



Volume 2, Issue 2, February 2012

ISSN: 2277 128X

International Journal of Advanced Research in Computer Science and Software Engineering

Research Paper

Available online at: www.ijarcse.com

Social Search: A blend of regular search and search using social connections

Ankit Dhamija

Assistant Professor, IT Department
Institution of Innovation in Technology & Management
New Delhi, GGSIP University

Deepika Dhamija

Assistant Professor, IT Department
Institution of Innovation in Technology &
Management, New Delhi, GGSIP University

Abstract--Searching on the web in today's world is a very pleasant experience, with search engines bombarding their users with a lot of efficient search shortcuts, keywords and parameters. No doubt this has been a great help to the web surfers and particularly to those who are novice to searching. They are now able to find their desired data by spending very less time sitting on the computer. But, even after offering so much search functionality, the search engines are continuously working towards improving the search experience. The latest that they had added is to present to the searcher, the normal search results as well as the results from their online contacts, friends. The idea is very simple: to reduce the search time of users by presenting them the results of their queries which are from all over the world plus the responses to that query given by the searcher's social online contacts. This is because the content from friends is sometimes more useful than content from any unknown person. This paper focuses on the relevancy of social search engines and find reasons as to whether they are really useful or are they just increasing the complexity in the minds of web surfers.

Keywords: Social, social search, social connections, search engines.

I. INTRODUCTION

Social search is a relatively new concept when compared with some other internet features. It is a type of online search that includes the results posted by our social connections on various websites such as twitter, facebook, linkedIn, friendfeed etc, apart from the normal search results produced by the search engine. If we use social search, we'll have the choice of selecting a known link posted by one of our known person or friend or a relatively unknown link posted by an unknown person. When social search is used, we can see friend's photos, their blogs, and comments along with ordinary search engine results.

II. EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL SEARCH: SOCIAL NETWORKS

The primary reason behind the emergence of social search is the social networks. Social networks are the networks that got created on the web, thanks to a number of social networking websites. People connected with each other through these websites, started sharing information on various issues and thus these networks grew. So as these social networks grew, the necessity of social search started to felt. Search engines thought it would be great to allow people see what their friends think about a particular thing. Might be the searcher gets what he wants to find from these posts. Due to this idea, search engines started to take further steps to create social search engines. A lot of companies are using social search web systems today such as Google, Bing, Wink, Scour, Delver and a lot more.

One more reason for emergence of social search is due to the fact that the social and search people have not been very friendly till now. The social people see

search ones as a bonus or an extra thing they have got and the search people see socials as something that can be linked together. Search is to find something and being social means that we have got that thing i.e. reached to the destination. But now, things are changing and search engines are moving towards a new type of social search.

III. SOCIAL SEARCH FUNCTIONALITY

The functioning of social search is totally dependent on how the search engines communicate with social networking sites. This is because it is these social networks that are to be mingled with the search engine's database. The search engine decides where to put this functionality; generally it is put under each individual user's profile page. The user after logging on to his account specifies that from which social networks the contacts are to be imported. There may be a number of social networks from which the contacts needs to be imported. The user has to specify one by one the name of each social networking site on which he has contacts.

When this task is completed, the user's search engine account is connected with his social networking websites contacts list. Now the user can select from all these contacts as to which friend's posts he wants to see in the search results and whom to left.

After done with it, user has to just save his profile and this is it. Now the next time he will search something using that search engine, he will have results or links from his own social circle.

IV. AN EXAMPLE

Let us consider an example to understand how social search is done. In this example, I had taken google as our search engine. I assume that we have already added the contacts to the user's google profile from various social networking websites like facebook, twitter and friendfeed. Before starting the search, the searcher must be logged in from his search engine's account. In our case, the searcher must be logged on from his google account. Let us divide this process in some steps to get a clear understanding of the example:



Suppose we want to see the results for "new Zealand", we type the search keyword in google search box and click the "Google search" button.

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[Bloomberg - 113 related articles >](#)
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[Results from people in your social circle for new zealand](#)

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[Jeremy Ginsberg](#) - connected via Gmail
new zealand - home > photography > **new zealand**. Doubtful Sound 14 photos. Routeburn Track 14 photos. Milford Track 12 photos. The Catlins 13 photos ...
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New Zealand - by Carolyn Bain, George Dunford - 772 pages
New Zealand - its present condition, prospects ... - by E. Brown Filton - 364 pages
New Zealand: being a narrative of travels and ... - by Joel Samuel Polack

2.The search engine displays results as it normally does.

