

# Bing upgrades draw upon Facebook, other partners (Update)

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(AP) -- Microsoft Corp. is hoping its Bing search engine can gain more ground on Google with a little more help from Facebook and its other Internet friends.

As part of an extensive upgrade announced Wednesday, Bing will feature more recommendations and other information from people's social circles on Facebook to help distinguish its results from Google's.

Bing also is teaming up with several other Internet companies to make it easier to complete a variety of tasks, such as buying tickets to a sporting event or making reservations at a restaurant, on its site.

The changes, which will start appearing during the next few weeks, are unlikely to shift the balance of power in the lucrative search market any time soon. Google Inc. ended November with a 66 percent share of the U.S. search market while Bing remained a distant third at just under 12 percent, according to the research firm comScore Inc. Bing recently started to power Yahoo's U.S. search engine, whose 16 percent share ranks second to Google.

Despite the huge gap, Microsoft has been encouraged by the progress it has made since it retooled its search engine and rebranded it as Bing in June 2009. Bing has about 90 million regular users now, up from 27 million when it made its debut, according to Satya Nadella, a senior vice president in Microsoft's online services division.

Some of the new features unveiled Wednesday provided a glimpse at how Microsoft hopes to capitalize on a competitive advantage that it gained in October when Facebook agreed to give Bing greater access to the 500 million people who have set up accounts on its social network

Google Inc. still isn't able to compile the same volume of Facebook information in its search index. Microsoft has been chummy with Facebook and its founder, Mark Zuckerberg, since it paid \$240 million for a 1.6 percent stake in the privately held company three years ago.

Microsoft believes its Facebook relationship will become an increasingly important factor in the search market as people realize how helpful it is to see the recommendations of their friends when they're looking for information on the Web. The breadth of those recommendations is rapidly growing as people spend more time on Facebook and become more comfortable sharing their preferences.

In one upcoming change, if you are searching on Bing while signed into your Facebook account, some of the links listed in the results might include notation showing that one of your Facebook friends liked the website or a product.

Bing also will draw from Facebook when processing requests about people. In some instances, the results will show whether the Bing user making the search request shares any common Facebook friends with the person being researched.

Microsoft also is betting it can lure Web surfers away from Google by making Bing a one-stop shop for a range of common online activities. Toward that end, Bing has formed an alliance with a specialty search engine FanSnap to enable people to buy tickets from within the results page. It also is working with OpenTable Inc. to provide more convenient access to restaurant reservations.

A variety of other revisions are being made to Bing's image and mobile search.

Google also is constantly tweaking its search engine to make it faster and smarter. In the most dramatic change this year, Google in September started to display search results that change with each keystroke in the request box.

It's also trying to get better data about airline flights , a popular search topic, with a proposed \$700 million acquisition of travel technology vendor of ITA Software Inc.

Microsoft is among several companies pressing the U.S. Justice Department to block the ITA deal on the grounds that it would give Google too much control over online travel bookings. Google dismisses those complaints as misguided. The Justice Department isn't expected to complete its review of the deal until next year.

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