

Google unveils faster Internet search (Update 2)

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Members of the media and invited guests use the new Google Instant during a special launch event in San Francisco, California. Google is giving Web users the thrill of speed with a new feature that displays suggested links as fast as a person can type.

Internet powerhouse Google is giving Web searchers the thrill of speed with a turbo-charged engine that displays suggested Web links as fast as a person can type.

After two days of teasingly tinkering with the Google logo, or "doodle," atop its home page, the California company ended the mystery Wednesday by unveiling "Google Instant" -- a zippier route to Web search results.

As users type in a query, the Google search box suggests terms and

shows results for the top suggestion.

"Google Instant actually gets queries and gives you search results as you type and streams those results to your computer," Google vice president of search products and user experience Marissa Mayer said.

"We are actually predicting what query you are likely to do and giving you results for that. There is actually a psychic element to it," Mayer said at a press event in the San Francisco Museum of Art.

Instant began rolling out Wednesday in the United States and would expand to Britain, France, Germany, Russia and three other countries during the course of the coming week, according to Mayer.

"We are really excited about what Google Instant could mean in terms of the evolution of search," she said, describing it as "a quantum leap forward" in search.

Google is putting finishing touches on a version of Instant for smartphones and other mobile devices and should release it in the next several months, according to Mayer.

"I think this is a piece of an ever-changing landscape of computing," said Google co-founder Sergey Brin. "Things coming out in the next decade from Google and other companies will really change the way we do computing."

Brin joked that he has started toying with saying "Google wants to be the third half of your brain."

As queries are typed, "auto-complete" software developed by Google engineers tries to predict the subjects of searches.

For example, when someone in Washington types the letter h in Google's search line, the words Hotmail, Hulu and Home Depot immediately appear in a drop-down box. Continue writing "he," and those words are replaced with Hertz and Hershey Park.

The suggested links vary according to user location.

"You have to truly use Google and see for yourself to understand the power," Google Instant director of product management Johanna Wright said.

Brin credited software innovations in-house and faster, cheaper computer chips with making it possible for Google data centers to manage the leap in the amount of data handled by turning each search into an ever-evolving query.

"We did have to spend a lot more computer power on it, and it is really thanks to all of those advances in semiconductors and multi-core processors that we can do this," Brin said.

The new tool shaves seconds off searches at Google, which is used by more than a billion people monthly, and prides itself on the speed with which it finds what people seek on the Internet.

Search Engine Land website editor Danny Sullivan said Instant promised to add an "Oh wow!" effect to using the world's most popular search engine.

"But it might also be annoying when it doesn't get things right," Sullivan said. "I also think it wouldn't be that hard for competitors to copy."

The Instant launch came shortly after Microsoft's rival search engine Bing began handling online queries at Yahoo! Web pages in an alliance

aimed at taking on Google.

"We think it is a great differentiator; search is going to be easier and more fun on Google," Mayer told AFP.

"We are really happy with how well this sets us apart from the competition."

Matt Rosoff of private analyst firm Directions On Microsoft doubted that Instant would make much difference in the battle for Internet search market share.

"It's a nice improvement, but I can't see it really changing the search game a lot," Rosoff said.

"It is sort of the same problem Bing has been facing: many people are really happy with their Google results and it is hard to improve on that."

Ripple effects of Instant are expected to be felt by websites that tailor designs or content to rank high in Google query results in a tactic called "search engine optimization."

"With Instant, people might not be as prone to finish a query and change search patterns," Rosoff said.

"It is a big change for companies trying to get listed in search results. Lots of companies make or lose millions of dollars based on search engine optimization and their Google strategy."

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