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Welcome To The Google Desktop?

By [Danny Sullivan](#), Editor

Here's a thought that I hope to expand upon more in the near future. Will Google's new [Gmail free email system](#) be just the first of many things we begin moving to a new Google Desktop? If so, Microsoft might have a lot more to worry about than web search.

Today, plenty of people download mail to desktop-based email programs. But Google might convince some of them to take up its email storage offer.

After all, even if you do have a great way to search through your desktop-based email, you might like the idea that all your mail is backed up, stored offsite and easily searchable from anywhere, to boot.

Now take things a step further. Imagine next year that Google provides anyone with 5 gigabytes, 10 gigabytes or more of storage space for personal files.

Got a ton of Word documents, spreadsheets and other material? Push it across to us, Google would say. We'll store it, index it and make it easy to retrieve what you want. This type of material Google already indexes from across the web and has done for ages.

As broadband expands, such an idea becomes more and more feasible. And with it, the idea that Microsoft might trump Google with "desktop" lock-in becomes perhaps less an issue.

This recent [AP article](#) takes a fresh look at the search wars from the perspective of Microsoft being on the defensive, because of how prominent Google and Yahoo have become as almost parts of the operating system, a "layer" as John Battelle puts it, above Windows, Mac OS or Linux.

Go even beyond this. Google's move might be a harbinger of redefining where our desktop lives, not just in terms of software-like applications that we interact with, but in terms of where we store that data.

All this assumes that people will trust Google with their data, of course. That's yet to be proven. [Wired News](#) and the [San Jose Mercury News](#) are just two publications out today with stories outlining privacy concerns some people have raised, now that they're digesting the program.

Google cofounder Larry Page is quoted in the Mercury News story as being baffled by concerns. But while Google might have the best intentions, that's not true of many companies consumers deal with -- and its that worst case scenario that can produce unease.

At breakfast this morning, I asked my wife what she thought of the service. Her feelings were mixed. She didn't like that targeted ads would be shown, because she understood immediately that Google would need to read her email. Even if this was done in an automated fashion, it left her feeling uneasy. Ultimately, she decided she'd use it only for email she didn't consider sensitive.

Convincing people like my wife to trust Google will be a challenge. But if Google can build that trust, then people might have faith to move their data to a Google Desktop -- and that might make Microsoft's presumed desktop power much weaker.

By the way, for more about privacy issues specific to search, see my article from last year: [Search Privacy At Google & Other Search Engines](#).

April 2, 2004

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