

Google cranks up search speeds with images, voice (Update)

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Google engineers also shaved precious seconds off the time it takes for Web pages to display after links are clicked on in search results.

"We at Google will not be happy until we make the Web as easy to flip through as a magazine," Google fellow Amit Singhal said at an "Inside Search" event in San Francisco.

"We measure every millisecond," he said. "The time it takes Google to return a result is negligible compared to how long it takes the user to

enter the query."

On the other end of the search, it takes an average of five seconds for a Web page to load once a person has clicked on a link listed in query results, according to Singhal.

Members of Google's search team rolled out the California-based firm's latest innovations crafted to deliver the knowledge being sought "in the blink of an eye."

Google enhancements spanned all gadgets from desktops using Chrome software to browse the Internet to the latest Android-powered smartphones or tablet computers.

"In mobile, we are always thinking about how we can make the process of getting those results easier," said Google mobile engineering director Scott Huffman.

Google added icons to the bottom of mobile search pages that let people do common searches such as for restaurants, cafes, or bars with a single click instead of having to type in queries.

Google also began letting people build queries with simple "plus" buttons and providing instant previews of search results pages that could be glimpsed with simple swipes of a finger on a touchscreen.

Huffman announced that a Google Goggles feature allowing people with mobile devices to search using pictures now translates languages in photos of text, with Russian added to the list.

Google was taking innovations in mobile and applying them to desktop computers with the addition of voice and image search capabilities, according to search director of product management Johanna Wright.

"Mobile has opened a world of possibilities," Wright said.

The option to speak searches was represented by a microphone icon on the Google search page.

Spoken search queries on Google-powered mobile gadgets have grown six-fold in the past year, according to Mike Cohen, manager of the California firm's speech technology team.

"We are trying to change the user's mental model to make speaking search a basic habit," Cohen said. "Accuracy, ubiquity...it needs to be in every language, on every device."

A camera icon could be clicked to trigger image searches and pictures "dropped and dragged" into search boxes, Cohen said.

Google was also rolling out an "Instant Pages" feature crafted to predict which link a searcher is likely to choose and have that Web page pre-loaded for display as soon as it is clicked.

"Sometimes, when you click on a result the page will be just there instantaneously," Singhal said of the feature. "This is amazing."

Google also extended its "Instant" results to image search, making pages of pictures available as fast as one could type. Google already provides instant results for standard searches.

"Search is what we are good at," said Alan Eustace, whose new role at Google is director of knowledge.

Co-founder and chief executive Larry Page sees online search as a quest for knowledge instead of a simple hunt for data, according to Eustace.

"He thinks Google should understand how things are related," Eustace said of Page, who took the reins of the company early this year.

"He wants us to know more rather than just find better," Eustace continued. "I think his view is Google should be much better at understanding the world."

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