

Google's Schmidt: The Internet needs a delete button

Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt says mistakes people make when young can haunt them forever.

by **Shara Tibken** | May 6, 2013 9:56 AM PDT



NYU professor Nouriel Roubini interviews Google's Jared Cohen and Eric Schmidt (from left) during an event Monday in New York.

(Credit: Shara Tibken/CNET)

NEW YORK--The Internet needs a delete button, Google Executive Chairman Eric Schmidt said Monday.

Actions someone takes when young can haunt the person forever, Schmidt said, because the information will always be on the Internet. He used the example of a young person who committed a crime that could be expunged from his record when he's an adult. But information about that crime could remain online, preventing the person from finding a job.

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"In America, there's a sense of fairness that's culturally true for all of us," Schmidt said. "The lack of a delete button on the Internet is a significant issue. There is a time when erasure is a right thing."

Schmidt made the comments during an event at New York University in Manhattan. He and Jared Cohen, director of Google Ideas, spoke with NYU professor Nouriel Roubini about their new book.

Cohen said that in the future, an ecosystem will evolve around protecting and monitoring people's online images.

Meanwhile, Schmidt said that even with the proliferation of wearable devices, people will still have privacy. Each country will make a decision about how to address the issue, he said, and each nation's policy will be different.

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Senior writer for CNET focused on Samsung and other consumer electronics. Previously wrote for Dow Jones Newswires and the Wall Street Journal. She's a native Midwesterner who still prefers "pop" over "soda."



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I think rather than change the data, it would be better to change society's perception of data--we'll realize everyone makes mistakes and everyone changes so it doesn't make sense to brand people for life. Everyone (even ex-cons) deserve a second chance.

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I would make a comment, but I am afraid it would surface later and ruin me.

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Hahaha, the hypocrisy is unbelievable mr. Schmidt!

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For a Google chairman to state this, especially after Google's openly anti-privacy stance a year ago, is a pretty big deal. It almost makes me wonder if there is not a bit of self-referencing to the chairman's own personal misgivings which he recently discovered in some back alley of the internet.

Major episodes of a person's life get recorded one way or another and the internet makes that information more easily accessible. That said, it is true that one's past can be expunged under certain conditions and if it meets certain criteria. Major Felonies, for example, can only be expunged by the President of the US. Misdemeanors & minor crimes committed during childhood (under 18) can be expunged much more easily.

It seems as though we are getting closer to the tipping point of either becoming a Transparent Society, which requires integrity from the population, i.e. no one exploits knowledge of you for selfish gain (yeah, good luck with that), or else there IS going to have to be a way to undo / vanish the little dumb things from your past off the internet. This is not about vanishing a major felony - this is about that time you threw a TV off the top of the college dorm, smashed the college statue accidentally, got written up about it, paid a \$5000 fine, and nearly got expelled but instead did 6 months of community service. 20 years later you are applying for a job requiring very high integrity which you learned in the 20 years since being a dumb kid. Should that act 20 years prior really be allowed to follow you, especially seeing as how you are now an upstanding, productive citizen with good integrity? What about high school photos of you drunk, semi-barfing and flashing the camera that you thought were so funny at the time, but now a competitor for that same job 20 years later tries to use those photos to discredit you? And lets not forget the Tabloid Press who will happily dredge up anything from even a minor celebrity's past purely to sell magazines.

Furthermore, it is ridiculously easy to find personal information online these days when it comes to someone's phone number, living address, names of relatives, etc, by anyone wanting to pay a search fee. Yes that includes all the stalkers in the world. THAT is a Huge Gap & Flaw in Personal Privacy and its being perpetuated purely for profit. There absolutely SHOULD be a "Delete" button that removes that kind of information which is no one's

business other than law enforcement. That kind of information should NOT be available to any random person but should absolutely require security clearances. Getting OFF those sites should not require lengthy letter writing or paying a service, but yes a simple "vanish my phone / living address / names of relatives / etc" one button click.

The question I personally have is how will this idea of a "delete button" be regulated and who will draw the line as to what can be expunged? How will it be enforced?

At the end of the day, and until they sort it out, I hold with the others here who said that its best just to think ahead and only post things of which you will never be ashamed.

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[@AJotr](http://www.cnet.com/profile/AJotr) [<http://www.cnet.com/profile/AJotr>]

I agree, it's really a shame such things can follow and haunt you for so long. Hence why I refuse to have a Facebook or Twitter, and I always request people don't post any pictures of me online. I fear the fact that one tinsey mistake can plague me forever, no matter what I do to rectify it.

So I try to avoid the issue in the first place by simply not using such services, but I will admit, the fear is still there that someone, someone will post something that I will never be able to truly delete. Take many viral videos, for example. The person staring in them usually never intended for them to go online, yet someone finds it and posts it to YouTube. Bam! Within days, half the world has seen it, and the 'star' can't change it.