[BlackBerry's 26 Advantages over iPhone -- Seeking Alpha](#)
Aug 10, 2009 ... For the casual observer, these iPhone advantages are very compelling when comparing it to its main rival to date, the BlackBerry ...
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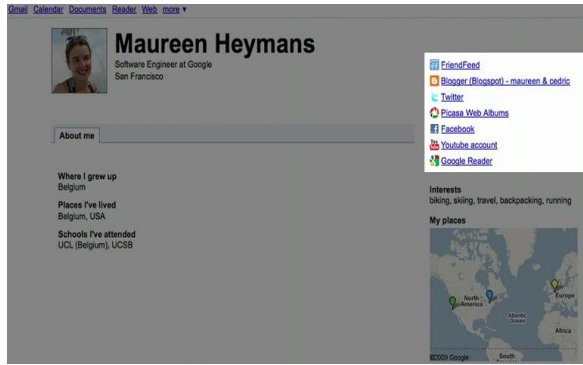
[Results from people in your social circle for Iphone BlackBerry](#)

[Traded in my BlackBerry for an iPhone - Paul Haahr's Blog](#)
[Paul Haahr](#) - connected via friendfeed.com
Despite my original plan, I was going to stick with my BlackBerry, at least until there was a physical keyboard on the iPhone and, ...
paulhaahr.com/blog/2008-06-09-traded-in-my-blackberry-for-an-iphone

[Neha Narula: Productivity](#)
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I have an iPhone which I love, but I also believe that paper is a very ... solely use a Palm/iPhone BlackBerry for entering information. ...
transientneha.blogspot.com/2009/02/productivity-pom.html
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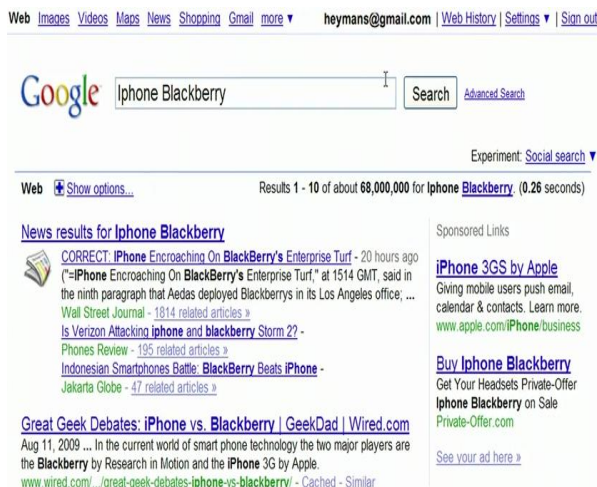
[Blog posts about Iphone BlackBerry](#)

As we scroll down the search results, near the bottom of this search page, we will find a category of search results titled "results from people in your social circle for new Zealand". And below this title, we are presented with a list of results from our social contacts that google had taken from various social networking websites on which that particular user has an account.



The above picture is of the user or searcher's google profile. As discussed above in functionality part, the user first has to create a profile on the search engine and import the contacts. The highlighted part in above picture is a list of social networking websites on which this user is registered.

V. ANOTHER EXAMPLE



The above two pictures shows another example. The keyword to search is "iphone blackberry". First, the results are produced as normal and at the bottom of page, the results from people in user's social circle are displayed. A friend "paul haahr" is connected via friendfeed.com and he had posted his review about iphone blackberry some time ago. So google is able to find this result. Now the user can make his decision in a better way because now he has the opinion of a person to whom he knows. So, this is how a search engine uses social search.

VI. ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL SEARCH

Personal, quick and shorter way: First of all, social search is a kind of classifying search results especially for you. This is a great benefit of social

search. You can reach to the things you look for quickly and with a short way.

Safe content: The results given with social search are much more related with the content you look for. The sources given with social search are generally safe as you know the connections, links and contacts.

Current results: Social search gives more current results because life goes on the Internet and you can follow the latest things related with your links and contacts.

Relevant: The relevance is increased because each result has been selected by users.

Human judgment: The introduction of 'human judgment' suggests that each web page has been viewed and endorsed by one or more people, and they have concluded it is relevant and worthy of being shared with others using human techniques that go beyond the computer's current ability to analyze a web page.

VII. CONCERNS REGARDING SOCIAL SEARCH

1. Spam Risk: There is a risk that some users could insert search spam directly into the search engine because users can directly add results to a social search engine. Elimination or prevention of this spam would require the ability to detect the validity of a user's contribution, such as whether it agrees with other trusted users.

Time consuming: "The Long Tail" of search is a concept that there are so many unique searches conducted that most searches, while valid, are performed very infrequently. A search engine that relied on users filling in all the searches would be at a disadvantage to one that used machines to crawl and index the entire web.

Incomplete information: Information from social resources may not be as complete or thorough as information stored in large search engine databases. This is an issue of scale and scope. A social search only solution will lack either the scale or the scope that a Google search can provide.

Less knowledgeable contacts: a searcher may not have knowledgeable or available contacts for a given query. In these circumstances, passively receiving social recommendations may be a good solution

Depends on type of query: social inputs won't be the right solution for every user query. Certain questions are likely to be improved by social search (experience-, opinion-based, and tacit information)

Open-ended, exploratory queries may benefit from social inputs, simple navigational ones may not.

False information: Some people can end up submitting duplicate stories and content on different social bookmarking sites. Hence the overall user experience can become negative.

Tagging issues: Lack of a controlled vocabulary and the ambiguity of language (orange = fruit or orange = color?) gives folksonomies some problems that taxonomies don't have.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, social search is a great help to searchers in finding what they actually want on the web but looking at the concerning factors of social search, it is concluded that social search is still in its early days as current social search tools used are very simple, presenting solutions to simple algorithmic problems instead of to user problems, they may be working on the wrong questions. The most important role of social search in the foreseeable future will probably be organizing non-text content like images and movies.

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