Escaping the Filter Bubble

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Introduction

We will cover:

- How websites customize content
- Ways to escape these filters
- Best practices
How Content is Customized

- Personal login
- Activity tracking
- Geolocation
- Browser detection
Personal Login

Offers a improved user experience based on your:

- Profile/background
- Friends/interests
- Searches/activities
Personal Login

Customized:

- Advertisements
- Recommendations
- News
- Search results

**Pew Report: 65% View Personalized Search As Bad; 73% See It As Privacy Invasion**

Mar 9, 2012 at 10:00am ET by Danny Sullivan

Personalized search? Both Google and Bing will tell you that it provides better results. But two-thirds say they don’t care. They view personalized search as a “bad thing,” a new survey finds. Nearly three-quarters also view gathering data to personalize results to be a privacy invasion.

The findings come out of a survey from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Around 2,000 adults in the US were questioned between January 20 and February 19 of this year as part of a wide-ranging poll about search engine use, though fewer may have answered particular questions.

**Personalized Search: A Bad Thing**

People were asked how they’d feel if a search engine tracked what they searched for, then used that information to personalize their future search results:

- 65% said it was a “bad thing” because it may limit the information you get online and what search results you see
- 29% said it was a “good thing” because it gives you results that are more relevant to you

Rather than a straight yes/no option, the choices gave some context. From the chart above about views on personalized search:

- 85% said it was a “bad thing” since, as the response said, “it may limit the information you get online and what search results you see”
- 29% said it was a “good thing” because “it gives you results that are more relevant to you”
How widespread?

- Most major websites
- Different levels of user control
- Many share data with other websites
Personal Login

Search plus Your World: Personal results

Google helps you find personal results that are relevant to you. With a single Google search, you can see regular search results, along with all sorts of results that are tailored to you — pages shared with you by your friends, Google+ posts from people you know, and content that's only visible to you (like private photos from Google+ and Picasa albums). Personal results are part of Search plus Your World, Google's search experience that blends personal results with universal results, and helps you connect with people you care about.

Getting personal results isn’t just convenient and fast — it’s also private. No one else will see your private content in their results unless you’ve shared it with them. Learn more about the visibility of personal results.

How it works
You have to be signed in to a Google Account to get all of the features of personal results. Here’s how Google personalizes your results when you’re signed in:

1. **Google products**: Search for publicly and privately shared content visible to you, like your Google+ (and Picasa) photos and Google+ posts from your friends.
2. **Social Search**: Discover relevant images and pages shared by people in your Google+ circles and by suggested connections.
3. **Web History**: Get customized results based on your past search activity on Google, such as searches you’ve done or results you’ve clicked. Learn more about Web History.
4. **Profiles in search**: When you search for a friend’s name, you might see a link to the relevant Google+ profile in the list of autocomplete predictions. With personal results, you’re more likely to see your friend John’s profile than some John you’ve never met. Learn more about profiles in search.

For now, you have to search on Google.com and also have your Google language set to U.S. English to get all of the features of personal results.

It’s easy to see which results are personal results. When you do a regular web search, a little personal result icon appears to the left of personal results. When you do a search on Google Images, the name of the person who shared the photo appears on personal results.

To see only personal results, click the XX personal results link below the search box or click Personal on the left side of the search results page.
Personal Login

+1 on non-Google sites

+1 personalization on non-Google sites allows Google to tailor content and ads to you across the Web, based on your Google profile, +1 activity, and social connections. Google does this without sharing your information with outside websites.

- See recommendations from your friends

If you enable +1 on non-Google sites, you can see recommendations from people you know when you view the same content that they've +1'd. For example, say your friend clicks the +1 button on an entertainment site. If you visit the site, you might see your friend's recommendation next to the +1 button.

Enabling +1 on non-Google sites does not share your information or your friends' information with the site you're viewing (unless you specifically consented to share your information with that site). Instead, Google acts as an intermediary between you and outside websites—displaying your information to you without sharing it with the site.

- See aggregate +1's only

If you disable +1 on non-Google sites, the +1's of your social connections won't appear on websites outside of Google. For example, if your friend +1's an article on a news website and you view that same article, you'll only see an aggregated, anonymous count of people who've also +1'd the site.

