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## “A shocking and horrible surprise”?

Reaction to Google’s new results page layout

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# 1. Google's New Layout

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

On 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2010 Google officially rolled out the latest update to their [search results page layout](#). Anyone using Google to search will now be offered a range of options to the left of their search results.

The overwhelming sentiment of opinions posted online seem to be extremely critical of Google for the move with people feeling that they've copied Bing's interface and pushed it on users who liked the simplicity of the previous interface. [Google's own support forum](#) is full of such comments, and features users describing the interface as "obnoxious", and a "shocking and horrible surprise". One user went so far as to claim Google have alienated their entire user base, which certainly seems to be the impression given by their support forum.

Over recent years the content shown in Google's search engine result pages (SERPs) has diversified, with video, maps and social media channels becoming increasingly common.

Google has made gradual tweaks to its design over time to help accommodate these changes, but the latest interface is intended to provide an even richer search experience and put more results at the users' fingertips.

The move to include additional information on the left of the screen is not new. Google have shown the search options panel in the left column since May 2009. At launch, this column offered a very limited set of options which was primarily utilized by power users and essentially escaped the notice of more casual users.

This is however the first time this space has been included in the default view; the previous version was an optional display which users could choose to show or hide.

From Google's point of view the new layout is still a work in progress. [Their blog states](#) "We're already testing additional refinements and we'll continue to listen to all of you as we work to continue making search better". It seems very likely that Google's fundamental functionality will remain intact and anyone searching on Google will now be shown the expanded range of search tools in the column to the left of the natural search results.

## 1.2 WHAT'S CHANGED

The changes are primarily to the layout and styling, most notably in the permanent presence of the expanded search options. The content is largely unchanged from the last version of the search options panel; however, some changes merit exploration.

When a search is carried out the results are listed by type (1). The default view is to list everything in the same way as previously, with the filters being used to narrow the results down where appropriate. The list of filters shown will vary depending on the search term used, with Google only displaying filters for types of content that are included in the main “Everything” results set. There’s also the ability to show more or fewer options as desired.



pet insurance

Search

About 38,800,000 results (0.27 seconds) #

[Advanced search](#)

## Everything

[Images](#)[Videos](#)[Maps](#)[News](#)[Books](#)[Blogs](#)[Updates](#)[Discussions](#)[Fewer](#)

## The web

[Pages from the UK](#)

## Any time

[Latest](#)[Past 24 hours](#)[Past week](#)[Past month](#)[Past year](#)[Custom range...](#)

## Standard view

[Related searches](#)[Wonder wheel](#)[Timeline](#)

## Standard results

[Sites with images](#)[Fewer shopping sites](#)[More shopping sites](#)[Page previews](#)[Translated search](#)[Fewer search tools](#)

1

**Pet Insurance - 30% Off**

Sponsored links

[MoreThan.com/Pet-Insurance](#)

MORE TH&gt;N Covers Up to £7,000 Vet Fees. Buy Online and Get 30% Off!

**Go Compare Pet Insurance**[www.gocompare.com/pet-insurance](#)Get the cover your **Pet** deserves, Compare & Quote at GoCompare Now!**Sainsbury's Pet Insurance**[www.sainsburysbank.co.uk](#)Award Winning **Pet** Cover & Up To £7,500 Vets Fees Per Condition!**Pet Plan**Offering horse, cat, rabbit and dog **insurance** in the United Kingdom. **Pet** care tips.[Dog Insurance](#) - [Contact us](#) - [Cat Insurance](#) - [Find a Pet](#)[www.petplan.co.uk/](#) - [Similar](#)**Pet Insurance >> Get the Cover Your Pet Deserves | Gocompare.com**The UK's first true online **pet insurance** comparison service, with quotes for dogs and cats. Compare now and get the cover your pet deserves![www.gocompare.com/pet-insurance/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)**Pet Insurance - Cheap Cat And Dog Insurance For UK Pets**Buy **pet insurance** online. For dog or cat insurance quotes call 0844 5570300. Animal Friends Insurance is the ethical UK pet healthcare insurance company.[www.animalfriends.org.uk/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

2

**Pet insurance - Protect your pet from just £3.92 a month with ASDA**Asda **Pet Insurance** starts from just £3.92 a month. 10% discount for 2 or more pets. Get a quote and compare us with confidence![www.asdafinance.com > Insurance](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)**Pet Insurance | Find Cheap Pet Insurance Quotes Online ...**Compare cheap **pet insurance** quotes with moneysupermarket.com. Search for the cheapest **pet** health insurance cover for your cat or dog from leading UK ...[Pet Insurance](#) - [Cat insurance](#) - [Rabbit Insurance](#) - [Horse Insurance](#)[moneysupermarket.com/pet-insurance/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

