

Social-networking rivals offer workaround for Google social search

January 24 2012, By Jeremy C. Owens

Google's social-networking rivals have apparently teamed up to offer users a tool that allows them to avoid the integration of Google's core search business and Google+.

The "bookmarklet," a free browser add-on available at www.focusontheuser.org, instead will use Google's own algorithms to show a search result's most popular social-networking destination. That means a Facebook or [Twitter](#) account that is used more often and has more [followers](#) than a [Google+](#) profile is likely to show up.

The workaround avoids Google's recent major change to its core [search business](#), which it dubbed Search Plus Your World. A user signed in to a Google account now receives personalized results based on that user's network of friends - including personal photos, [status updates](#) and other content shared on Google+, the Mountain View, Calif., company's new social networking feature, or Google's photo-sharing service, Picasa.

According to the Focus on the User website, the downloadable add-on was developed by Facebook, Twitter and [MySpace](#) engineers, who say they wanted to answer one question: "How much better would [social search](#) be if Google surfaced results from all across the Web?"

Google's newest foray into [social networking](#) debuted in June on an invitation-only basis, then opened its doors to all users and eventually entities, such as companies. Since then, it has rapidly added users, with Google executives announcing during the company's earnings report last

week that 90 million users now have profiles on the social network.

When Google announced it was going to integrate Google+ content into its industry-dominating search engine, some in the industry squawked that the practice was unfair, led by Twitter, which publicly stated the practice would hurt people searching for breaking news events.

"We're concerned that as a result of Google's changes, finding this information will be much harder for everyone. We think that's bad for people, publishers, news organizations and Twitter users," the San Francisco microblogging service said in a written statement.

Facebook has never publicly voiced opposition to Google's new search algorithms, but a blog post from Wired co-founder John Battelle states that the workaround was actually developed by Facebook product director Blake Ross, who helped develop Mozilla's Firefox Web browser. Battelle writes that Ross showed him the tool last week and asked him not to share the news until Ross had time to gauge the reaction of Facebook management, lawyers and other social networks.

[Facebook](#) did not immediately respond to a request for verification of Battelle's account nor confirmation that it has a hand in the new offering. Twitter confirmed its engineers contributed to the project; Google did not immediately respond to an email request for comment.

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