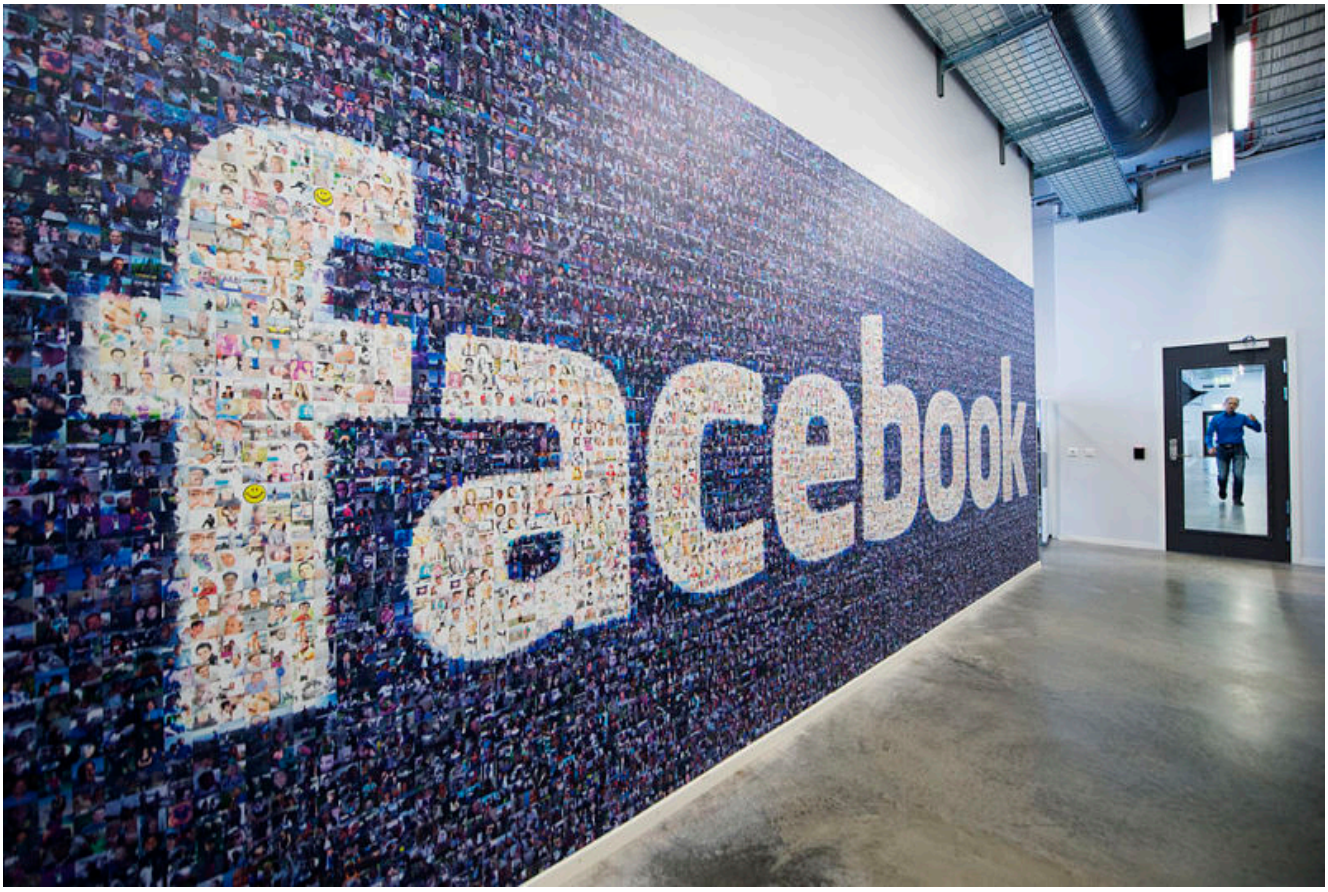
You can migrate your photos from Facebook to Google next year



Enlarge / A wall of user photos form a Facebook logo at the company’s data center in Lulea, Sweden.
JONATHAN NACKSTRAND | AFP | Getty Images

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If you feel like you don’t want to spend much time on Facebook anymore but don’t want to lose up to 15 years’ worth of shared photos, good news: the company is rolling out a tool that will let you export your image library directly to Google Photos.

Facebook announced the new tool in a corporate blog post today. The initiative springs from the Data Transfer Project, a collaboration among Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter to make some data transferable among those platforms.

The pilot begins this week in Ireland (where Facebook has been under investigation for alleged violations of EU data privacy law). The tool is then expected to roll out to users in the rest of the world sometime in the first half of 2020. Users who have the option available to them will see the tool in Facebook's settings under Your Facebook Information.

If you're not keen on putting your images into Google Photos either, there will in theory be other platforms made available in the future. For now, Facebook did not specify what the platforms are, nor did the company provide a timetable.

Ahead of the law

Facebook's gesture is not borne of pure magnanimity. A bevy of probes and investigations, together with enforcement of new laws, are likely forcing the company's hand.

You can make the argument that a company hoarding consumers' data for itself, and refusing to release it to a competitor if the consumer asks, is in violation of antitrust law. Facebook currently is under antitrust investigation by basically every US regulator that has antitrust authority, both state and federal, and may well prefer to avoid antagonizing those regulators at this time.

Lawmakers worldwide are also forcing the issue. Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which went into effect in 2018, includes a "right to data portability" for consumers. Here in the States, the California Consumer Privacy Act also provides for a right to data portability. That law goes into effect next month.

Federal legislators are also trying to address the issue. A bipartisan group of senators, including Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), Josh Hawley (R-Mo.), and Mark Warner (D-Va.), in October proposed a bill that would require US firms to make user data portable. Additionally, two other proposed sweeping privacy and data reform bills—one in the House and one in the Senate—both include explicit rights to data portability.

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