

Background

Last week Google and Twitter announced their latest partnership, which will allow Google to gain access to the "firehose" (Twitter's name for their tweet stream). The tweets will be displayed on Google, thus significantly enhancing the search engine results page (SERP) with user generated content. This is far from the first time Google and Twitter have struck a deal of this nature, having had similar deals in place back in 2009 and 2011. This deal however looks like it is here to stay, as Google continues its plight to transition into the social space and Twitter seeks new ways to extend its user reach.

Details and Implications

It is expected that Google will display the tweet feed in the same fashion as it did before, i.e., in the top position, below paid ads and above organic listings. This is potentially bad news for SEO, as it will push down organic listings even further, in many cases below the fold. However, we don't expect to see big changes for more informational or transactional queries ("buy + [keyword]"). It will also be interesting to see whether this will work with or against the Google News widget on Google.

From Twitter's perspective, this deal will serve to dramatically expand their reach, ultimately increasing its user-base and the activity of it. The net result, at least Twitter hopes, will be more inventory and more advertisers.

It is also worth considering the implications for "paid-for tweets", after Twitter's recent announcement that promoted tweets are going to be visible on other websites. Whether Google will allow Twitter to monetize Google space is an open question, especially as more than 80% of Google's revenue comes from paid ads (PPC), and the company has been struggling to meet Wall St. expectations over monetizing the shift to mobile searches.

This new development will also present tracking and attribution challenges. Typically links in tweets and promoted tweets are displayed using URL shorteners such as bit.ly, which are tagged and attributed to the Twitter platform. However, if a tweet with a link to a website is shown in a Google listing, and a user clicks on it and lands on a website, what is the real source? Is it Twitter or is it Google? Current URL shortener set-ups will list the source as Twitter, but is that accurate?

Finally, from a brand and reputation management perspective, this change will place even more emphasis on content and real-time. Inevitably further driving an "always on" adaptive marketing approach.

Summary/ POV

This is a stark reminder to all that different media and devices no longer operate in silos. Content, search, and social need to work closely together to ensure a seamless user experience prevails across ever increasingly ambiguous platform divides. More practically, it may require a renewed focus on your approach to Twitter given the implications that social network will now have elsewhere.