Google: Sorry, Twitter, We Donâ€™t Index the @ Symbol

If you havenâ€™t noticed that Google+ pages are increasingly becoming a part of Google search results, you may have noticed Google and Twitterâ€™s increasingly public spat about it.

Twitter argues that by promoting Google+ in search results, Google isnâ€™t providing the most relevant social results. Meanwhile, Google has implied it would promote more pages from Twitter if it had adequate permission to do so. Twitter general council Alex Macgillivray then tweeted an example of why he thought Googleâ€™s new results were inefficient: Google search results for the search term â€œ@WWEâ€ â€” yes, with the â€œ@â€ symbol â€” that did not include the organizationâ€™s Twitter page.

Now Google has confirmed to *Mashable* that it has *never* indexed the â€œ@â€ symbol. In other words, the search engine has *never* recognized a Twitter handle when it was formatted that way.

So while a search for â€œWWE Twitterâ€ still returns the organizationâ€™s Twitter feed before its Google+ page, â€œ@WWEâ€ returns the same results as â€œWWEâ€ â€” in this case, with Google+ results first. Somehow a search for â€œ+WWEâ€ succeeds in returning a Google+ profile.

But really, Google? The company with a car *that drives itself*? In more than five years of people searching for Twitter handles, you never got around to adding the @ symbol to your index?

Even without the @ sign being indexed, however, the concern over the results for â€œ@WWEâ€ are valid: About 24,900 people have +1ed or added WWE to their circles on Google+ â€” but 792,642 people follow WWE on Twitter. In this case, and many others, the Twitter page is a more relevant social result than the Google+ page. Twitter ranks higher than Google+ for the WWE in Yahoo, AOL and Bing results.

On the other hand, Twitter and Facebook havenâ€™t necessarily made it easy for the search engine to feature them in results. Facebook denies Googleâ€™s crawlers access to its private pages, for one obvious reason â€” theyâ€™re private. Twitter includes â€œnofollowâ€ links on its pages that stop Googleâ€™s crawlers from understanding where links in tweets point to.

As Search Engine Landâ€™s Danny Sullivan has pointed out, Google has indexed at least 3 billion pages. But Twitter users create 200 million Tweets every day that would be hard to index without access to the networkâ€™s firehose â€” access to which Google lost with expiration of an agreement last July.

In the end, exactly how Google search results came to be dominated by Google+ pages â€” either as a result of having little access to other social networks or by intentionally ignoring them â€” isnâ€™t that important. The important question is whether or not this domination is good for consumers. An issue which, if a complaint from privacy watchdog EPIC is effective, could be settled by the FTC.

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Posted by Janine E. Mooney, Editor

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