

Part I

CUSTOMIZING YOUR GOOGLE EXPERIENCE

- CHAPTER 1 Starting Strong: Google Account and Profile Secrets
- CHAPTER 2 Customizing Your Google Experience with iGoogle
- CHAPTER 3 Increasing your Knowledge with Google Reader

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CHAPTER 1

Starting Strong: Google Account and Profile Secrets

IN THIS CHAPTER

- ▶ **Administrating multiple Google accounts simultaneously**
- ▶ **Managing your Google dashboard effectively**
- ▶ **Reviewing Google Voice call log and Google search histories**
- ▶ **Utilizing your Google profile in an effective, beneficial manner**

Quite a few Google Apps are available, the most common of which is Gmail. Google Apps are a versatile collection of applications that give you the flexibility you need to be your most productive at home and in the office. To get the most out of your Google Apps, though, you first must know where to manage your settings, how to use the Dashboard, and how to set up your public profile, if you decide to use one.

CONNECTING GOOGLE ACCOUNTS

One great thing about Google Apps is that all your applications are connected to one another and convenient to access. At the same time, each application has individual customization settings. For example, your Gmail Chat picture can be different from your Google profile picture. You can configure Gmail to send appointments to your Google Calendar, or embed a calendar into your Google Sites website, or even onto your iGoogle homepage. And, when you use multiple sign-ins, you can easily move data from one account to another. Truly, the possibilities are endless.

Using Multiple Sign-ins

If you're like me, you have several Google accounts. I have a personal account, one for my business, and a third to collect professional newsletters and group mail. Some people use Google Apps for business at work and have a personal Gmail account. No matter how you use your multiple Google accounts it's always a time-saver to be able to log in to more than one Google account at a time. You have several ways to do this.

SIGNING IN USING DIFFERENT BROWSERS

One way to log in to more than one account at a time is to use different web browsers for each account (see Figure 1-1). For example, say you have three Google accounts and regularly use Microsoft Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, and Mozilla Firefox. Open Internet Explorer and log in to your first Google account. Next, open Google Chrome and log in to your second Google account, and finally, open Firefox to log in to the third account. You can use all Google services for each account, just as if you were logged in to just one. I find this method useful when I need to move information from my Gmail inbox of one account to my Google website on another account.

TIP If you use Google Chrome, the Incognito window acts as a separate browser. But, be aware that your history won't be saved when you're using the Incognito window.

USING MULTIPLE INBOXES

If you want to access e-mail for all your Gmail accounts from only your main Gmail account, you can use the Multiple Inboxes feature from Google Labs. Log in to your Gmail account and go to Gmail Lab and find Multiple Inboxes about three-fourths

down the page. Select Enable and remember to save your settings (usually a button on the bottom of any editing screen).

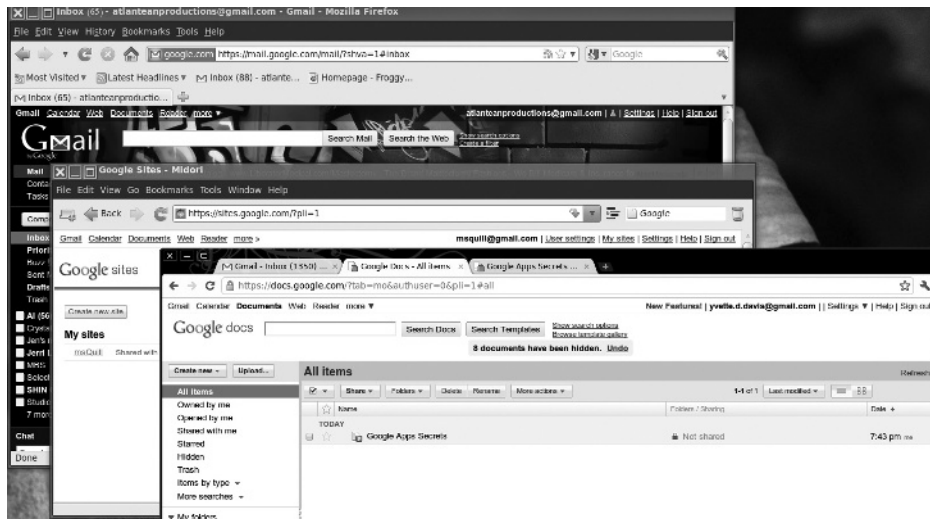


FIGURE 1-1: Logging in to your Google accounts with different browsers is a simple and effective way to get the job done.

