

Google drops background images on homepage amid outcry (Update)

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Google spruced up its homepage with images from artists, sculptors and photographers on Thursday, but dropped the feature after drawing the ire of users clamoring for the normally blank background.

The rotating images designed to show off a new feature that lets users personalize their wallpaper originally were intended to be on display on the Google.com homepages of users around the world for 24 hours.

But Google returned to its plain white background prematurely because many users believed the change was permanent.

"We had planned to run an explanation of the showcase alongside it in the form of a link on our homepage," Marissa Mayer, Google's vice president for search products and user experience, said in a blog post.

"Due to a bug, the explanatory link did not appear for most users," she said. "As a result, many people thought we had permanently changed our homepage, so we decided to stop today's series early."

Visitors to Google.com on Thursday morning were greeted with photos from National Geographic and Yann Arthus-Bertrand and images of the works of Dale Chihuly, Jeff Koons, Tom Otterness, Polly Apfelbaum, Kengo Kuma, Kwon, Ki-soo and Tord Boontje.

Users who wanted to return to the "classic" Google white background found that they were unable to do so, however, and in addition were being forced to create a Google account to add a new image.

"Remove Google background" was one of the top 10 "hot searches" on Google itself on Thursday, and criticism of the background images was flying fast and furious on Twitter.

Some Twitter users accused Google of copying Microsoft's search engine Bing, which has featured a different background image every day since it launched in June, and the US software giant itself poked fun at its rival.

Microsoft Europe, in a message on its Twitter feed @MSEurope, said: "We've lost a background image, if found please return to Bing.com."

"Hey Google, if I wanted a background image I would have gone to Bing," wrote Twitter user @jcready.

"A sad day for Googlers. Google has added -- nay, forced -- a

background image on us," wrote @michael trollan.

"Oh Google what have you done! Why?!?" wrote @PaulOBrien.

Google has steadfastly refused offers to put outside advertising on the homepage featuring its search box in a bid to maintain its spare look, and Thursday's move surprised a number of observers of the Internet giant.

Mike Elgan, writing at IT World.com, compared it to Coca-Cola's ill-fated 1985 decision to revise its famous formula, to the ire of millions of customers who said they preferred the taste of the original soft drink.

"Today's Bing-wanna-be stunt feels like the introduction of 'New Coke,'" he said.

More information: Google blog post explaining the change:
googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/06/freeze-frame.html

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