3

**Pet Insurance UK | Cheap Pet Insurance Quotes Online | MORE TH>N**Buy **Pet Insurance** online from MORE TH>N and get a 30% discount! Get an instant online quote today and save money with cheap pet cover.[www.morethan.com/Pages/Products/Pet/PetHomepage.aspx](#) - [Cached](#)**Pet Insurance - Online Pet Insurance Quotes - M&S Money UK**Insure your family pet with **pet insurance** from M&S Money. M&S Money, offer **pet insurance** for a range of pet types including cat and dog insurance.[money.marksandspencer.com/insurance/pet-insurance/overview/](#) - [Cached](#) - [Similar](#)

Filtering by date also now appears in the left hand navigation (2). [Google says](#) that publication date for a page is estimated “using information such as the date when Google first indexed the page”. The filter appears to be most effective for blogs and news types. This is reflected by the ability to filter on pages published for these types as recently as the last 10 minutes.

There are some additional search tools at the bottom of the navigation (3). These include:

- The related search tab and the Wonder Wheel, both of which give users an additional method of browsing information by widening out their search terms to include similar or related terms.
- The ability to see previews of the website incorporated into results and images from websites displayed along with the results to give a quick snapshot of the sites' content.

- The ability to display more or fewer shopping results is also displayed in this section, clicking ‘fewer shopping sites’ removes shopping results from the larger ecommerce stores like Amazon and eBay. Selecting ‘more shopping sites’ increases the amount of product information displayed and includes details like pricing where appropriate and available.
- The timeline tool gives users a way to see information relating to a particular search term over time. Searching for “Albert Einstein” for example gives you “web pages about Albert Einstein on a timeline that illustrates the history of Albert Einstein’s life”, as follows:

**Google**

About 235,000 results (0.28 seconds) [Advanced search](#)

**Everything**

- News
- Images
- Books
- More

**The web**

Pages from the UK

**Any time**

- Latest
- Past 24 hours
- Past week
- Past month
- Past year
- Custom range...

Standard view

Related searches

Wonder wheel

**Timeline**

**Standard results**

- Sites with images
- Fewer shopping sites
- More shopping sites
- Page previews
- Translated search
- Reset tools

**Timeline**

1860-2010 [Search other dates](#)

**1879** Mar 14, 1879 - Where was **Albert Einstein** born and raised **Albert Einstein** was born at Ulm, in Württemberg, [Germany](#), on **March 14, 1879**. ... 2 days ago, 12:42pm | Asked 23 times | in [Historic Figures](#). When did **albert einstein** die **Albert Einstein**, the German-born ...  
[Show more](#)  
 From [Einstein 1879 | ChaCha Answers](#) - Related web pages  
[www.chacha.com/topic/einstein-1879](http://www.chacha.com/topic/einstein-1879)

**1904** May 14, 1904 - On **May 14, 1904**, Einstein's first son [Hans Albert Einstein](#) was born.  
[Show more](#)  
 From [Albert Einstein's Birthday](#) - Related web pages  
[web.visionlearning.com/events...](http://web.visionlearning.com/events...)

**1905** 1905 - In the year **1905**, Nobel physicist, **Albert Einstein**, published his  $E=mc^2$  EQUATION, which opened the door to THE WORLD OF THE PROTON GENIE. But, nobody looked or listened except the Energy Cartel, which stood to lose its wealth and power if ...  
[Show more](#)  
 From [Think Progress » Bush Administration Announces Half-Baked Climate ...](#)  
[thinkprogress.org/2006/09/20/climate-change-plan/](http://thinkprogress.org/2006/09/20/climate-change-plan/)

1905 - In **1905**, **Albert Einstein** proposed that time is not absolute. Einstein claimed that the rate of flow of time depends on the motion of the clock. A second as measured by one clock corresponds to less than a second as measured by another clock in motion with respect ...  
[Show more](#)  
 From [Great Ideas in Physics](#) - Related web pages

## 2. What This Means for Online Business

### 2.1 REDUCED CLICKTHROUGH FOR STANDARD SEARCH RESULTS

The new Google interface makes it far more obvious to users that there are additional media types available. It seems inevitable that over time users will gradually start using this functionality to filter their results.

The “Universal Search” view of results continues to be the default setting and it seems unlikely that this will change. It is likely however that the increased prominence of the specific media types will result in a steady increase in the level of click-throughs for content such as blogs, news and videos.

Since Universal Search rolled out there has been increased emphasis on the importance of diversifying the types of content which comprise a website, and Google’s latest interface change should be seen as a compelling reason to continue in that strategic direction. Having an increased click-through rate to non-traditional webpage results also has implications for search engine optimisation. Site architecture (the way a site is semantically organized and structured) becomes more important than ever, as there’s now an increasing need to make sure all possible content gets indexed in order to match as many different types of search query as possible. Optimising a site’s architecture can help highlight important content and ensure that content ranks where appropriate.

