

# Google expands personalized search for desktops and mobile

August 16 2013, by Brandon Bailey

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Are you still scrolling through your email just to locate the particulars of an airline reservation or an online purchase you made weeks ago? That's so 2012.

Google said Wednesday that most U.S.-based users of its search service soon will be able to retrieve useful information from their other Google services, such as Gmail or Calendar, by typing or speaking a conversational question such as "Is my flight on time?" or "Show me my purchases."

The Internet giant, which has been testing different aspects of the service for the past year, said it will start answering such conversational queries for most people in the United States who use the Google search app on an Apple or Android smartphone or tablet or a personal computer running Google's Chrome browser.

The move is part of a broader Google effort to develop useful services that can be operated through conversational, [spoken commands](#) - like the celebrated computer on "Star Trek." While Google may be further along than most of its competitors, Gartner analyst Whit Andrews said other tech companies, including startups and giants like Apple and Microsoft, are working on related services.

That makes it "not only necessary but strategic" for Google to expand its capabilities if it wants to keep dominating the search business, Andrews added. "Siri is the scariest thing Google has seen since Facebook," he

said, referring to Apple's online [personal assistant](#).

Google's new feature works by tapping other Google services for [relevant data](#), including Calendar items or even photos from a Google+ account. It can retrieve airline information from a confirmation email saved in Gmail, and then get an updated flight status from the Internet. Anticipating [privacy concerns](#), Google said a user can only get personal information from his or her own account, and only when signed in. Users can opt out of the service.

For now, the service works with five categories of information - flight information, hotel and restaurant reservations, online purchases, calendar events and photos - but Google spokeswoman Roya Soleimani said the company will add more. "We're focusing on daily tasks that make your life a little bit easier," she said.

Google already performs a similar function on mobile devices with its Google Now service, which anticipates needs and tries to show relevant information without being asked. It's offered personalized search service for desktop users who enrolled in a "field test" program last year. Google also has been improving the conversational prowess of its speech technology, available for Chrome users since May.

In a blog post, Google product manager Roy Livne said the service now can field variations on a question such as, "What are my plans for tomorrow?" and show a list of events from a person's calendar as well as email confirmations from hotels, restaurants or airlines.

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