THE USEFUL TECH

The Subscription Swap Sheet

Every subscription worth cancelling, matched to the free tool that replaces it. One page you can keep, whether or not you ever build a home server.

The Useful Media Co.
OWN YOUR DATA

Free companion guide

How to use this

Most of us aren't really paying for storage or software. We're **renting space on someone else's computer**, and the day we stop paying, our access to our own photos, files, and passwords leaves with it. This sheet maps the way out.

Each row is a subscription on the left and the free tool that replaces it on the right. You don't have to build anything to begin. Start with the swaps marked **Start today**, which run on the Mac you already own, and save the rest for when you're ready for an always-on machine.

Start today · no server needed

Runs on any Mac. Install it and you're set, no dedicated server required.

Best on an always-on Mac

Wants a machine that stays awake. A cheap used Mac Mini in a cabinet is perfect. This is where the deeper setup guide comes in.

Prices are rough monthly averages and vary by plan and region. Every tool listed is free and, in most cases, open-source. Only self-host content and data you own.

The swaps · 1 of 2

PHOTOS

Google Photos / iCloud+ → Immich

$3–10 / mo

An open-source Google Photos. Auto-backup from your phone, face grouping, and search your library in plain language.

Best on an always-on Mac

FILES & STORAGE

Dropbox / Google Drive → Nextcloud

$10–12 / mo

Your own Dropbox with syncing and sharing. Or skip the app entirely and mount the drive over your Wi-Fi like any folder.

Best on an always-on Mac

PASSWORDS

LastPass / 1Password → Bitwarden

$3–5 / mo

A full password manager whose free tier already beats most paid ones. Self-host the vault with Vaultwarden for total control.

Start today · no server needed

AI CHAT

ChatGPT / Claude → LM Studio + Open WebUI

~$20 / mo

Run capable open models locally for everyday questions. Honest note: not a match for a frontier model on heavy work.

Start today · no server needed

STREAMING

Netflix → Jellyfin / Plex

~$16 / mo

Turn media you own into your own streaming service, with artwork and descriptions filled in for you.

Best on an always-on Mac

The swaps · 2 of 2

DOCUMENTS

Google Workspace → Nextcloud Office

~$7 / mo

Docs, sheets, and slides you can edit right in the browser, hosted on your own machine instead of Google's.

Best on an always-on Mac

ADS & TRACKERS

Per-device ad blockers → Pi-hole

varies

Blocks ads and trackers for every device on your network at once. Set it once, and your whole home is covered.

Best on an always-on Mac

REMOTE ACCESS

VPN subscriptions → Tailscale

$5–12 / mo

Reach your home machines from anywhere, securely, on the free tier. This is also what makes every swap above work away from home.

Start today · no server needed

LOCATION HISTORY

Google Timeline → Dawarich

free, now gutted

A private map of everywhere you've been, living on your server instead of being deleted by Google on a whim.

Best on an always-on Mac

DEVICE BACKUP

Extra iCloud tiers → Time Machine server

$1–10 / mo

Built into macOS. Back up every Mac in the house to one drive, with no monthly fee attached.

Start today · no server needed

One rule before you start

Own your data, and own the backups too.

The moment your photos and files live on your own machine, losing them becomes your responsibility instead of a company's. That's a fair trade, as long as you take it seriously.

Follow the **3-2-1 rule**: three copies of anything you'd hate to lose, on two kinds of storage, with one of them kept somewhere outside your home. Keeping a small cloud backup for your most irreplaceable files isn't the plan failing. It's the plan working properly.

Ready to actually build it?

This sheet is the map. The full step-by-step, which Mac to buy, the install order, and every setting people forget, lives in the complete guide.

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