Google opens its AI-Integrated search to Africa
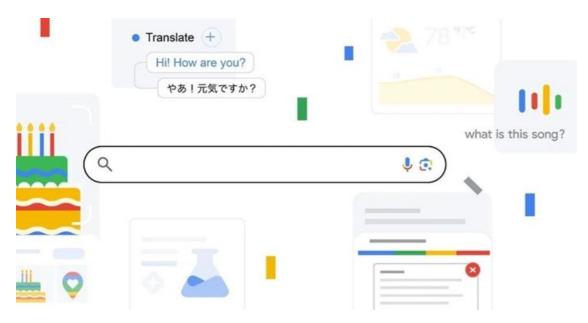
By Lindsey Schutters   8 Nov 2023

Google wants to, once again, redefine the landscape of internet search. Only this time the search giant is starting at a deficit with its unlikely biggest competitor - Microsoft's Bing - leading the search with generative AI charge. Google's response after a couple of false starts with Bard is an experimental version of its search feature, known as the Search Generative Experience (SGE).

This *new* experience integrates artificial intelligence (AI) to generate answers directly into the search results, offering immediate responses to user queries right on the Google Search webpage.

> " *Today we're starting to open up access to Search Labs, where you can try early generative AI experiments from Google. Opt in by tapping the Labs icon on the latest versions of your Google app or desktop Chrome, or join the waitlist at* https://t.co/zD6OCpRPH8. pic.twitter.com/NERBdmNPTW— Google (@Google) [May 25, 2023](May 25, 2023) "

Generating these conversational responses will significantly increase the cost of search queries because Google now has to spool up more compute power to run its large language model.

OpenAI found out very quickly that making ChatGPT freely available to the public was not cheap and quickly slapped a

price tag on the full capabilities.

Alex Okasi, Google Africa MD, on UK's Powerlist for 3rd consecutive year
8 Nov 2023

Microsoft has also curtailed general access to the service formerly known as Bing Chat (now Copilot) and invested $10bn into OpenAI for the license to use the ChatGPT engine.

Universally accessible

"Our mission is to make the world's information universally accessible to all," explained Wambui Kinya, GM of Google Search for Sub-Saharan Africa to a contingent of African journalists during a briefing call.

Kinya quickly dismissed any questions surrounding a future subscription for the SGE service by parroting this company PR line.

She went on to explain that SGE responses prioritise the quality of information above paid for responses, pointing out that "search ads are only for queries that have commercial intent".

"We have over the last 25 years built an understanding about what providing high quality search results entail, and that is not changing as a result of search with generative AI," said Kinya.

"Over time, and that is why we have released it as an experiment in Search Labs, we will continue to refine and improve the experience. Then we will be able to increase the number of queries we can serve."

Google says that SGE is designed to streamline the search process in three significant ways:

Simplifying complex topics. If users are faced with a decision that requires a detailed breakdown, such as "learning ukulele vs guitar," the SGE provides an AI-powered snapshot to help understand the factors to consider.

Offering quick tips for specific queries. For specific questions, the SGE can provide a range of content from across the web.

Enhancing product discovery and comparison while shopping. For example, if users are searching for removable wallpaper for their kitchen, the SGE can provide information on key factors such as ease of removal, and present a list of stylish options, including price, customer ratings, and purchase links.

Three products, one outcome

The reality is that Google now has three separate ways that users can interact with its core search business; Google Search, Google Bard, and Google Assistant.

"I think we're trying to attract the same users. It comes down to what is the intent, and then what is the tool, feature, or product that makes the most sense to get the answers or the product that you're looking for," Kinya tells *Bizcommunity*.

"When it comes to gen AI experience in search, it really is how do we evolve the way one seeks information to be able to become more natural and intuitive, or conversational in nature. And how can we get you to your answers faster and be able to give you the opportunity to deep dive and be able to follow up a little bit more."

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Lindsey Schutters 3 Nov 2023

According to Kinya, search is the same as it has always been. Google still assumes its role as helping users on their "path to the information that you seek" only now its powered by generative AI models.

To be part of these experiments, users can tap the Labs icon in the latest version of the Google app (available on Android and iOS) or on Chrome desktop. Users can also visit the Labs site to check their waitlist status.

ABOUT LINDSEY SCHUTTERS

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