

Let me perform a few random searches: Insulin pump, check, Mitchell report, check, Benazir Bhutto, check, Global warming, check. What do all these have in common? The top results for all of these Google queries are owned by Wikipedia, and that's why Google hates them. Google recently announced the launch of Google Knol.

With a healthy serving Wikipedia, a dash of Squidoo and a dollop of About.com, the search giant bets it can capitalize on this whole user generated revolution.

What's Different?

Knol's design allows experts to create a page on a topic that others can comment on and rate. The experts are given a template hosted within the friendly confines of Google and will have the option of placing Google Ads on their pages to share in the advertising revenue. It sounds like the old About model, but it is clear that Google is trying to create its own Google-pedia.

The product folks at Google claim the differentiator with Knol is in the experts; knowing who the author is will allow their citations to be more credible.

What happened to organizing the world's information? Maybe the motto is changing has to change.

Google once touted itself as organizing the world's information and making it available. It would seem that Wikipedia has done a good job helping Google deliver on that promise, almost too good of a job. They adhere to Google's standards of optimization and dominate the results pages by providing accurate information (generally speaking). So why won't Google just let it be? Why introduce a service that competes with something helpful to their users?

Just like Yahoo! veered off course by trying to out-Google Google, the same can be said about Google moving out of their comfort zone. If Google eventually breaks, it's partly our fault. We couldn't be happy with just a really good search engine. We had to make google into a verb, send their stock through the roof, and heap all sorts of expectations on them.

In order for Google to satisfy the monster that is Wall Street, the company needs to generate revenue at a crazy rate. Since they can't expand the amount of searches that occur, they need to expand their distribution. So why would Google do this? The answer is distribution.

Looking at the amount of unmonetized traffic the engine sends to Wikipedia has got to drive

Google crazy. Does anyone really believe that if Wikipedia agreed to host Google Ads that Google wouldn't abandon Knol as quickly as Britney left her kids?

The Search Implication

It has become clear over the last year that Google has grown tired of watching mass amounts of traffic pass through their doors and end up on sites on which they don't make money. With its marketshare, Google has the ability to push its own products on us, especially if they rank well.

Google has offered assurances that these pages will need to rank well on their own merit without any help. However, Google is a well run business, and there may likely be some intentional and unintentional favoritism.

The template that experts can use was designed by Google, probably with optimization in mind. If I wanted to create a Knol page on the New York Yankees, I can create my own page (which may or may not be Google friendly) or I can just use the search-friendly template that those nice folks at Google provided me. Since I am getting some revenue share and want traffic, I would likely use theirs. These pages would also benefit from Googles PageRank unfairly, simply because they are hosted there.

Similar to Wikipedia, Knol pages will likely link to one another, which will help their link popularity immensely. Currently, Google says that authors may not have to use the nofollow tag on outbound links, but we know that will change once another site shows ranking success from Knol links.

Casual consumers (non-SEM people) have grown accustomed to believing that every decision Google makes is based on helping us. According to Pew Internet, 58% of us go to the internet for important answers. With that kind of trust, many think it's crazy for Google to alter results to promote their products. Now consider this:

When you watch the World Series on Fox, you'll consistently find several stars in the stands from such Fox hits as Dark Angel, Titus, Undeclared, Action, That 80s Show, Wonderfalls, Fastlane, Andy Richter Controls the Universe, Skin, Girls Club, Cracking Up, The Pitts, Firefly, Get Real, FreakyLinks, Wanda at Large, Costello, The Lone Gunmen, A Minute With Stan Hooper, Normal, Ohio, Pasadena, Harsh Realm, Keen Eddie, The \$treet, American Embassy, Cedric the Entertainer, The Tick, Luis, and Greg the Bunny. The camera manages to casually find them so that the commentators can highlight them. Fox is using one of its biggest events to promote its other services, which is smart business.

Google had the exact strategy with Universal search and their News offering. When you have a huge captive audience, why not expose them to other products you're promoting?

Once Knol launches, only time will tell how the Wikipedia listings will be affected. Google is now adding an addendum to their motto: organizing the world's information and keeping it here on Google.

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About the Author



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