



# Leave Instagram for Pixelfed or Mastodon

**Difficulty:** Technical ★☆☆ Social ★★★ **Time:** 30 mins

## Enough already!

Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Threads, Messenger, and Oculus are Meta products. Assume that any data you put on any of these systems, whether talking to your friends or liking a photo, is money in Meta's coffers. You are paying for Mark Zuckerberg's 390-foot superyacht and his private Hawaiian island (replete with a herd of special cows, so his family will survive the presumed coming apocalypse in luxury) every time you scroll. This should make you angrier than Meta's algorithms—which, optimized for “engagement” increase our enagement as a poor proxy.

These products and systems are not benign. Their algorithmic sorting feeds into a world of political polarization and extremist rabbit holes. They have built systems that hack our perception and behavior, leaving us scrolling away. They are using our interactions to build and improve their AI systems. It is possible to interact with humans online without a toxic middleman.

## Beating Social Media #1

Any privacy guide worth its salt will tell you how to delete your account, as if it's just a question of clicking buttons. It's not. Meta grew by capturing our *relationships*, our *identity performances*, and our *attention*. We must reclaim them if we are going to get off for good. That means:

1. **REPLACE.** Make a list of the things you use social media for. Seeing family photos? Following celebs? Posting or learning about latest papers? Finding out about concerts? Relaxing? Getting news? Now make a list of the things you could do instead to replace those activities. Get creative. Consider:
  - Phoning friends and family for updates instead of “liking” their stuff
  - Subscribing to a magazine for celebrity gossip or a newspaper for news
  - Going outside. Disconnecting for a bit.
  - Picking up an old hobby
  - Doing a healthy activity like going to the gym or cooking
  - Subscribing to an academic alert system for paper notifications
2. Make a list of the people or companies you follow on Facebook or Insta that you want to continue to follow or be in touch with. Visit their profiles before you leave and save that information somewhere safe.
3. Earmark one social platform for one activity, and a different one for another part of your life. (When I got off Facebook in 2015, I kept my NASA ties on Twitter only). Make a plan for jettisoning “friends” or starting a fresh account.
4. Don't wait for everyone to start moving before you do. Live your values. Your community will follow. And you will find new friends.

## Beating Social Media #2

Meta doesn't want you to leave, so they "design to effectively frustrate" the user. The steps below are buried beneath many menus. You must wait a month before they delete your profile. Until then, a single log-in or click on an email notification will reactivate! Expect enticing emails but don't click on them. Be patient, look at your list (item 2 above) and choose another activity to occupy your time and refocus your relationships, identity, and attention.

1. In Insta's navigation menu, click **MORE > Settings > See more in Accounts Center**
2. Click **Your Information and permissions > Export your information > Create report**
3. Choose which profile to export and save to device, taking your data with you.
4. Go to **Accounts Center > Account Settings > Personal Details**
5. Click on **Account ownership and control** then **Deactivation or deletion > Delete account**
6. Just keep going through the next screens until you get to delete. Don't get distracted.

## Federated Social Media: Choosing a Server

The best alternatives to Meta owned social media are the federated social media systems. Systems like Mastodon (like Facebook or Twitter), Pixelfed (like Instagram), Peertube (like YouTube) or Loops (like TikTok) are considered part of "**The Fediverse.**"

These are not platforms: they are software applications that run on distinct servers, connected by **protocols**. Anyone on a Mastodon or Pixelfed server can send messages to or see other people on other Mastodon or Pixelfed servers. It's like email — or like email used to be, before it mostly got consolidated by Google and Microsoft. Anyone can set up a server, which using the federated protocol can talk to any other server — except those which an administrator places on a blacklist.

There is no company in charge providing a white glove experience. These are community maintained and owned social servers. There are no account real names or policing, although certain communities take moderation, governance, and inclusion much more seriously than others. You are not outsourcing moderation to Meta (who, in turn, outsource it to people they underpay). No algorithms determine what you do or do not see. That means **your experience depends on the moderation and community on the server you choose.**

You can easily migrate to another server (much more easily than leaving Meta) if your needs are not being met. You can also **Balkanize** and **Earmark** all you want on the Fediverse. When choosing a server, look for a Code of Conduct or a group with aligned interests to your own.

For **Pixelfed**, go to <https://pixelfed.org/servers>. Search by area of interest and look at "details" to see if the server has moderation policies, codes of conduct, or if they review applications (i.e. they care).