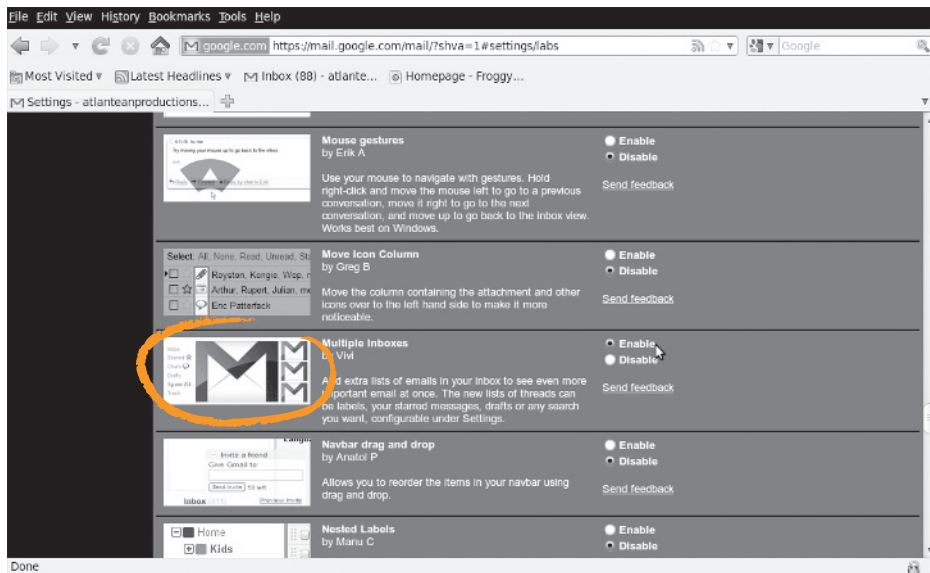


FIGURE 1-2: With a little tweaking, the Multiple Inboxes feature enables you to access e-mail from your other Gmail accounts.

Now, log in to the Gmail account you'd like to access from your main account. Click Settings in the upper right, and select the Forwarding and POP/IMAP tab. Select Forward a Copy of Incoming Mail To and enter your main Gmail address using the button marked Add a Forwarding Address. Use the drop-down menu to tell Gmail what to do after the e-mail is forwarded. Save your settings. Now, go back to the Settings page of your main Gmail account and select the Multiple Inboxes tab. Type **to:yourothergmailaddress@gmail.com** in the text box marked Pane 0. Go to Settings and set up a filter so that e-mails in your new inboxes don't show up in your main Inbox. To do this, create a filter for the alternate e-mail address and check the Skip the Inbox option. If filters sound good to you, you should check out Chapter 11 of this book, where we cover Gmail filters more in depth.

The screenshot shows the Gmail Settings page for the 'Multiple Inboxes' tab. At the top, there are navigation tabs: General, Labels, Accounts and Import, Filters, Forwarding and POP/IMAP, Chat, Web Clips, Priority Inbox, Labs, and Multiple Inboxes. Below these are sub-tabs: Offline, Themes, and Buzz. The main content area is titled 'Current searches for the multiple inboxes:' and includes a note: '(leaving any of the boxes empty will remove thread panels from your inbox view. Removing all the searches will remove all the inbox panels.)'. There is a table with two columns: 'Search query' and 'Panel title (optional)'. The table has five rows labeled 'Pane 0' through 'Pane 4'. 'Pane 0' contains the search query 'to:yourothergmailaddress@gmail.com'. The other panes are empty. Below the table, there is a section for 'Maximum page size:' with a dropdown set to 'Show 9 conversations per page for the new inbox panes'. At the bottom, there is a section for 'Extra panels positioning:' with two radio buttons: 'Right side of the inbox' (selected) and 'Above the inbox'.

