

Alternative for Google Apps on Android - living without Google on Android

Android without any Google App? What to use instead of Hangouts, Map, Gmail? Is that even possible? And why would anyone want to live without Google?

I've been using a lot of different custom ROMs on my devices, so far the two best: plain Cyanogenmod 11 snapshot on the Nexus 4^[^1], and MIUI 2.3.2 on the HTC Desire G7^[^2]. All the others (MUIU 5, MIUI 6 unofficial, AOKP, Kaos, Slim, etc) were either ugly, unusable, too strange or exceptionally problematic on battery life.

For a long time, the first step for me was to install the Google Apps, gapps packages for Plays Store, Maps, and so on, but lately they require so much rights on the phone that I started to have a bad taste about them. Then I started to look for alternatives.

So, what to replace with what?

Play Store

I've been using F-Droid^[^3] as my primary app store for a while now, but since it's strictly Free Software^[^4] store only, sometimes there's just no app present for your needs; aptoide^[^5] comes very handy in that cases.

Hangouts

I never liked Hangouts since the move from Gtalk although for a little while it was exceptional for video - I guess it ended when the mass started to use it in replacement of Skype and its recent suckyness. For chat only, check out: ChatSecure^[^6], Conversations^[^7] or Xabber^[^8]. All of them is good for Gtalk-like, oldschool client and though Facebook can be configured as XMPP as well, I'd recommend Xabber for that, the other two is a bit flaky with Facebook. And you can also use VoIP on any Android^[^9] - there is a built-in option for that, you don't even need any additional apps.

Map

This is the most problematic replacement: Maps is exceptional, an incredible tool, fast, accurate - but it still collects a crazy amount of data about you. Osmand^[^10] is a good map, but it's a bit geeky and slow; RMaps^[^11] on the other hand seem to be doing a very good job.

Gmail

First of all: don't use Gmail. They read your mails.^[^12] And for mail on Android, use K9^[^13], because it's a really, really good mail client. I'd like to have it on my desktop as well.

Chrome

There are tons of browsers out there, I'd recommend 3: Firefox^[^14], because it's full-fledged, Open Source and under active development; Lightning^[^15], because it's a Free Software and very small; Tint Browser^[^16], because it's Open Source and has the fastest rendering speed I've seen so far (and has adblock addon^[^17]).

Google+

I have no idea why would you want Google+ as an app. Use the browser to access it.

Google Keyboard

I was not aware of this until I checked the gapps packages; just use Hacker's Keyboard^[18].

Google Play Books, Google Play Games, Google Play Newsstand, Google Play Music, Google Play Movies

Books, music, movies: my recommendations on this is the oldschool way: by the CDs, the ebooks, the movies, rip them to your computer and copy the files. Use VLC^[19] for media, Cool Reader^[20] or FBReader^[21] for ebooks, MuPDF^[22] for magazines, VuDroid^[23] for djvu. For plain old music playing, also see Just Player^[24] This way, no one can remotely delete your books, music, or video^[25].

YouTube

If you're using Youtube to listen to music, check out NetMBuddy^[26]. For videos, see PTVStar^[27]/jp.co.asbit.pvstar).

Google Drive

For plain file synchronisation check out Syncthing^[28]; ironically there's not alternative way to download it officially, so I've uploaded it to dropbox^[29]. MD5 sum the two if you feel unsafe. For web as well, try Owncloud^[30]. Yes, it needs a server and setup and all the fuss, but you will not be judged by your data.^[31]

Wallet

There's no alternative for this yet, but I guess if you're willing to pay by your phone as credit card, you're not concerned about privacy or security.

Sync services

Use Baikal^[32] with DAVDroid^[33] or Owncloud^[34] with Owncloud Client^[35] for contact & calendar sync, Syncthing^[36] or Owncloud for data & files sync.

Will it worth it?

From the privacy point of view, it will. From the user experience point: no, it will probably not. Some apps are just as good as the corporate surveillance^[137] ones, like K9, Tint Browser, but some will give you an edgy feeling, like Xabber: even though it's fast, works really stable, it does not look good and the whole UI is pretty rough.

Unfortunately, at this point in time, you need to choose: "free" services, in exchange for knowledge on everything you do (yes, including that copied ebook, because your friend would have lent it to you, but with ebooks, there's no such thing as lending anymore, hell, I think publishers would try to stop lending real books if the could), or slightly unpolished, Free and Open alternatives.

Choose your future, like you did with web 2.0^[38].

Links

1. <http://download.cyanogenmod.org/?device=mako>
2. <http://pzoley.matraszele.hu/desire.php?p=176>
3. <https://f-droid.org/>
4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_software
5. <http://m.aptoide.com/>
6. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=xmpp&fdid=info.guardianproject.otr.app.im>
7. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=xmpp&fdid=eu.siacs.conversations>
8. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=xmpp&fdid=com.xabber.androiddev>
9. <https://petermolnar.net/linux-tech-coding/howto-android-free-internet-call/>
10. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=osmand&fdid=net.osmand.plus>
11. <http://eroe.store.aptoide.com/app/market/com.robert.maps/8140/3414820/RMaps:%20Offline%20maps>
12. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/15/gmail-ads_n_5149032.html
13. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=k9&fdid=com.fsck.k9>
14. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=firefox&fdid=org.mozilla.firefox>
15. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=lightning&fdid=acr.browser.lightning>
16. <http://m.collusion.store.aptoide.com/app/market/org.tint/10/4696767/Tint%20Browser>

17. <http://m.arcanatoria.store.aptoide.com/app/market/org.tint.adblock/3/1112870/Tint%20Browser%20Adblock%20addon>
18. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=hacker&fdid=org.pocketworkstation.pckeyboard>
19. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=vlc&fdid=org.videolan.vlc>
20. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=reader&fdid=org.coolreader>
21. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=reader&fdid=org.geometerplus.zlibrary.ui.android>
22. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=mupdf&fdid=com.artifex.mupdfdemo>
23. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=reader&fdid=org.vudroid>
24. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=just%20player&fdid=jp.co.kayo.android.localplayer>
25. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/18/technology/companies/18amazon.html?_r=0
26. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdcategory=Multimedia&fdid=free.yhc.netmbuddy&fdpage=3>
27. <http://www.appbrain.com/app/pvstar-youtube-music-player>
28. <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nutomic.syncthingandroid>
29. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdid=com.nutomic.syncthingandroid>
30. <https://owncloud.com/>
31. <http://www.extremetech.com/computing/179495-how-dropbox-knows-youre-a-dirty-pirate-and-why-you-shouldnt-use-cloud-storage-to-share-copyrighted-files>
32. <http://baikal-server.com/>
33. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=davdroid&fdid=at.bitfire.davdroid>
34. <https://owncloud.org/>
35. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=owncloud&fdid=com.owncloud.android>
36. <https://f-droid.org/repository/browse/?fdfilter=syncthing&fdid=com.nutomic.syncthingandroid>
37. <https://ind.ie/manifesto/>
38. <https://web.archive.org/web/20111109014223/http://interface-7.net/20060919/>

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