.
- **Connection:** paying in cash means I have lots of interesting conversations with people and get to know my town better.

⚡ Device Performance Benefits

When I made the decision to become more privacy-focused and move away from Big Tech, I expected to have to make compromises; I thought I would be switching to clunky independent tech that didn't perform so well. It was a huge surprise to me to discover that actually I now experience **better performance on all my devices**, battery life improved, the internet seemed faster, and my laptop fan stopped whirring.
So what's going on? Well, it turns out that Big Tech apps work our devices unnecessarily hard, partly because of the extra energy it takes to collect our data constantly and send us ads, leaving us feeling that our devices are slow and that we need new ones! Privacy-focused tech runs better for these reasons:

- **No data collection and no ad rendering** → less GPU work, longer battery life, cooler device.
- **Fewer background processes** → lower CPU & RAM usage.
- **Reduced network chatter** → better performance on slower or metered connections.
- **Smoother overall experience** → lighter browsers and sync clients mean quicker app launches and fewer glitches.
- **Less pressure to upgrade hardware** or buy ultra-fast internet – you get more mileage out of existing devices.

□□ The Financial Dividend: How Much I Saved

Summary of Annual Savings:

Category	Estimated Annual Saving
Streaming & Subs	£431.64
Connectivity & Hardware	£379.00
Travel (Cash & Hacks)	£230.50
Community & Making	£360.00

Category	Estimated Annual Saving
TOTAL ANNUAL SAVINGS	**£1,401.14**

□□ Conservative "Digital-Only" Version

For those who can't switch to cash travel or maker habits yet, just the digital swaps alone yield massive results: **Subs + Phone + Deferred Laptop + iCloud = £810.64 per year.**

When I started this journey, I thought privacy would cost more. Instead, I discovered that **Big Tech charges a "privacy tax"** through subscriptions, data harvesting, and planned obsolescence. By opting out, I've reclaimed hundreds of pounds annually.

I had no idea how much money I was haemorrhaging to Big Tech, essentially funding the very system I oppose. Every subscription I cancelled and every service I swapped meant that money was no longer flowing into the coffers of surveillance capitalists. Instead, that capital could be redirected toward **funding activist movements to build a better world**.

A Note on Costs: This isn't a story of zero spending. I now pay for **Notesnook** (approx. £20/year) and buy items locally (like guitar strings) that cost slightly more than on Amazon. **But that's okay.** Because of my massive savings elsewhere, I can afford these ethical premiums without breaking the bank. In fact, the money I save on Big Tech subscriptions easily covers these new costs with plenty left over for donations or mutual aid.

Everyone's situation is different. I didn't have many subscriptions to begin with. If you have **Spotify, Netflix, or multiple cloud services**, your savings will be even higher. Similarly, if you tend to buy **new phones and laptops every year**, switching to second-hand and extending device life could save you **hundreds more** than my figures show.

The Potential for Collective Power: Imagine if thousands of us redirected our "Big Tech tax" into mutual aid, climate justice campaigns, or the movements we need to win. That is the power of collective refusal.

Here is the breakdown of my annual savings:

1. Streaming & Subscriptions

- **YouTube Premium:** Cancelled (£16.99/mo). Used Brave/Duck ad-blockers instead.
  - **Annual Saving: £203.88**
- **Amazon Prime:** Cancelled (£8.99/mo). Found local and online independent suppliers. Tough at times, but totally worth it!
  - **Annual Saving: £107.88**
- **Audible:** Cancelled (£8.99/mo). Discovered my local library offers a free audiobook app (Libby/Overdrive).
  - **Annual Saving: £107.88**

- **iCloud Storage:** Cancelled the paid plan (£1/mo). Switched to local storage and Proton Drive.
  - **Annual Saving: £12.00**

2. Connectivity & Hardware

- **Mobile Phone Plan:** I wanted to switch to **EcoTalk** (a true independent/anti-capitalist supplier), but I work digitally and needed guaranteed coverage/speed that they couldn't guarantee in my area. I ended up with the **EE Green Plan** instead. However, I haggled and they **price-matched EcoTalk**, saving me £22/month.
  - Note: If you don't work digitally, you might be fine with EcoTalk or other independents!
  - **Annual Saving: £264.00** (£22/mo)
- **Device Longevity:** My laptop ran significantly faster on independent tech. I realized I didn't need to upgrade until later than I expected.
  - **Annual Saving: £115.00** (deferred purchase cost)
  - Note: If you usually upgrade devices frequently, switching to second-hand and extending your device life could save you **£500+ per year**.

3. Travel & Transport (The "Cash" Advantage)

- **Train Booking Fees:** Stopped using Trainline (£1 booked fee/fare). Based on **3-4 local trips per month** and **4 London trips per year** (approx. 46 fares total).
  - **Annual Saving: £46.00**
- **Local Railcard:** Discovered a local railcard I didn't know existed (£3.25/trip saving).
  - **Calculation:** 42 local trips × £3.25 = **£136.50**
- **London Split Tickets:** Bought tickets in person from savvy staff who knew split-ticketing hacks apps miss (£12/trip saving).
  - **Calculation:** 4 London trips × £12 = **£48.00**
  - **Total Travel Saving: ~£230.50**

4. Community & Maker Savings

- **Local Shop Gifts:** cash payments led to free produce, tips, and advice from independent shop staff.
  - **Calculation:** £5/week × 52 weeks = **£260.00**
- **Making & Fixing:** refusal to buy from **Amazon** led me to repair or find alternatives for things myself (bicycle inner tube to fix an old tripod, drum stand used as a laptop stand, cloth bags instead of special tech pouches) rather than buying new products.
  - **Annual Saving: £100.00+**

The Bottom Line: By simply refusing to fund Big Tech, I've freed up nearly **£1,400 a year**. That is money that can now go to **donations, mutual aid, or funding the very movements we need to win**. The "cost" of privacy is a myth; the cost of Big Tech is your wallet, your data, and your freedom.

Good luck with making the swaps!