

Survey ranks Google highly despite privacy fears

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(AP) -- Google is almost everyone's favorite search engine, despite misgivings about data-collection and advertising practices that are widely seen as intrusive.

A survey released Friday by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found 83 percent of the respondents rated [Google](#) as their preferred [search engine](#). That was up from 47 percent in 2004, the last time that Pew gauged people's attitudes about Internet search engines.

Yahoo's search engine ranked a distant second at 6 percent, according to the latest numbers, down from 26 percent in 2004.

Google Inc. has turned its dominant position in Internet search into a gold mine. The company's Internet search engine is the hub of an advertising system that generated \$36.5 billion in revenue last year - up from \$3 billion in 2004.

But the Pew findings also indicate Google may be risking its popularity by trying to learn more about users in a quest to sell more advertising.

Nearly three-fourths of the survey participants said they don't want search engines to sift through their personal information to deliver results tailored to their individual interests. Google has been doing this more frequently since January when its search engine began to include personal information pulled from Google's social networking service, Plus.

More than two-thirds of those polled said they don't want to be targeted by customized ads because they don't want their Web surfing activities to be tracked and analyzed.

Google might be vulnerable to a backlash if its major rivals, including Yahoo Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Facebook Inc., didn't also collect [personal information](#) to help them aim their ads at the right audiences.

Like its rivals, Google believes a well-placed ad is appreciated by most Web surfers. To gain a better grasp on people's preferences, Google this month overhauled its privacy policy to enable the company to compile individual dossiers on its logged-in users' activities on more than 60 different services, including Internet search.

Pew took its survey of 2,253 adults before the March 1 revision to Google's privacy policy, but mostly after the company had announced its changes. The poll spanned Jan. 20 through Feb. 19. The changes were announced Jan. 24.

Google and its rivals say they offer a variety of tools to protect their privacy, including ways to erase their search histories. But only 38 percent of people are aware of these privacy-protection options, Pew found.

Whatever [privacy](#) fears might be nagging them, most people remain comfortable using search engines. Pew found 59 percent of Web surfers use a search engine at least once day, up from 29 percent in 2004.

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