

Google's Knowledge Graph

By Miklos Sarvary

Google has just announced that it will completely reshape the presentation of its search results. Instead of listing websites where people can find the answer to their queries, it will present data, links, pictures, etc. from its own databases, some 500 million “items”. The redesign is said to represent the biggest change in search for the last five years, not just conceptually but also in terms of business impact.

The goal, of course, is to make sure that web surfers remain on Google properties instead of clicking away to another site for answers. Internet companies all over the world already complain and regulators can add the move to their list of Google features to investigate from an antitrust perspective. The announcement is also a subtle tactical move, just one day before Facebook's IPO. It reinforces Google's positioning as the owner of the “knowledge network” as opposed to the “social network”.

It is hard to anticipate what the new ‘product’ will really be but there are a few important pointers. First, it will make connections between the different information elements. At the moment, search provides a list of sources but does not really categorize them. Knowledge Graph will and may even link the sources to one another. People (not least Tim Berners-Lee) have always argued for the, so called ‘semantic web’ to replace the traditional web. Google's Knowledge Graph is a fine approximation of the idea. Another aspect of the service will, hopefully, have to do with formatting. We may get a more standardized presentation of the information, which is quite important for rapid processing. Will Google look more like Wikipedia then? I think that the answer is ‘yes’. The difference is that the voluntary human element in building knowledge will be taken out of the equation and be replaced by a few algorithms.

And now for some fun: I always thought that Google is building a giant brain, the cells of which being living web pages constantly built and animated by human beings. Is it possible that this brain will one day wake up to consciousness? It is hard to believe that this will not happen, actually. Maybe the alarm clock has just gone off....

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About the author(s)

Miklos Sarvary Miklos is a Carson Family Professor of Business at Columbia Business School and a former Dean of Executive Education at INSEAD.

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