As content is likely to be sourced from deeper into a website’s architecture, the importance of domain authority continues to grow. Where previously an SEO strategy might focus on ranking for specific pages, it’s becoming more important that a site ranks well for a variety of content types, something which can be achieved by increasing the domain’s authority.

Google’s update is encouraging brands already making good use of social media. Social media channels are receiving increasing prominence in search results, and this should only continue to trend upwards. Engaging in social media channels can be an effective way to diversify a site’s online portfolio and if done correctly can also have far-reaching natural search benefits.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure important content is not buried deep within the site architecture. Ideally, important content should not be more than 3 clicks away from the homepage.
- Ensure a site has a correctly configured and located XML Sitemap which is ideally dynamically updated every time site content is updated
- Add high quality links from a variety of high quality websites, varying anchor text and target page, making sure to include links to pages deep within the site architecture. This will help build domain authority as well as page authority
- Ensure brand visibility and popularity within the major social media channels. This can be achieved by actively participating on channels like Twitter and Facebook. Make sure to link any social media profile back to the main website and work to increase popularity of the profiles through active participation in discussions online.

## 2.2 INCREASE RELEVANCE ON DATE

Posting relevant fresh content has always been important for SEO but with the new interface change this is more important than ever. The ability to easily filter by time period on Google is likely to increase the click-through rate of the freshest content online at the expense of older content. Posting regular fresh content has always been seen as a good way to make sure a website regularly gets indexed but now it seems likely that fresh content will gradually play an even bigger role in overall search strategy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure that sites are updated with new content on a regular basis. The introduction of a news or blog section can be an effective method.
- Ensure Google indexes content as soon as possible after publication. A well configured, regularly updated XML sitemap is an effective way to achieve this.

## 2.3 GREATER EMPASHIS ON THE LONG TAIL

The new results page layout gives increased prominence to related searches and the Wonder Wheel. Users will rely less on their original queries and will start using the new tools as a means of quickly navigating deeper into their subject material.

There will be an increase in traffic to more specific or “long tail” search terms coupled with a gradual decrease in more generic subject terms. This places a greater importance on content held deeper within the website and therefore puts site navigation and domain authority higher up the list of priorities for SEO strategy. It also places greater emphasis on the need to understand a site’s target audience and make sure that content is produced to match their needs. Relying on a handful of broad search terms to drive traffic will be less and less effective over time.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Clarify the market-driving search terms and use them in content.
- Focus on adding more high quality content to the website in order to capture additional long tail searches
- Ensure good site architecture to make sure all content gets indexed.
- Increase domain authority by encouraging inbound links from quality websites.

## 2.4 TIME TO START TAKING BING SERIOUSLY?

Google is well established as the market leader in search with reports of their global market share [consistently placing them above 80%](#). They’ve been at the forefront of search for over a decade and their design has often been the model emulated by other search engines.

This recent change is significant in that Google wasn’t the first search engine to adopt this style of interface. While Google have been experimenting with design changes for [since at least 2005](#), both Yahoo and Bing have been using the left hand column of the screen in a similar way for [some time](#), with Bing being the first to adopt the layout in June 2009.

It is interesting that they chose to roll these changes out less than a year after Bing started using a [similar interface](#). There’s a feeling that the launch was somewhat rushed with Google’s own vice president of

search product and user experience, Marissa Mayer recently stating “While I wish we had gotten here sooner I’m excited to finally have it out”, and their official blog admitting that they’re “already testing additional refinements”. Given the widely reported [rise in popularity of Bing in the US](#) the launch feels like it’s been pushed through to try and prevent users leaving and moving over to Bing.

This has coincided with many webmasters reporting a drop in [click-through](#) from Google since the launch of the new interface which could indicate a move away from Google towards other search engines. This also seems to be further backed up by disgruntled users posting complaints on Google’s [forum](#) with longstanding Google users claiming that they’ve moved to other search engines as a result of the change.

Could this mean it’s time to start taking Bing seriously as a legitimate competitor to Google? Should companies start to pay greater attention to optimizing their websites for Bing? Bing has been seeing a [steady increase in market share](#) and their forthcoming deal with Yahoo! will only serve to expand their position. It’s too soon to tell if Bing will be a serious threat to Google’s dominant position, but the current evidence is indicating a strong backlash against Google.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- While initial signs suggest a drop in Google click-through it’s too early to know what the long term effects will. While we don’t anticipate a major change in market share there is sufficient evidence to suggest some move away from Google. Until we know how big this change is likely to be we would recommend paying close attention to analytics and any available market data.
- Don’t change anything relating to SEO strategy in the short term. The vast majority of SEO techniques that work for Google will also work for Bing so everything that currently delivers results should continue to deliver results for the foreseeable future. If the rise in Bing’s market share continues to increase in the long term we will recommend starting to pay closer attention to Bing in optimization efforts but for the time being Google should still remain the focus of SEO work carried out.