

Personalize me – Yahoo and its Googto Know You

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Some people like to personalize everything, mixing and matching from an enormous variety of options to suit their unique tastes. Others are not so fond of the concept of information personalization, fearing the trend will remove their ability to access the same options everyone else gets while trampling whatever sense of personal privacy they once held. Regardless of how consumers personally feel about the concepts of data mining and information personalization, it is now more of a modus operandi than it is a trend in marketing. The major search engines are adopting this method of operation with both Google and Yahoo announcing personalized search features in the past two weeks and MSN presenting information on one they are working on.

Early last week, Google introduced the beta version of My Search History. Requiring user registration, the feature records and displays your Google search history, making it accessible on any computer you might be working on. My Search History uses a calendar format showing what you searched for, where the searches took you, and the date and time of those searches. This information is stored by Google and is easily viewed by clicking a link added to the general search page at Google.com. Avni Shah from the My Search History team explained Google's motivation in a [blog posting](#) last Wednesday (April 20).

"How many times have you used Google to find an obscure funny website or fun facts about "The Wizard of Oz," but then got distracted by other web pages and tasks? I know - me too. Wouldn't it be great to find them again, and for that matter review all your Google searches over time? Which is exactly why we built [My Search History](#).

When you're signed in to your [Google Account](#) , you can use My Search History wherever you go. An additional bit of fun: try the handy calendar to check the level of your Google activity on a given day, or see related searches you've done over time. Look for the link in the upper right corner of your Google web search home page and results pages."

While the results gathered by My Search History do not affect general organic results, marketers expect Google to use the information to better determine which paid-ads to serve individual users. There is speculation that personalization could eventually affect placement of organic listings displaying Google AdSense however there is no actual evidence to suggest that will happen.

This week Yahoo responded with My Web, a slightly more powerful personal search history-recording tool. My Web provides a storage space for everything users choose to save while surfing Yahoo search results. An RSS feed will allow users to blog and distribute content from saved sites sharing notes, links and other information inputted by the user. My Web promotes a form of social networking giving individual users a personalized space to evaluate information saved in their searches. The space is built on the information My Web records while they move through Yahoo results.

In a posting to the [Ysearch Blog](#), Senior Product Manager Kevin Akira Lee wrote, "Today, we launched a 'My Web', a new personal search engine fully integrated with Yahoo! Search. My Web is based on a very simple principle - a search engine should enable you to define and use the information that's important to

you. Specifically, My Web enables you to find the information relevant to you, save it, share it, add your own notes to it, and easily find it again, whether it's three days or three months later.

The idea is a simple one – we provide a “Save” button on our search results, on the Yahoo! Toolbar (for both IE and Firefox), and, in the future, anywhere you might find useful info on the Web. When you hit the “Save” button, My Web grabs that page and makes a cached copy which is fully searchable. Anytime you need that page, all you need to do is search My Web. You can publish your My Web links via RSS and, of course, there's an API for My Web published on YSDN.”

My Web opens more doors for search marketers and advertisers. Yahoo Search Marketing is working to integrate their various features such as Yahoo360, Instant Messenger, YahooMail, etc, with their paid-ad delivery network innovating on the model outlined by Google's integration of AdWords and Gmail. By making it easier for search marketers to work with their system, Yahoo is betting they can motivate ad-buyers and search marketers to migrate away from Google.

Both Google and Yahoo are responding to a larger long-term threat posed by MSN's long-pending release of their all-encompassing Longhorn operating system. First scheduled for release in mid 2004, Microsoft now sees December 2006 as a likely release date. Longhorn was meant to be the end-all-be-all when it came to merging search tools into the operating system. Back in 2003 when Microsoft started hyping it, Longhorn was going to incorporate a desktop search feature, blog creation features, a personalization tool called Stuff I've Seen, a expandable toolbar, and dozens of other features that would give the new operating system extra clout in the complete world of search. Everybody knows that MSN has the dice loaded with their control of the vast majority of operating systems used on the Internet. While Microsoft's absolute dominance might be cracking with open source products taking huge shares of what was once theirs, the software giant has been working triple time to enter and dominate the search market.

Recently, MSN's research specialist Susan Dumais released a presentation showing that Microsoft's vision of search is as heavily influenced by its competitors as theirs are by Microsoft. In her [presentation](#), “Personal Information Management, Helping the Finders Become the Keepers” Ms. Dumas notes that search is about finding previously retrieved information as much as it is about finding new information. With a control over the operating system and allowance from its users, Microsoft will be able to scan your hard drive to find stuff you saw and saved that are in any way relevant to your search query. Their recent experiments with document clustering might point to the direction these personalized results will be presented.

Over the past two years, Google, Yahoo, Ask Jeeves, and other search firms have rolled out variations on products and features thought to be incorporated in Longhorn. They have also developed other products, innovating on other ideas and concepts in the realm of information retrieval and distribution. The rapidity of change in the information environment, along with the ironic tendency of other firms to innovate on Microsoft's stated intentions are the likely reasons Longhorn keeps getting pushed back quarter after quarter. Even so, Longhorn is still said to be coming and Google, Yahoo and the rest have only so many months to make hay while the sun is definitely going to shine.