

Bing is not Google, but it is a spin engine.

Written by Christian Einfeldt
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Microsoft is at the beginning of a major product launch, called Bing, in an attempt to catch up to Google in search, following the collapse of Microsoft's take-over attempt of Yahoo. While Bing is a re-branding of Microsoft's clunky distant third place "Live Search" search service, Bing is also an attempt to add new features to search. Microsoft calls Bing a decision engine, in that it purports to offer more comparisons in its search results, rather than the simple blue links which have characterized search up to the recent arrival of Wolfram Alpha.

But rather than a search engine or even a "decision engine", Bing also appears to be a spin engine, in that it provides partisan answers to controversial topics, such as Steve Ballmer's propensity to throw chairs to blow off stress. At a friend's suggestion, I typed the following phrases (without quotes) into both Google.com and Bing.com. The results are very telling. Be sure to look at the phrase completion options that you are offered as you type.

"linux "

"antitrust microsoft"

"ballmer throws chair"

"bill gates steals"

The important thing here is not whether Bill Gates does, in fact, steal, and I am not here to make ad hominem attacks on the world's richest man. The point is how Microsoft deals with criticism. With spin. As opposed to Google, which just repeats much of the criticism of it.

For example, the first phrase, Linux, when typed into Bing, yielded phrase-completion suggestions linked to comparisons of Linux and Microsoft products. By contrast, the same phrase when typed into google leads to information that a GNU-Linux user would actually want, such as information on different Linux distros.

The second phrase produced no phrase-completion results at all in Bing. Google yielded the records in the actual case.

Same for the third phrase. Bing returned no suggestions at all for "Ballmer thr", whereas that same incomplete phrase yields "ballmer throw chair" and "Ballmer throwing chair" in Google.

As to the fourth phrase, Bing returned "bill gates steve jobs" and "bill gates steps down" for "bill gates ste". But add an "a" to the end of that search, "bill gates stea", and you get nothing under Bing.

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In short, Microsoft is always partisan, whereas Google is more informative, Microsoft couldn't even do so much as suggest phrases that would lead the reader look at official court records regarding its anti-trust trials, or anything else that reflected negatively on it.

Contrast that with phrases that are negative for Google, such as "Google is evil." Typing "Google is e"; yields no suggestions. But typing in "Google is"; yield results which are both positive and negative for Google as a company:

"Google is your friend";
"Google is broken";
"Google is skynet";
"Google is making us stupid";
"Google is a number";
"Google is paying to work from home";
"Google is always right";
"Google is taking over the world";
"Google is watching you";
"Google is paying";

More to the point is the first phrase. Microsoft's first suggestions all are aimed at diverting attention away from one of its keenest competition, Free Open Source Software, a competitor which, every year in its official annual 10k SEC-mandated warning to investors, Microsoft lists as a threat to its profitability.

Compare that to Google's suggested results for its main global competitor, Baidu, a Chinese search engine which holds about 60% of search results in China to Google's approximate 32%. Google's suggested phrase-completions return first a Chinese character hyperlink to Baidu; second to an English-language hyperlink for Google's arch rival; and trailing below that are all viable suggestions for Baidu.com or Baidu MP3 or Baidu Video.

Clearly, it is more important for Microsoft to put its spin on your results, compared with Google, which is more concerned with giving you information that is probably useful to you, even if it is negative for Google.

Which raises a question: who at Microsoft is responsible for skewing results this way? Does Chairman Bill know about this? I'll bet he does. Same for Ballmer. These two men have reputations for cut-throat competition, and yielding no quarter to their competition. Which is the real lesson to be learned here. Google has thrived despite competition. Microsoft has succeeded only where it can choke out competition, as in leveraging its Microsoft Windows desktop monopoly. Where Microsoft has to compete, such as in search or in on-line video delivery or even in game consoles, it comes in second or even third.

Clearly, Bing is not Google, and is not going to overtake Google anytime use, nor offer information which, on the whole, is as useful to its users as Google search results.

By the way, the most concise summary of why Google is beating Microsoft can be seen by

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typing this phrase into your browser: Bingisnotgoogle.com. Google is always one step ahead of Redmond.