FIGURE 1-3: Tell Gmail for which e-mail addresses to create inboxes.

USING MULTIPLE SIGN-INS

The final way to sign in to multiple Gmail accounts, called Multiple Sign-in, is a newer feature of Gmail. Using the Multiple Sign-in feature enables you to access more than one account for Gmail, Voice, Sites, Reader, Calendar, and Code from within the same web browser.

To turn on Multiple Sign-in, go to the Settings page for your main Google account. (Access this page from Gmail by clicking Settings → Accounts and Imports → Google Accounts Settings.) Under the heading Personal Settings, you'll find the Off - Edit setting for the Multiple Sign-in feature, if it's available for your account. Click Edit and select On. You'll need to read and click each of the checkboxes to say you've read and agree to the warnings.

NOTE When you use Multiple Sign-in, your Offline Mail and Offline Calendar are disabled, and any unsent mail may be lost.



FIGURE 1-4: Turn on Multiple Sign-in.

Recovering Passwords and Lost Accounts

It's inevitable—at some time you will forget the password for your Google account. If you've paid attention to the Google security nag screens that periodically remind you to update your Google records with secondary e-mail and cell phone information, forgetting your password is no big deal. Simply click the link that says Can't Access Your Account?, and follow the on-screen directions. You'll be back up and running in no time. But, a lot of people get in a hurry and ignore that nag screen. Or, what if you accidentally delete your Google account? Then what do you do?

USING THE GOOGLE HELP FORM

You could go to the online Google help forum at www.google.com/support/accounts/bin/answer.py?answer=48598 to fill out a support request form. The form will ask you specific questions, such as the date you opened your Google account, and the e-mail address from which you last received an e-mail. If you can answer those questions, and satisfy Google tech support that the account is indeed yours, you may be able to recover your password.

You can also use this form if you accidentally delete your account. However, you need to submit the help form within 24 hours of the accidental deletion, or tech support can't help you.

USING GOOGLE PASSWORD DECRYPTOR

For lost passwords, there is a handy little third-party program that can recover your Google password from saved password and cookie information on your hard drive. This is useful if, for example, you save your Google Docs password in Firefox and then forget it. Say you go to sign in one day and for whatever reason the saved password auto-fill doesn't work. You can download Google Password Decryptor by Security Xploded. You can find this handy program here: www.securityxploded.com/googlepassworddecryptor.php.

Google Password Decryptor can retrieve your saved Google password from your web browser, or from Google Apps information you have saved using offline tools.

Managing Account Settings

Google makes it easy to manage all your personal information and Google Apps from one page. Log in to your Google account. In the upper right, next to your login address, is the link for My Account. This is where you find everything you need to remove Apps, manage your personal settings, and even change your name. Take some time to look around a bit, and you may discover some exciting new Apps.

One of those new Apps is 2-step verification. For those of you who are concerned about your account's level of security, 2-step verification might be something that can soothe your concerns a bit.

Basically, the way that 2-step verification works is that you configure a mobile phone number to receive a verification code a minimum of once every 30 days. You need to enter that verification code immediately after typing in your Google username and password (and, before you can access your Google account). Enabling 2-step verification also means that your mobile phone Apps or other non-browser

methods of accessing your Google account do not function unless you sign-in and configure each device separately.

