

Microsoft updates Bing search to highlight reputable results

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Microsoft on Wednesday rolled out new features on its Bing search engine powered by artificial intelligence, including one that summarizes the two opposing sides of contentious questions, and another that measures how many reputable sources are behind a given answer.

Tired of delivering misleading information when their algorithms are gamed by trolls and purveyors of fake news, Microsoft and its tech-company rivals have been going out of their way to show they can be purveyors of good information—either by using better algorithms or hiring more human moderators.

Microsoft is also trying to distinguish its 2nd-place [search engine](#) from long-dominant Google and position itself as an innovator in finding real-world applications for the latest advances in [artificial intelligence](#).

"As a search engine we have a responsibility to provide answers that are comprehensive and objective," said Jordi Ribas, Microsoft's corporate vice president for AI products.

Bing's new capabilities are designed to give users more confidence that an [answer](#) is correct and save them time so they don't have to click through multiple links to validate it themselves.

"You could be asking, 'Is coffee good for you?' We know that there are no good answers for that," Ribas said. But the new search features side-by-side opposing perspectives. One source emphasizes coffee's ability to

increase metabolism and another shows it can raise blood pressure. Similar questions can also be asked on more sensitive topics, such as whether the death penalty is a good idea.

On more complicated questions—is there a god? - Bing doesn't have enough confidence to provide a pro-con perspective. But on questions that involve numbers, it boils information down into digestible doses. Iraq, for instance, is described as "about equal to the size of California."

Search engines have evolved since Google took the lead at the turn of the 21st century, when rankings were based on "link analysis" that assigned credibility to sites based on how many other sites linked to them. As machines get better at reading and summarizing paragraphs, users expect not just a list of links but a quick and authoritative answer, said Harry Shum, who leads Microsoft's 8,000-person research and AI division. To test its technology, the company has compared its machine-reading skills to the verbal score on the SAT.

"We are not at 800 yet, but we bypassed President Bush a long time ago," Shum jokes.

The demand for more sophisticated searches has also grown as people have moved from typing questions to voicing them on the road or in their kitchen.

"If you use Bing or Google nowadays you recognize that more and more often you'll see direct answers on the top of search result pages," Shum said. "We're getting to the point that for probably about 10 percent of those queries we'll see answers."

Shum is hesitant to over-promise Bing's [new features](#) as an antidote to the misinformation flooding the internet.

"At the end of the day, people have their own judgments," he said.

The search engine features were announced along with updates to Microsoft's voice assistant Cortana and a new [search](#) partnership with the popular online forum Reddit.

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