



The last word Google is dead?

APPARENTLY, AS STEVE HOLDEN DISCOVERS, GOOGLE IS DEAD; SO LONG LIVE, UM, THE NEXT THING, MAYBE.

If you're into all that social network stuff and follow bloggers or actually read the zillions of RSS feeds or tweets on Twitter that come your way, you'll already know that the latest buzz is that in our internetted lives we now rely on social networks more than Google. Correction, when it comes to finding something, we now *trust* our social networks more than Google.

According to Melbourne-based blogger Alex Campbell, a strategy and planning consultant at DTDigital-OgilvyInteractive, the reason for the change is the rapid expansion of our social networks, not just because they're rapidly expanding, but because we trust the like-minded souls who we find through them.

Google, on the other hand, can no longer be trusted, mainly because search engine optimisation aggregators have stopped helping Google to use PageRank to index sites better and started using Google's relevance algorithms to get more web traffic, so you end

up visiting sites based on irrelevant search results, finding unrelated, useless sites on the first page of a Google search because they've been stuffed with numerous keywords by unscrupulous search engine optimisers.

Apparently 80 per cent of us search using Google, a percentage figure touted by, you guessed it, search engine optimisers. Fewer than one per cent of us look beyond the first page of our Google searches, a percentage figure touted by, you guessed it, search engine optimisers. If you're not on that first page, forget it. Who says so? You guessed it, search engine optimisers.

The problem with this search engine optimisation game, of course, is that it's basically not possible for everyone to play, since it's not possible for every site to get onto that first search page where 99 per cent of us stop searching – unless Google decided to make it a very, very big page. Mind you, the fact that it's not possible for everyone to play the game is a good problem. It would

be terrible if every site could get onto that first search page.

As Campbell puts it, 'There was a time when Google was really good at showing the most useful results; I think that this time has passed.'

The reason, and Campbell should know because he's a blogger, is that the flow of information has changed. 'In times past, I was always seeking out information through Google search. Now,' he explains, 'the vast majority of the information I am interested in comes to me, rather than me having to go out and find it. Social networks such as Twitter and Tumblr are excellent examples of this. By choosing who to follow, each individual can create their own ideal flow of information that contains exactly what they are interested in.'

The amazing thing is that even for a techno troglodyte like me, this is true. Heck, that's how I came across Campbell's blog in the first place. Mind you, I've used Google to check out search engine optimisation, Google's PageRank, stuff about the percentages of us who use Google, the percentages that look beyond the first page of our Google searches, what RSS stands for – it's 'really simple syndication,' or 'rich site summary,' if you don't want your technohow to sound really simple – and even whether I properly qualify as a techno troglodyte. I do, by the way. I still use Google.

To paraphrase Mark Twain, rumours of Google's death have been greatly exaggerated. It's worth pointing out, mind you, that what he really wrote was 'This report of my death was an exaggeration.' I found that out by googling, and reached Quiddity, a search engine optimisation blog. 

This month's Last Word was written following extensive use of Google by Steve Holden, Editor of Teacher, and the 2008 highly commended winner in the Best Columnist category of the Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards for the Last Word.

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