2-step verification for Google accounts is, ironically, a three-step process:

1. Set up your primary phone. First, on your Google account settings page, click Using 2-step Verification. Then, click on Set Up 2-step Verification. From this point, you need to stop what you're doing without closing your desktop browser window to get your mobile device. At this point in time, you have two options to consider. Option one entails selecting your mobile device and then, on your mobile device, downloading a free app called Google Authenticator (available free on the Android App market, the Apple App Store, or from your BlackBerry, m.google.com/authenticator). This App takes you through the necessary first steps of configuring your primary phone; there is a point during this process where you will receive a code on your mobile phone and are asked to enter and verify it on your desktop computer.

Option two involves receiving an SMS text message instead of downloading the Google Authenticator App. To do that, you select None - Show Me More Options instead of selecting your mobile device. Google sends you a code to verify on your desktop computer.

2. Add a backup phone. This ensures that you are still able to access and verify your account using 2-step verification, even if you lose your primary phone or get a new phone. Google recommends that the backup phone you enter should not be the same number as you entered for your primary phone.
3. Record your backup codes. You are provided with 10 backup codes after you complete the 2-step verification set-up process. You can use the 10 backup codes once each instead of using the aforementioned verification code to sign-in to your Google account. Backup codes can come in handy if you don't have access to your primary phone and need to access your Google account (travelling internationally, on vacation, or a dead phone battery are some good reasons to keep these backup codes handy on paper, in your wallet or in your purse).

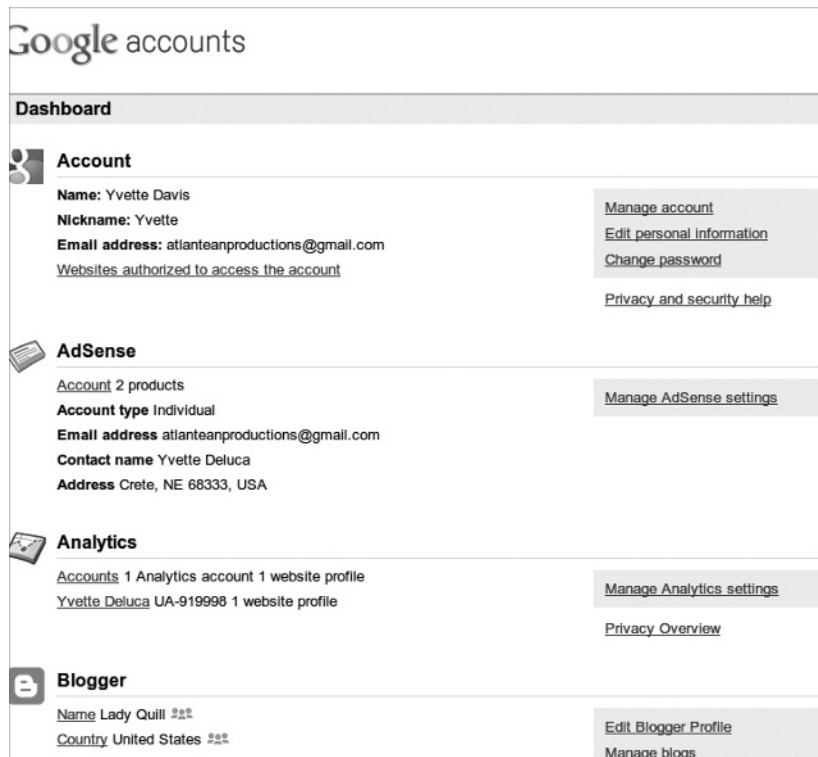
ADDING AND REMOVING APPS

Whether you use Google Apps for business or personal use, you have the flexibility to add and remove individual applications from your account. If, for example, you know you will never use Google Health, you can simply remove it from your Google Apps

collection. Likewise, if you know that eventually you'd like to try Google Analytics, you have the freedom to add it to your Dashboard as a reminder to try the program.

