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Search's Andy Warhol Moment: How LinkedIn, Twitter and Social Networks May Change Search for the Better

by Chris Copeland, 2 hours ago

Andy Warhol once said, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes." More recently, rapper Eminem asked if you had one shot, one moment to seize everything you wanted, would you capture it or let it slip away?

A recent meeting I had with Yahoo brought both of these quotes to mind. A Yahoo product rep told our group that the average search session lasts 15 minutes. That includes the back and forth between clicks and all queries in a given session. A week later, I polled a room of savvy client-side marketers on this issue, and the responses I got ranged from 15 seconds to 3 minutes. It wasn't until guesses were exhausted that someone finally came onto the exceedingly high time expenditure.

This led me to ask the question: If you were willing to spend 15 minutes searching for something, is the current model of back and forth and refinement the best bet for the future? My personal sense is no, but then, the question becomes: What is?

Let's begin by exploring what search today does well -- immediacy -- and what it does reasonably well: organization based on relevancy. Clearly that is an oversimplification, but these are at or near the top of the list. Of all that the search experience provides, encyclopedic knowledge and its organization by any set of guidelines is a massive shift in how the general public finds and is exposed to information. The fact someone can go from zero to being conversant on any topic with the help of Google should not be understated in the value equation. People expect Google to find them the best deals, the most insightful data, and generally create order in their otherwise chaotic world of searching for answers.

But it's the setting of order -- and on whose terms -- that may cause a seismic shift in what types of platforms will deliver the intersection of content and intent. Today, the single largest arbiter of relevance is Google, period. This is a company that had moved forward with open as its mantra in social and mobile, and remains completely closed in another area: its search engine. Given this is the secret sauce that makes Google what it is, this is understandable. But it presents challenges for a society becoming more intelligent about the Internet and the social nature of the Web. Last month I discussed [GoogleWiki](#), which begins to alter, in a very small way, the open nature of Google rankings, but this is a far cry from where a personalized search results page could get to very quickly.

It's Not What You Know, it's Who You Know

Today, connected communities of users on LinkedIn are able to post and respond to questions from their network on anything. At the same time, tweets back and forth are proliferating on the Net regarding anything of immediate relevancy to a given user of Twitter. The questions become, who will organize these conversations -- and does that spur the next generation of search offerings? My hunch is that the network of many will eventually play a significant role in the relevancy of results. Clearly the limitation today of both LinkedIn and Twitter is that both are largely dependant on who you know. Your expertise extends as far as your social graph. And while these connections can eventually reach larger numbers, you are bound in part to sharing and receiving relevant insights from those you know.

For example, take two of the most connected search marketers I know, David Berkowitz and Kevin Lee. Kevin has asked hundreds of questions on LinkedIn and is in its elite 500+ connections status, with 78 pages of connections. David has 32 pages worth of connections. Both of these men are using LinkedIn to its fullest -- and yet their network is likely no more than 5,000 total people. Clearly the scale of an individual's network is not sufficient in broader context to provide the

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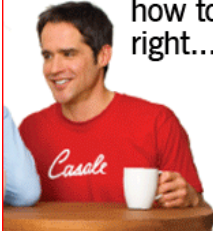
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depth that a Google.com could provide. However, it is a certainty that if the topic was advertising, and more specifically, search or emerging media, that the network of connections would be more than capable to answer a given question within 15 minutes.

I'd Gladly Pay You Tuesday For a Hamburger Today

The trouble with LinkedIn today is that what it offers as a relevant engine can not function in real-time. To ask and then get answers requires more than 15 minutes in a row. If you were willing to ask the question, come back on Tuesday and review for greatest relevancy and act, then this model would be acceptable. Twitter can potentially be a better immediacy vehicle through its mobile application, but even that is limited by scale. What potentially changes all of this is the networks' ability to scan questions and answers and make them accessible to you, in addition to the more latent responses of your own connection set. This functionality exists today in LinkedIn with relevancy sorting based on degrees of separation, but as this is not the original intent of the network its volume level is not a critical scale.

Same Musicians, New Band

In the search space we have Google and Yahoo, with Microsoft trying to work its way into a legitimate position. If you read the trades you know employees hop from one company to the other with some frequency. What began with Sheryl Sandberg's high profile shift to Facebook was a movement of leaders out of pure search plays into more emerging social sites. If you've noticed my LinkedIn fixation in this column, it's because of several very recent and very important additions. Last week, Dipchand "Deep" Nishar, who helped launch the Google mobile business, joined the company. On Dec. 17, TechCrunch reported that former Yahoo Network chief Jeff Weiner had agreed to join as president while founder Reid Hoffman was taking back over the role of CEO.

So we have the original visionary behind LinkedIn bringing in one of the key players in Google's mobile space, and in Jeff Weiner, the guy who in all my dealings with Yahoo was able to more clearly communicate the Yahoo 360 social vision better than anyone else.

So a connected community, already dabbling in search for relevant insights, is bringing in skills from the Top 2 search engines with emphasis on mobile and scale along with social communities. This band of leaders may not play the same music, but while Madonna suggested it only takes four minutes to save the world, these guys may redefine what can be done in 15 minutes to searching.

One Response to "Search's Andy Warhol Moment: How LinkedIn, Twitter and Social Networks May Change Search for the Better"



Martin Edic from **Techrigy, Inc.**

commented on: December 19, 2008 at 12:08 PM

I think one of the real insights here is that social media is moving into the mainstream and will likely supercede traditional search as a means of discovery. If I go on Twitter and ask for info using a keyword phrase I get almost instant responses from humans- essentially Twitter crowd sources human search results very successfully. If I were still a search professional I'd be looking very hard at how this is going to impact my world. You're not going to optimize or get contextual advertising in social media. I really think it replaces virtually every communication medium in the very near future.

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