- +1 on non-Google sites and your web activity

When you click the +1 button, you're explicitly signaling interest in displaying, sharing, or recommending specific online content, including ads. So if your friend chooses to +1 an ad, page, or search result, you might see that +1 on other websites. Google stores your +1's to personalize the web, for example, by showing them to your social connections and others who may find it relevant.

If you've chosen to display your +1's tab publicly, people who visit your Google profile can see all the items you've +1'd. If you've chosen to keep your +1's tab private, only you will be able to see the contents of your +1's tab.

Ask friends for ideas about a search

Whether you're making a purchase, choosing a restaurant, or figuring out what movie to see, the opinions of people who know something about what you're looking for can help you make confident choices, especially when those people are your friends.

The Bing Sidebar makes it easy to get and share opinions and ideas about your searches by starting and joining conversations about them with your friends. Bing doesn't share every search—only the searches, results, and comments you choose to post.

In this article

- Starting a conversation with friends about a search
- Finding people who know
- Replying to a post
- Clearing posts
- What's shared and what's seen
- Compatibility and availability
- Protecting your privacy

Starting a conversation with friends about a search

Bing finds your friends from Facebook who might know something about your search. When Bing finds relevant friends, you'll see them in the Sidebar under FRIENDS WHO MIGHT KNOW.

The friends listed here are those who have liked pages, shared photos related to your search, or lived near the thing or place you're searching for. To point to the friend's name to see details about why each friend might know something relevant to your search.

Don't see the friends you think should be here? Bing doesn't show people whose privacy settings on Facebook restrict public sharing.
Personal Login

How to Escape?

- Turn off history
- Don't login
- Avoid toolbars
Activity Tracking

No Login Required

- Cookies – information stored by websites in your browser
- LSO - Sneaky cookies hidden in Flash files
- IP address
Activity Tracking

Potentially All Interactions

- Searches
- Pages viewed
- Links clicked
Activity Tracking

- Shared across websites...
Activity Tracking

- And between browsers (thanks LSO)
Activity Tracking

How to Escape?

- Flash 10.3+
- Firefox4+, IE8+, Chrome12+
- Use privacy mode
- Clear cookies
- Set browser to always clear cookies
- Use privacy-friendly search engines
Activity Tracking

Internet Options

General
- Home page: To create home page tabs, type each address on its own line.
  - http://www.consortiumlibrary.org/
- Browsing history: Delete temporary files, history, cookies, saved passwords, and web form information.
  - Delete browsing history on exit
- Search: Change search defaults.
  - Settings
- Tabs: Change how webpages are displayed in tabs.
  - Settings

Appearance
- Colors
- Languages
- Fonts
- Accessibility

Delete Browsing History

- Preserve Favorites website data: Keep cookies and temporary Internet files that enable your favorite websites to retain preferences and display faster.
- Temporary Internet files: Copies of webpages, images, and media that are saved for faster viewing.
- Cookies: Files stored on your computer by websites to save preferences such as login information.
- History: List of websites you have visited.
- Download History: List of files you have downloaded.
- Form data: Saved information that you have typed into forms.
- Passwords: Saved passwords that are automatically filled in when you sign in to a website you've previously visited.
- ActiveX Filtering and Tracking Protection data: A list of websites excluded from filtering, and data used by Tracking Protection to detect where websites might be automatically sharing details about your visit.
Activity Tracking

Duckduckgo.com

- Does not track
- Queries Yahoo & other indexes
- Uses Wikipedia for info boxes
Activity Tracking

Ixquick.com

• Does not track
• Queries Yahoo & other indexes
• Ranking based on # of engines
• Proxy link for anonymous page views
Activity Tracking

Startpage.com
- Does not track
- Queries Google anonymously
- Proxy link for anonymous page views
Geolocation

- Based on ISP or cellular/GPS
- Content localized
- Big trend for mobile apps
Geolocation

How to Escape?

- Set browser to not share location
- Change location setting in search engine
- Use proxy like startpage.com or Tor
Geolocation
Browser Detection

- Browser
- Version
- OS
- Mobile/desktop

Customized:
- Mobile websites
- Flash availability
- Downloads
- App stores
Browser Detection

How to Escape?

- Use multiple devices & browsers
- Change user agent in browser via developer tools or plugin
Best Practices

- Stay current with browser, Flash, etc.
- Use two browsers & set 2\textsuperscript{nd} browser to clear cookies on restart, etc.
- Learn to control the options in your favorite search engine