Apple joins Google, Facebook, and Microsoft in data-sharing project

Just over a year after its official launch, the Data Transfer Project is announcing a new set of partners and features. Today, Apple announced that it will be joining the project, developing interoperable systems to bring data in and out of iCloud. A number of alternative social networks have also joined the project, with Tim Berners-Lee's Solid project enabling the import and export of contacts, and Mastodon allowing for the import and export of posts.

An open-source project aimed at making it easier to transfer data from one service to another, the Data Transfer Project has mostly consisted of back-end coding to make data export tools like Google Takeout and Facebook's Access Your Information tool compatible with each other. Right now, those tools let you download data directly to your hard drive, but the hope is that the project's code could allow the data to be ported directly to another service. That would allow you to send all of your Facebook photos to a Google Photos account, for instance, with no intermediate step and a lesser possibility of leaked data.

Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Twitter all signed on last summer, and the project's GitHub page shows regular updates since then, but it is still very much a work in progress. As the official site puts it, "We are continually making improvements that might cause things to break occasionally. So as you are trying things please use it with caution and expect some hiccups."

So far, most of that work has been on the back end, but there may be more consumer-facing products arriving soon. In a statement, Google teased new user-facing projects arriving in a matter of months. “We’re really encouraged by the progress the Data Transfer Project has made since we announced it last year, and look forward to rolling out our first user-facing features in the coming months,” said Jessie Chavez, Google’s lead for the Data Transfer Project.

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