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**Personalized Search Versus Personal Choice**

**By Kevin Kantola**

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Personalized search is a hot topic especially since Yahoo! and Microsoft have announced they are aggressively developing this service. Most likely, people will be leery of personalized search if they think that this is just be another way for companies to market to them. Search engine research has shown that there are typically two types of searchers: information seekers and buyers.

**Information Seekers**

If personalized search is to work for the information seekers, then instead of lots of targeted marketing, the personalized search experience had better offer targeted information that the person can use. A better information search experience without having to bypass a slew of commercial sites would appeal to the information seeker.

**Buyers**

What if you already have the information you need or don't want any information, but just want to make an online purchase? For buyers, information-only sites are something to be by-passed in the SERP's. If personalized search can deliver the products and services the buyer wants, and not just what the marketers want to push before them, then buyers may find some value in personalized search.

**Personal Choice**

## Personalized Search Versus Personal Choice

Personalized search must involve personal choice if it is to succeed. The Big Brother and privacy issues need to be held to a minimum. Personalized search needs to be an option that can easily be turned on and off as desired. Personalized search should not be equated with limited choices. The person needs to feel that they are in control and not the search engines. They also need to see real personal value in using this service.

What if a person is sometimes an information seeker and other times a buyer, or in the matter of seconds they switch hats? How will personalized search accommodate this person?

Will the person have to toggle back and forth between a couple of different user profiles or click on and off a checkbox to switch between these two different forms of search? These are questions the SE's will have to address in personalization.

### Google

Google has a beta personalized search engine at: <http://labs.google.com/personalized/profile.html> that is pretty interesting to test. You're told to click on Health, then the General Health checkbox and search for "stanford." When searching for the word "bob" instead of "stanford" at the Minimum Personalize setting the first three results are "Bob the Builder," "Bob Marley" and "Bob Dylan". The rest of this page has no health related information on it as well. But, when the slider is pulled to Maximum Personalize, "Dr. Bob" has the first two positions followed the other results mentioned above. Its obvious Google has a ways to go in developing this.

### Personal Privacy

If personalized search is to succeed, then personal privacy issues need to be addressed and concerns held to a minimum. Will personalized search involve searching your hard drive to see what your interests are? Will your interests be stored in a cookie on your computer? What happens when multiple users share a computer – will someone else get hit with all sorts of Preparation H advertisements because of the hemorrhoid treatment searches you wanted to keep private? And will children be affected by adult personalized

searches?

These are all questions that the SE's need to address so that people do not feel that their privacy is being violated or put at risk. The more control and choice the user has over personalized search the more likely it has in succeeding for the search engines.

Copyright © 2004 SEO Resource <http://www.seoresource.net> Kevin Kantola is the CEO of SEO Resource, a California search engine optimization company, and has published many articles over the past 20 years.

### **Get personal with Google**

**By Jakob Jelling**

#### **Get personal with Google by Jakob Jelling**

By Jakob Jelling  
<http://www.sitetube.com>

Anyone who's been on the net any time at all knows that Google has been the search engine of choice for many for a while now. Whether that continues remains to be seen, but for now, with MSN still in development and Yahoo going through some growing pains, many still feel that Google is the leader. As such, it's worth dropping in to the Google Labs every now and then to see what's going on there.

For example, Google's Personalized search offers a fun and useful way for searchers to interact with part of the mysterious and closely-guarded Google search algorithm. You can set a search profile that's stored as a cookie on your computer. The easy-to-use Google profile interface allows you to pick specific topics that interest you. Once chosen and saved, you can then do a search from the Personalized search page. At first, you'll see normal Google results. But at the top of the page is a slider bar, and by moving this to the right, those same search results will be dynamically altered to narrow in to focus on your personalization settings.

For example, a standard search for "restaurants" (without the quotes), will return several large, well-known sites among the first 5 results. These include [restaurants.com](http://restaurants.com), [zagat.com](http://zagat.com), [restaurantrow.com](http://restaurantrow.com), the official Subway corporate site, and the Yahoo restaurants directory. But let's say you've selected Texas as a geographic area of interest in your personalization profile. Move the personalization slide all the way to the right on the same search, and now the top 5 results are from [guidelive.com](http://guidelive.com), [Landrysseafood.com](http://Landrysseafood.com), [Houston Citysearch](http://HoustonCitysearch.com), and [Austin360](http://Austin360.com), followed by [restaurants.com](http://restaurants.com). Each of your personalized results are marked with small spheres of red, blue, and yellow.

There are many personalization topics to choose from, including Arts, Business, Computers, Health, and many other categories which can be further narrowed.

Jakob Jelling is the founder of <http://www.sitetube.com>. Visit his website for the latest on planning, building, promoting and maintaining websites.



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