Using the Google Dashboard

When the Google Dashboard was rolled out, Google stated that the intention was to improve transparency and give users more control over their data. And, it has accomplished that goal. Google Dashboard (www.google.com/dashboard/) lists every piece of information Google has collected about you and your web usage. Here you find links to every Google App you have ever used, along with all your personal and security information. Google Dashboard is the place to go if you want to access settings for any of your Google Apps, read privacy information, access your Google Voice call log, or see and view your web history. Plus, you can see alerts of any suspicious activity on your Google Account when you view your Dashboard.



The screenshot displays the Google Dashboard interface. At the top, it says "Google accounts" and "Dashboard". Below this, there are four main sections, each with a small icon and a title:

- Account**: Shows "Name: Yvette Davis", "Nickname: Yvette", "Email address: atlanteanproductions@gmail.com", and "Websites authorized to access the account". Action links include "Manage account", "Edit personal information", "Change password", and "Privacy and security help".
- AdSense**: Shows "Account 2 products", "Account type Individual", "Email address atlanteanproductions@gmail.com", "Contact name Yvette Deluca", and "Address Crete, NE 68333, USA". Action link: "Manage AdSense settings".
- Analytics**: Shows "Accounts 1 Analytics account 1 website profile" and "Yvette Deluca UA-919998 1 website profile". Action links: "Manage Analytics settings" and "Privacy Overview".
- Blogger**: Shows "Name Lady Quill" and "Country United States". Action links: "Edit Blogger Profile" and "Manage blogs".

FIGURE 1-5: Google Dashboard gives you access to all your Google settings from one page.

UPDATING PERSONAL AND SECURITY INFORMATION

When you open the Google Dashboard, the first item you see is your account information. Your name, nickname, and e-mail address are listed. Under your e-mail address is a link to Websites Authorized to Access the Account. This is where you find out which websites have access to your Google account. For example, if you use the reminder program Remember the Milk (RTM), it is possible to allow RTM to access your Google Calendar and put your RTM tasks on your calendar.

To the right, you'll see a link to Edit Personal Information. This is where you can change your name, time zone, ZIP code, and set an alternate e-mail address with which to log in to your various Google Apps. Remember, though, any changes made to your personal information on this page will be effective throughout all your Google Applications.

▶ Check your personal and security information often to ensure you have authorized all access to your account.

REVIEWING PRIVACY INFORMATION

It is a smart idea to review the privacy policies of every website where you store information on a regular basis. Google Dashboard gives you one-click access to the privacy policy for every Google App you use. Simply scroll down until you see the App you're interested in, and click the link that mentions privacy.

ACCESSING GOOGLE VOICE CALL LOG

Have you ever wondered about a missed call? Or maybe you suspect someone is using your Google Voice account without your permission? The fastest way to find out is to use Google Dashboard to access your call log. You can see a call history, and how many phones are being forwarded—all at a glance. Of course, if you want more detailed information you can get that too. You learn more about Google Voice in Chapter 17.

REVIEWING WEB HISTORY

For me, one of the most useful features of the Google Dashboard is the Web History section. Here, you find listed all of your search history for

- ▶ Web browsing
- ▶ Images
- ▶ News Products
- ▶ Video
- ▶ Maps
- ▶ Blogs
- ▶ Books

This is helpful when you've been researching a topic and just can't remember where you found a vital piece of information.

RECEIVING SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY ALERTS

If Google detects a login to your account from a location very different from your usual location it automatically generates an alert in red at the top of your Google Dashboard. So, if you usually log in to your Google account from somewhere near California, and someone in China logs in to your account, a notice appears on your Google Dashboard. This feature is enabled on every Google website to help alert you in the event your accounts are hacked.

Deleting Accounts

I can't imagine why you'd want to, but if for some reason you want to delete your Google account, it's easy.

Go to your accounts page (www.google.com/accounts) and select Edit next to My Products List. You see several choices for deleting your Google accounts. Select your desired option, click the confirmation box, and enter your password. Click Remove. That's all there is to it.

