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TECHNOLOGY

## Google Wants Search to Be More Social

By AMIR EFRATI

Updated March 31, 2011 12:01 a.m. ET

Google Inc. is offering to add a twist to Web searches, in a bold offensive to prevent Facebook Inc. and other social-networking companies from gaining an upper hand on Web innovation and potential advertising dollars.

The Internet search giant said it would allow users to recommend useful search results to friends and potentially reorder the way sites are ranked based on what they and their friends like or find useful.

The "social search" effort, dubbed "+1" or "plus one," could change the way that some people use Google's search engine.

The move is striking since Google's search engine—based on an algorithm developed more than a decade ago by co-founders [Larry Page](#) and Sergey Brin —has propelled the company to be one of the world's most valuable tech concerns. It is the reason the millions of people turn to Google every day. Search ads related to the search engine still account for the vast majority of Google's nearly \$30 billion in annual revenue.

The "social search" move comes after Google has botched several attempts at creating a viable social-networking service, including a previous effort dubbed Google Buzz. Indeed, on Wednesday, Google said it agreed to settle a complaint by the Federal Trade Commission over alleged privacy violations from when it launched Google Buzz, a social-networking service, more than a year ago. (See related article on page B2.)

Google is now an incumbent in a fast-changing Web industry that has been disrupted by younger rivals such as Facebook and messaging service Twitter Inc. Those companies have gotten people to publicly and privately share information on the Web, including their favorite articles, videos, personal interests and whereabouts, and redefine how people discover news articles or get advice on where to shop or travel.

Facebook in particular, with more than 600 million users worldwide, has amassed a wealth of personal information about members and now has a multibillion-dollar advertising business that lets marketers pinpoint specific demographic groups. Google views Facebook as a major future competitor in online advertising, people familiar with the matter said, and one of the aims of its social-networking efforts is to obtain similar data about users, rather than continuing to rely on information about them that is inferred from their Web searches.

**EXHIBIT 2084**

*Facebook, Inc. et al.*

Facebook declined to comment.

"Recommendations play a vital role in our decision-making process," said Christian Oestlien, a Google group product manager for search ads. "You look at the advice of people you know and trust."

Google and Facebook, which long operated in different realms on the Web, increasingly look like they are on a collision course. Facebook executives have explored the possibilities of using their unparalleled social data to improve Web search, but found building out a general search engine was extremely difficult, said a person familiar with the matter. Last year, the company launched a partnership with Microsoft Corp. to use Facebook users' social signals—such as clicking the "Like" button—to improve the results on Bing.

So far, Facebook has focused its own search product on finding people and places and combing through information that users contribute to their social profiles.

The social search feature won't replace Google's traditional search results, which are based on the mathematical algorithm that attempts to rank sites based on how relevant they are to a user's search query.

But the "+1" effort allows people to publicly recommend certain websites and share those preferences with their contacts on Gmail and other Google services. They are highlighted in search results for relevant queries that are typed into the Google search box, said Matt Cutts, a Google search engineer.

As with Facebook's "Like" button, Google users can click a "+1" button on the search-results page or on a site that installs the button in order to recommend that site to friends.

Only users with Google accounts who are "signed in" while searching will be able to see changes to the search results.

One of the eventual aims of the project is to reorder search results so that sites that users find more useful appear higher in results, people familiar with the matter said.

The social-search effort makes good on a promise by Google's outgoing chief executive, Eric Schmidt, who last fall said without elaborating that the company would be adding "social layers" atop its services. Co-founder Mr. Page takes over as CEO on Monday.

Google has been adding social components to its business. In November, the company launched Hotpot, which attempts to create a social network around local-business recommendations. Google also plans to infuse other services, including its YouTube video site and Picasa photo-sharing site, among others, with their social-networking contacts so users could more-easily share content with friends, people familiar with the matter said.

Google is developing a way to connect all of those services into a kind of social-networking service that would rival Facebook, people familiar with the matter said. Google last year worked on creating the infrastructure needed to let users play online "social" games, such as those made by Zynga Inc., with their contacts, people familiar with the matter have said. It's unclear whether such a system, which already exists on Facebook, will materialize.

The effort to create a broad social-networking service using key Google services including its search engine began in earnest after Buzz flopped, in large part after the backlash that resulted from when it made

email address books visible to other people.

Spokeswoman Katie Watson said Google has many strengths, including the most popular search engine and video site, but acknowledged that "like any company, we have challenges" including "how to build relationships, sharing and identity into our products and "how to stay nimble as we grow."

But, she added, because of "enormous" opportunities in social networking and other areas, "we are investing so heavily in the future."

—Geoffrey A. Fowler contributed to this article.

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