

Consumers Concerned About Personalized Search Results

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Nearly half of internet users prefer standardized search results

Search and social media are becoming more interconnected, particularly as Google works to integrate social media content into its search results.

In January 2012, Google announced that, as of March 1, 2012, search results on Google.com will incorporate content from users' Google+ social network, highlighting links, photos and comments from Google+ within search results. This has led to some concern from users, particularly about privacy.

AYTM Market Research asked US internet users if they liked the idea of personalized search results. Of respondents, 15.5% said yes, they would like personalized search results, while 39.1% said yes, but that they were also concerned with privacy. Additionally, 45.4% said they would prefer everyone to see the same search results.

RKG, a search marketing company, found in its "Digital Marketing Report Q4 2011" that 83.5% of the organic search traffic of companies worldwide was through Google. While Google is by far the most popular search engine, another concern with Google's search-and-social plan is that Google+ may not fully represent consumers' social media lives.

According to AYTM, only 19.3% of respondents actively use Google+, while an additional 20.3% have an account but do not use it. Nearly one-fifth of respondents (19.5%) reported that they don't know what Google+ is.

Twitter, in particular, took offense to Google's plan to integrate Google+ content into search results, while not including that of Twitter and Facebook. Twitter and Google previously had a relationship where Twitter content showed up in Google's real-time search results, but the two companies were unable to come to an agreement to continue the partnership in July 2011.

In a statement, Twitter said, "As we've seen time and time again, news breaks first on Twitter; as a result, Twitter accounts and Tweets are often the most relevant results [for world events and breaking news]. We're concerned that as a result of Google's changes, finding this information will be much harder for everyone."

Google faces an uphill battle as it works to connect its social content to search results, including determining how users prefer to connect the two. No matter what happens with Google+, though, marketers must find a balance with search and social media marketing, as the two are becoming more connected every day.

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