

# Data Portability: It's The New Walled Garden

 [techcrunch.com/2008/05/16/data-portability-its-the-new-walled-garden/](http://techcrunch.com/2008/05/16/data-portability-its-the-new-walled-garden/)

By Michael Arrington

The [scuffle today](#) between Facebook and Google has very little to do with user privacy and everything to do with user control. A huge battle is underway between Google, MySpace and Facebook around control of user profiles and, therefore, users themselves. And their three new products, [Data Availability](#), [Facebook Connect](#), and [Friend Connect](#), are all designed to further that goal.

Internet giants know that the days of getting you to spend all of your time inside their walled gardens are over. So the next best thing is to at least maintain as much data about the user as possible, and make sure they identify with your brand while they are out there not being on your site. The most valuable information a user has is his or her identity (that's why the big guys are so [eagerly adopting](#) the issuing side of OpenID so you log in with, say, your Yahoo account on other sites), as well as their friend list (valuable, plus users hate to keep redoing it all over the Internet) and other information.

The companies with the profiles (mostly MySpace and Facebook) know this. And they know that to keep users happy, and to stop them from entering in all that friend data into other sites, they need to make their data at least somewhat portable. Not too portable, mind you. That means they'd lose control. But just portable enough. That's why they are launching their products, and that's why they are being justifiably criticized by people like David Recordon, who says [this is not real data portability](#).

Google is a little different. They don't have a social networking presence in the U.S., so they are trying to get in the middle between the guys with the profiles (like Facebook) and the sites that want the data. Their Friend Connect product does just that, and makes them an important data middle man. That position can later be leveraged intensely. In fact, in many ways Google can become the most important social network without actually having a social network. Facebook, of course, doesn't want this. And that's the real reason why they blocked them today (although the rumor is that they two companies are talking tomorrow about some sort of compromise).

So when [Robert Scoble](#) wrote this evening that Google is in the wrong, I disagree. I think Facebook's intentions aren't to let users get data out of the network until Facebook is absolutely forced to do so, and then only on Facebook's terms (see Facebook Connect). The fact is, this isn't Facebook's data. It's my data. And if I give Google permission to do stuff with it, I'm damned well within my rights to do so. By blocking Google, Facebook has blocked ME. And that, frankly, kind of frustrates me.

Let me put this another way. **How dare Facebook tell ME that I cannot give Google access to this data!**

Scoble has been on the [wrong side of this issue](#) before, when he tried to scrape his friend's contact information out of Facebook and export it to Plaxo. In that case, it wasn't his data and he didn't have the right to make it portable. It's MY data, once again, and only I should be allowed to make that decision. He thinks his new position shows that he gets the importance of privacy, but once again he isn't thinking in terms of who really owns the data and should be allowed to make decisions around it.

Ultimately I hope that I can keep my identity, friend list, photographs, videos and everything else that constitutes the [\(de\)Centralized Me](#) at any service provider that I trust (meaning I trust them to protect that data, but never go against my wishes and try to keep it to themselves if that isn't what I want), and just tell sites like Facebook and everyone else where to grab it.

So far, none of the services do that or have announced plans to do that. But someone will, eventually, and in the process of freeing my data they will likely make a big boatload of money, too.