Most of the time, said viral video 'stars' laugh it off with the rest of the world, even enjoy the fame. But for others, it can be a curse. Remember that Star Wars kids, with the broomstick and all? He was severely bullied after posting it, and fell into depression. I'm more than sure he would love to delete that video, both from the Internet, and the minds of others. Sadly, he will more than likely never get that opportunity.

I think an Internet delete button would be incredible, but sadly, the Internet in its current form can't support such a thing.

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[andrew7783](http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783) [<http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783>]

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"Don't post private things on the internet" is this generation's "Don't take candy from strangers." The best way to save young people from this mistake is for parents to take the time to make sure that they know better.

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[@andrew7783](http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783) [<http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783>] If you have to send something private over the internet, don't use plain text, use a tool such as whisperpro.

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[\[http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783\]](http://www.cnet.com/profile/andrew7783) Good point, take the extra step when you do need to communicate over the internet. The service on whisperpro.com, seems very cool and get the job done nicely.

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Oh good, I'm glad Google recognizes the need for privacy, so will Google Glass have a delete button? Can I delete pictures of me that were taken by a random Google Glass user in the gym locker room?

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[gork_platter](http://www.cnet.com/profile/gork_platter) [http://www.cnet.com/profile/gork_platter]

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Nah, it's all good. All of us have posted dumb things. Being perfect means you're curating your public self, and I'd be suspicious of a flawless record.

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I can hardly wait until the 2032 elections when the first of today's dumb young kids is old enough to run for President and they have something stupid from their past dragged out for all to see...

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@solitare_pax They'll just paraphrase the same old dodges politicians have been using for years: "I posted but didn't share", "I was young and stupid", "I deleted that account long ago", "Sorry, my bad", etc.

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@solitare_pax [http://www.cnet.com/profile/solitare_pax] I didn't inhale. LOL

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The internet doesn't need a delete button, people need to exercise more intelligence and caution before posting things. But then, I guess that would require that those things existed in the general population in the first place,...

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I like this dialogue. There's a story on the front page of reddit today about a man whose ex-girlfriend has been convicted of slandering him on the internet, but she's still ruining his career because he is powerless to stop her from continuing (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/05/03/bc-cyber-stalking.html> [<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2013/05/03/bc-cyber-stalking.html>]). Seems relevant -- that slander SHOULD be deleted.

On the other hand, life has no undo/delete -- if you can't undo the fact that you did something stupid, can you expect to be able to delete the evidence? Not really ...

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I have to disagree with Schmidt in this case

If someone gets into a fight at 15 and accidentally kills the other person and is subsequently charged, I'd want to know that before hiring that person or considering them for something.

A person's age should not determine if what they did should be "forgotten". Whether or not someone's past is erased, the initial offense was still committed.

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@JPaterson1 Yup. Or if they listen to Nicki Minaj, or Nickelback, or think harlem shake is funny. Or if they've ever said "YOLO". I'd never hire them.

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[@Scott Wilson](http://www.cnet.com/profile/Scott_Wilson) [**[http://www.cnet.com/profile/Scott Wilson](http://www.cnet.com/profile/Scott_Wilson)**] The YOLO I could forgive. Nickelback? Never.

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Nickleback I could live with, the rest, AGREED!

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[@JPaterson1](http://www.cnet.com/profile/JPaterson1) [**<http://www.cnet.com/profile/JPaterson1>**] if u killed someone ..u can neve erase it...if u went to prison u can not espunge your record either.....the only way a person can espunge their records if they did county time ..it u killed someone...im sure your not going to be able to espunge it..

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If you don't want to incur the social ramifications, you shouldn't post it or do it in the first place.

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[@vercillo](http://www.cnet.com/profile/vercillo) [<http://www.cnet.com/profile/vercillo>] forget social data, what about email, should i not have emails too?

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That does not appear to be the topic of this article. Rather, it is about publicly and lawfully discoverable information.

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[@vercillo](http://www.cnet.com/profile/vercillo) [<http://www.cnet.com/profile/vercillo>] Second guessing is much easier

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This seems counter-intuitive coming from Google, but you have to remember they are really a "targeted marketing" company rather than the popularly thought "advertising" firm. They honestly don't care about hording data forever. It's not like it's cheap to do it either. They also appear to be migrating from targeted marketing to a micro-payments model so they can shake off the privacy concerns. That's why there won't be any advertising allowed in Google Glass. That said, the "privacy issues" despite being seriously blown out of proportion and glamorized by the press and haters are their biggest negatives. It's nice to see they'll be making those go away and make the haters look even more stupid than they

already do.

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from a company that started keeping personal details.. WOW

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Yeah, no other company keeps personal detail. /s

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