WARNING Remember, deleting a Google account or service is most likely a permanent action. There are a few exceptions (for example, if you can contact Google tech support within 24 hours of the Google account deletion), but for the most part you cannot get your account or your data back.

CREATING A GOOGLE PROFILE

The Google Profile is your opportunity to tell the world about you. List contact information, birthday, career and school information, and create a bio. Google automatically suggests links to your Picasa Web Album or your Blogger blog to include on your profile. This makes it easy to share those things that are important to you. Use your Google Profile to receive messages from friends and strangers alike without ever revealing your e-mail address, and let people know where you have lived in the past and where you are now. You can even present yourself as a creative geek by listing your superpower.

Because Google really does care about your privacy you have the option of making part, or all, of your profile private.

Benefits of Public Profiles

Many people shy away from using the Public Profile page Google provides. I admit, I'm one of them. I value my online privacy, and don't necessarily want anyone with a web connection to have access to my personal information. On the other side of that coin lies the fact that I run a business, have old friends I'd like to find, and have a solid need to network.

I merge these two needs by being selective as to what information I include on my Google Profile. With careful planning on my part, I can use my Google Profile to attract new clients, point established clients to my new ventures, maintain an online presence that allows old friends to locate me, and even provide a central location so that far away family can see what I'm up to.

Building and Modifying Your Profile

Access your Google Profile here: www.google.com/profiles. Click Create My Profile and log in to your account, or create a Google account if you don't already have one. Select Edit Profile in the blue stripe under the Picasa box.

ABOUT ME

The first tab you'll see is the About Me page. This is where you enter your name in all its various forms, specify your gender, and enter the cities and/or states in which you have lived. This information is especially important if you want childhood friends or teachers to be able to find you. You can specify how you prefer people to contact you and enter the appropriate information. You can also include all the different names by which people might search for you.

Fill in your profession, current employer, and past employers. This allows old co-workers to find you. List your current and past schools.

The Introduction and Bragging Rights sections gives you space to create a witty and personal biography.

In the Links section, Google suggests websites to include in your profile. If you have a Blogger, YouTube, or Picasa account, they are listed here. Blogs hosted with other services and your personal website may also be in the list. Click Add for the site to which you'd like to link, and just ignore the others.

You can add your own custom links to your Google Profile as well. There is a space for this directly below the auto-list.

Use your Profile URL to point others directly to your Google Profile. Some potential uses may be to include it in your e-mail signature, Facebook page, Twitter account, LinkedIn, or even on your business cards.

Deleting and Hiding Your Profile

To delete your Google Profile, simply select Delete Profile and Disable Google Buzz Completely. The next screen is the confirmation screen. If you're sure you want to delete your profile, select Yes, I Want to Delete My Profile.

WARNING Remember, after you delete your Google Profile you cannot get it back (and even if you contact Google tech support within 24 hours, you most likely will still permanently lose the account). It is removed from your list of Google services, and you are no longer able to use Buzz. However, if you create a new profile, you can simply use Google Buzz again and any other option that you choose.

There is no easy way to hide your Google Profile. This is an important point to consider before you create one. You can, of course, decline to display specific information, such as your display name, e-mail address, IM names, and contact list, but there's no way to hide your profile as a whole. You always have the option, as discussed earlier, of deleting your Google Profile.

Sharing Your Profile

Google makes it easy to share your profile. Near the bottom of the About Me page is a link to your Google Profile. Copy that link to include in your e-mail, on business cards, or on your website. Give your personal URL to anyone whom you wish to see your profile.

SUMMARY

The launch pad for customizing your Google experience however you want is through your Google account settings. If you've been following along on your own account with this first chapter, you have already experienced the labyrinth that the Google ecosystem can be. Although you can modify the way you access accounts, your profile information, and your Google Buzz, you need to be able to find where these are in the first place!

Chapter 1 is designed to start you off strongly and confidently because there are more than 30 more chapters chock full of secrets left to discover!