

## Does It Matter If Google's Search Results Are Fixed.

The fools, usually, are us.

We, the people, switch off our critical faculties and happily barter our trust for the joy of convenience.

So will we ever make the effort to even raise an eyebrow when we read "Google this week admitted that its staff pick and choose what appears in its search results"?



These words, from The Register's Andrew Orlovski, ought surely to give one or two people pause for a small grunt of concern.

As Orlovski points out, Google News expressly declares that the "selection and placement of stories on this page were determined automatically by a computer program." Except that, it appears, maybe they weren't.

He quotes Michael Arrington of TechCrunch, who suggested that Google will "make obvious changes - An example is if "thousands of people" were to knock a search result off a search page, they'd be likely to make a change..."

"Now what, you may be thinking, is an 'obvious change'?" writes Orlovski. "Is it one that is frivolous? (Thereby introducing a Google Frivolitimeter? [Beta]). Or is it one that goes against the grain of the consensus? If so, then who decides what the consensus must be?"

Notice the considerable idealism in Google's DNA.

Orlovski concludes by questioning Google's "unique democracy" in the way search results are presented. He cites Google's current explanation of Page Rank:

"PageRank also considers the importance of each page that casts a vote, as votes from some pages are considered to have greater value, thus giving the linked page greater value. We have always taken a pragmatic approach to help improve search quality and create useful products, and our technology uses the collective intelligence of the Web to determine a page's importance."

The important words here, surely, aren't "value" or "useful" or "collective" or "intelligence." They are "pragmatic" and "approach."

Many who reside in Inner Accolyteville cling fondly to the belief that the Web, with Google as its artificial heart, symbolizes a new democracy, a new honesty, a new pulsating, life-affirming form of justice.

But Google's is surely a "pragmatic approach." It's an advertising agency. It makes its money out of advertising. Mundane classified advertising at that. There is nothing idealistic about it.

Indeed, the idealism of Web 2.0 as a whole is, these days, rushing down the Turbulent River to be replaced by an endearing rush toward pragmatic approaches.

Google wants its search results to become more pragmatic, not for any political, social or even intellectual reason. The company simply thinks it's better for business. Advertising business.

Most of us won't notice or care and will continue to depend on Google because it's so dominant, so fast, so very much our rolling dictionary of the world.

This leave Google to approach its business in as pragmatic a way as it chooses. It will makes changes, and we will continue to believe in them.

The folks at Google are no fools. As for us, well, the slapping of our foreheads always comes a little too late.

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118 A Cass Street | Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2438 | Traverse City, Michigan (MI) USA 49685-2438  
Tel: 231-922-9460 | Toll: 866-536-8614 | Fax: 231-929-3398  
Office Hours: M-F 8AM-9PM EST\* | Email: [Info@peakpositions.com](mailto:Info@peakpositions.com)