# Content curation - Just what i was looking for!

Author : Cat

Date : October 25, 2013

Imagine that you are looking for a pair of jeans. You walk in to a clothing store and, lo-and-behold, the only thing this store has is jeans AND they are all in your size. They may not be the fit or colour you wanted but you asked for jeans and that's what you got. Sound like wizardy? It is content curation and it happens every day in your internet experience.

Every time you use the internet you are generating data: The searches you make, the websites you visit, the items you click on. Some of this data is recorded by your computer (via cookies) and some is recorded by the sites themselves (via their servers). Google has one of the best algorithms for content curation. It maintains a profile for your account that it updates every time you do a new search and select corresponding links. It remembers what types of links you chose and delivers a set of search results to match those needs.
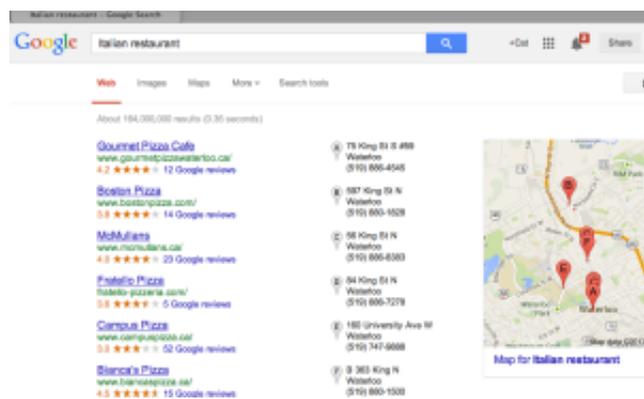
Your search engine also likes to know where you are. It can do this by using your IP address on a computer or location on your device. This is why when you search out 'Italian restaurants' or 'dog kennels', you tend to get those results which are closest to you.

Algorithms are also used to determine which advertising you get on the sidebar of sites you visit. Some days you may think "How did it know I was looking for a new car?" and on others you may say "What is it trying to tell me when it keeps offering me weight loss solutions??". It may be based on previous searches or keywords. It may be based on the links you chose. Or it may not be that personal. Just about every woman (and some men) that I asked who were aged 25-45 get some kind of weight loss ads.

So, is this good or bad? It is a matter of perspective. Personally, I much prefer having targeted answers to questions. When I search out a 'car emissions testing facility', I want the one closest to

my house. And I would much rather get ads for 'yoga pants' than 'motorcycle helmets'.

Where the issue comes up, is how narrow a view of the world am I getting? During the political crisis in Egypt, a researcher asked two friends to type in "Egypt" to their search bar. Both men were the same age, lived in the same city and had the same socio-economic status. So their results should be the same, right? No. The bulk of the one man's results were around the political issues and the second was mostly travel sites in Egypt. Why? Because the second guy had recently spent a large amount of time researching travel to the middle east so his browser assumed that is what he was looking for. Had the second man been wondering about the political climate rather than the sunbathing climate, he may not have been alerted to the severity of what was going on based on where those articles appeared in his results list.

I have tried to reproduce this experiment at home on my search engine vs. my husband's. It could be that he and I do not differ that much in to what we search but best I could do was to get the same top 10 results but in a different order. I will keep trying. I do suggest that anyone searching for themselves do it on several people's browsers to make sure they are aware of the variation in what a future employer could see.

As technology grows, we can only assume that these algorithms will continue to evolve and become more specific to the searcher. If that is the case, are you seeing the news of the world, or the news the internet world wants you to see? All news sites are biased in their opinions, but it is important to note that your browser is too.