

# Facebook sets engineers to work on grown-up search

March 31 2012, by Nancy Owano

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Facebook is planning to get serious about its search engine. Sources tipped off reporters this week about Facebook plans to upgrade its search engine and run toward the money that can be gained from optimized search. Tongues are wagging about how, not when, and story headlines are pairing the Facebook plan with thoughts about Google, namely what the search surge can mean as a challenge to Google. Numerous sites that watch both Google and Facebook marvel at the two companies' opposite moves; of Google moving toward social while Facebook moving toward search.

Comparing the two giants as competing Goliaths is also tempting considering the fact that [Facebook](#) called in former Google engineer Lars Rasmussen, the co-founder of Google Maps, to work on its freshened-search project. (Rasmussen left Google in 2010 to work for Facebook.)

The news was bared this week in a [report](#) from *Bloomberg Businessweek*, in which people familiar with the project said Facebook gave the green light to a team of 24 to 25 engineers to enrich and refine the search function.

Citing more confirmation of Facebook's foray into search, news sites pointed to a photograph posted by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg on his Facebook wall, showing his desk and laptop display with an image of a Facebook page with a large white box. They said the box may be an image of the company's prototype search display.

But why should a social site go to so much trouble fixing the [search engine](#)? After all, Facebook's search box can do a number of tasks including finding other members. General Web search results are powered by the Bing search engine from Microsoft. Some Facebook users say there is lots of room for improvement, however, in sifting through content.

*Bloomberg Businessweek* said that a Facebook search for "Sonoma winery" resulted in a disorganized yield of wineries, people who work at wineries, unrelated banner ads, and a page for a wine-tasting iPhone app.

Being able to carry a well-structured search engine is not only a way to please users but also a way to ensure monetization. As *The Register* less delicately [put it](#), "Facebook - ahead of its IPO - is trying to get its advertising house in order because, like Google, that's where it makes its bucks."

What's more, one observer described Facebook's unique search-engine potential as being able to cropdust the Web with 'Like' buttons. "Facebook has a huge set of data and information curated by all of us," wrote Drew Olanoff in *The Next Web*.

Nonetheless, Google is not about to relax in maintaining search-engine supremacy. Google is working on a next-generation search where people can get answers to queries rather than just seeing Web links. Earlier this month, a report in *The Wall Street Journal* said that over the next few months, Google will present more facts and direct [answers](#) to queries at the top of the search-results page. People searching for Lake Tahoe would see key attributes about the lake, such as location, altitude, average temperature or salt content. This would be in contrast to getting just links to a visitor bureau, a Wikipedia page, and link to a map. The article noted that for a more complex question asking for the ten largest lakes in California, [Google](#) might provide the answer instead of just links to other sites.

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