

Facebook could capture 50% of global search market in just a few years

LONDON, UK: CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg has made it clear that Facebook has every intention of giving Google a run for its money by marrying social networking with one of the most valuable areas of the technology industry: Search. The search market represents a "big opportunity" that Facebook is uniquely positioned to address, said Zuckerberg at a tech industry conference in San Francisco recently.



A global survey "Search & Social Survey (2011-2012)", undertaken earlier in the year by leading independent digital marketing agency Greenlight, concluded Facebook could potentially capture close to a quarter of the Search market were it to launch its own search engine tomorrow, making it the second most utilised search engine in every major market except for China, Japan, and Russia, where it would occupy an uncontested third place.

What's more, the results from Greenlight's survey also showed Facebook could increase its share to 50% within just a few years. However, the survey also indicated Google+ has been more successful than most may have initially speculated and as such, the agency concludes Google and Facebook will both be front and centre in 'Social Search'.

The survey also asked respondents if they clicked on advertisements or sponsored listings in Facebook. The alarming response was that 44% answered 'never'.

Facebook could capture close to 50% of the global search market

Greenlight surveyed 500 people - students, law enforcement professionals, medical staff, accountants, lawyers, the unemployed, and everyone in between, to ascertain how they engage with online advertising, search engines, and social networks, in order to glean insight into how consumers engage with marketers today, and formulate views on what the future might hold.

The survey revealed 5% would 'definitely' use a future Facebook search engine if the firm were to launch one to rival Google's. The other extreme, those categorically saying they simply would not use a future Facebook search engine, totalled 26% of all respondents. Those responding in the 'Definitely' and 'Probably' camps totalled 17%. Those responding 'No' and 'Probably not', totalled 48%.

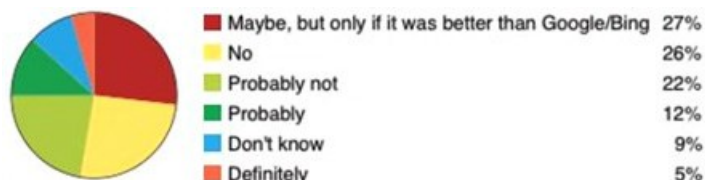


Fig 1 - If Facebook incorporated its own search engine, would you use it over your preferred search engine? (Source: Greenlight)

"These stats therefore suggest Facebook could capture around 22% of the global Search market by simply launching its own search engine tomorrow morning (the 'Definitely', 'Probably', and half of the 'Don't know' respondents combined), says Andreas Poulos*, chief operating officer at Greenlight. It wouldn't need to be a spectacular engine either, just well integrated into the Facebook experience and generally competent.

What's more, Greenlight's results also suggest Facebook could increase that projected market share to a maximum of 50% within a few years by converting the least overtly loyal Google users over to them. However, that increase would need to come from the 27% of respondents who replied 'Maybe, but only if it was better than Google and Bing'.

(Facebook already integrates Bing into its Search function, but it is a buried option in the navigational side-bar post query, so this really does not constitute its own search engine by any real definition).

Google and Facebook will both be front and centre in 'Social Search'

On the flip side, Greenlight found that Google's own social endeavours with Google+ might be more successful than most think. For instance, 23% of Google users have been +1'ing listings in Google's search results, giving Google lots of data about what people like.

"When compared to the 35% of users that Greenlight's survey found routinely 'like' a brand or company on Facebook, then it is not that significantly more than Google's social signal collection, particularly as 28% of respondents said they had no idea what '+1' actually meant, which will invariably decrease rapidly over time," says Poulos. "Essentially, Greenlight's research shows that Google and Facebook will both be front and centre in 'Social Search'."

19. How regularly do you '+1' something in Google's search results?

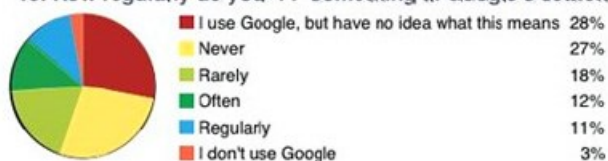


Fig 2 - How regularly do you '+1' something in Google's search results. (Source: Greenlight)

*Andreas Poulos is chief operating officer at Greenlight. He has been involved in search marketing for over twelve years, working for some of the biggest and most prestigious global blue chip companies. Andreas is responsible for an international team of Search consultants, developers, programmers, and copywriters. In his role, he provides guidance to well-known brands, including Santander, New Look, Sky as well as a number of government bodies.

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