Using a Chromebook without Google

Chromebooks, running ChromeOS, are designed by default to use the wide range of quality software available from Google. The operating system assumes you will read your e-mail from gmail, write your documents in Google Docs, store your contact list and calendar in your Google account. It will also record what apps you have installed and, where appropriate, your licenses for them.

Some situations require that sensitive information not be automatically stored on Google's servers, and this article is for those. We will set up a Chromebook to use NextCloud (https://nextcloud.com/) for:

- Online document storage and editing
- Contact storage and synchronization
- Calendar storage and synchronization
- Other functions such as secure password storage, notes and chat

We will also disable the Google App Store and set up F-Droid (https://f-droid.org/) as an alternative. **Note** this separate step requires decreasing the security of ChromeOS and should not be done in cases where this is a concern.

Initial Setup

Two ways of installing your apps

There are two basic ways of installing your apps, each with their own problems and advantages. Unlike Android on your phone/tablet, ChromeOS does not allow Play Store and another repository to be active (when this article was written, 2022/01/01). You must either have Play Store or another repository, but not both. To install apps from another repository, you must manually download and install the apps, and you are not reminded when an update is available.

Side Along

Side Along uses Google Play Store as the main repository for apps. Since Play Store restricts installing apps from any other source, we must use a work around to be able to install apps from other repositories.

If you want to use the Google Play Store but still use apps that are not available there, the simplest solution is Side Along. For some, this is a better solution as all of your apps installed through Google Play Store can be automatically updated. Additionally, Google Play Store tracks which apps can be used on your current operating system, so it is relatively simple to choose them from your “library” if a re-installation is needed.

Developer Mode

Developer Mode sets ChromeOS so you can replace the Google Play Store and use F-Droid as a replacement. Unfortunately, this removes several layers of protection from your Chromebook, requiring more care in choosing apps, and even your day to day usage. See Using ChromeOS for work for information on how we do this at Daily Data.

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