

## Google Iceberg (beta)

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Ever seen an iceberg? They are magnificent ice mountains, frozen floating islands bobbing around the most northern and southern oceans. Aside from the fact they are frozen, the coolest thing about an iceberg is that only about 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the mass of the berg is visible above the water. Knowing the other 9/10<sup>th</sup> of the mass exists below the surface adds oomph to the awe.

Google is like an iceberg. There is so much happening beneath the surface that even the most well informed observers can find themselves confounded and confused when contemplating the full Google's spectrum of services. Apparently, a similar sensation is felt around the Googleplex where an initiative to refocus on the core mission, "... to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful," is said to be underway.

Google has grown and diversified as rapidly as the web environment around it has, often placing itself on or even beyond the cutting edge of communication technologies. Its impact on our society and economy is hugely helpful and distressingly disruptive at the same time. Through its own innovation and a series of acquisitions, Google has managed to make an entry in most, if not all, major online marketing venues and is in the business of creating an ongoing stream of online marketing assets. It also has ambitions to venture into the traditional print, radio, and video ad markets, anticipating the inevitable migration to digital delivery of these mediums.

Much of Google's tremendous growth was spurred by its wildly successful stock offerings. The company went public in August 2004. Before their initial public offering, Google was the most important search engine on the Internet. Slightly less than two years later, Google has become one of the three most important and influential media companies in the world. Google is going where the big-media money is, a place known for its dramatic effect on the attitudes of those who inhabit it.

Regardless of what Google is, or might actually become, the general public still thinks of it primarily as a free-for-use search engine. That perception is important to Google because information accessibility, the core of Google's core mission, is facilitated through some form of search function. Being known as the world's favourite search engine gives Google a significant advantage when it comes to attracting advertisers. This is the reason Google, like its rivals at Yahoo, MSN and Ask, will invest a bulk of its resources on facilitating and improving search functions. Reliable search makes loyal users.

Conversely, a significant loss of public perception in Google's credibility is a risk. Over the past two years, Google has faced a steady stream of criticism for many of the choices it has made. Investment types criticise Google's secretive and sometimes bizarre ways of communicating financial matters. Social activists criticise Google's compliance with Chinese Government censorship of "sensitive" search results. Ironically (but necessarily), content creators and copyright holders criticise Google for living up to its stated mission goals.

Google actively changes the methods it uses to rank websites on a relatively constant basis. As new technologies, design methods or social trends accumulate users, the body of information those uses eventually compile will have an effect on rankings in Google's index. That's because Google's spiders are designed to follow links and practically every document that exists has a link directed towards it. When

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blogs were first popularized about two years ago, they had a massive affect on Google rankings because of the interlinked social nature of blogs, the tendency of some to abuse the comment sections, and the sudden emergence of millions of automated or out-sourced blogs.

As a search engine, Google is facing a great deal of criticism from webmasters and online merchants who contend that Google hasn't paid enough attention to the relevance of its organic search results. When it does pay attention, some suggest that Google's cure for spam is often worse than the symptoms its engineers were trying to correct. The recent, six-month long algorithm updates are a case in point. Many search engine optimizers continue to scratch their heads at the strange state of Google's search results.

The organic, or free, search results at Google have been in a constant state of flux for almost a year now. Along with the Jagger algorithm update and the Bigdaddy infrastructure upgrade, Google has been subtly introducing a few new factors to the search results most users see. Keen observers, like those at [Search Engine Watch](#), often spot experimental insertions of content pulled from services such as Google Base, News, Maps and Google Images.

These appearances indicate a high degree of research and development around local search and attempts at providing a degree of personalized search. Google invests approximately 70% of staff resources on search functionality. While its stated, public goal involves making the world's information accessible, its unstated, internal goal is to make its various features, functions and tools work together as a system.

Google is moving forward to integrate its various tools and functions into a stronger set of search tools, all of which are expected to be monetized primarily through AdWords advertising though some will present direct costs to consumers.

Later this week, Google is expected to release an online payment system that has been nicknamed Gbuy. While there are few confirmed details about the system, the clear intent would be to develop an online payment system that works with Google Base listings. This would give Google and its users an ecommerce platform that could seriously challenge the space eBay currently occupies.

Google is also actively assembling the components for a server-side suite of collaborative office-use software as a challenge to Microsoft's Office suite. Last year it purchased online word processor software called Writely. Earlier this year, Google acquired an online spreadsheet application, naming its new service Google Spreadsheets. Combine an online word processor and spreadsheet application with Gmail and Google Calendar. Add Google's photo sharing suite [Picasa](#) to act in the role of a rudimentary PowerPoint and Google Desktop's ability to locate any file on a computer or shared network and you have the background tools included in a useful operating system.

Google is an advertising company built on providing free space to frame paid advertising around. Its first priority is to its core mission of making information available, especially if there is a way to tie advertising to it. Its other mission is to position itself for battle against Microsoft, Yahoo, News Corp., Ask, and any other contender that might happen along its path. It is aggressive, overly confident, and often perceived as arrogant. It is also one of the world's largest media companies and responsible for providing the results of approximately half the searches made each day.

Google's continued growth is virtually guaranteed but it is a guarantee that is entirely theirs to squander.

In their favour, they have been far more open and communicative with their constituents than their rivals have. Though unorthodox, Google's mature CEO and mostly mature co-founders have a habit of shooting

from the hip when it comes to making public comments. For search engine optimizers, Google's quality czar, Matt Cutts provides a [forum](#) for information exchange on his blog and is **the** A-list celebrity at any search related function he appears at. This is a daily must read.

Working against Google is the fact that the real world of big business is wild, scandalous and fraught with difficult, literally world altering decisions. They, and their primary audience, are grassroots sorts of people suddenly working on the biggest of international stages. No matter what decisions Google makes, there will be a controversial outcome for someone.