

5 Mind-Blowingly Dumb Things We Heard at the Google Hearing by @MattGSouthern

Google CEO Sundar Pichai testified in front of the House Judiciary Committee yesterday, and many of their questions left the SEO community collectively shaking their heads.

At times it was glaringly obvious that Congress had no idea how search engines work.

Other times it seemed like Congress knew little about Google in general, or how the company differed from Apple and Wikipedia.

One might assume the House representatives would show up adequately prepared to speak with the leader of one of the world's largest companies.

However, if the Mark Zuckerberg hearing taught us anything, it's not to set our expectations too high.

With that said, let's look at 5 of the most jaw-droppingly, mind-blowingly, dumb things we heard at yesterday's hearing.

Google does not manipulate results for individual queries

Questioning the search results showing up for Congressman Steve King, Democratic Rep. Ted Lieu asked Pichai:

"That's a negative article. But you don't have a group of people at Google sitting there thinking and trying to modify search results – every time Steve King comes up, a negative article appears. That's not what's happening, right?"

Pichai had to explain, matter-of-factly, that Google does not manipulate search results for people in that way.

Google does not make iPhones

Rep. Steve King, after informing Pichai about an unfavorable pop-up that appeared on his granddaughter's iPhone, asked:

"I'm not going to say into the record what kind of language was used around that picture of her grandfather, but I'd ask you: how does that show up on a seven-year-old's iPhone, who's playing a kid's game?"

Pichai had to inform the Congressman that iPhones are made by a different company.

Congress doesn't understand how Google image search works

A question came up regarding pictures of Donald Trump showing up when people search for the word "idiot."

"Right now, if you Google the word 'idiot' under images, a picture of Donald Trump comes up. I just did that... How would that happen?"

Pichai had to explain, again, that Google doesn't manually intervene on any particular search result.

Congress scrutinizes Google's ability to track users

At one point during the hearing, Rep. Ted Poe asked Pichai whether Google can track his phone as it moves around the room.

Google Maps can do things like that. Any further tracking would depend on the phone's location settings.

However, rather than giving Pichai a chance to answer the question, Poe followed up with:

"You make \$100 million a year... You should be able to answer that question."

Google accused of liberal bias, over and over again

Throughout the hearing, Google was repeatedly accused of liberal bias.

Rep. Lamar Smith brought up an already-debunked statistic that 96 percent of search results for President Trump are from liberal media sites.

At another point in the hearing, a discussion came up about recently leaked emails in which Google employees are directed to monitor Breitbart for hate speech that violates Google's policies

However, in the same batch of emails, Google executives concluded that it's "tough to prove that Breitbart is Hate Speech."

It also had to be explained to Congress that this was part of a routine review of publishers conducted by its advertising team.

Defending his company again, Pichai had to explain that a rogue Wikipedia edit led to unfavorable information showing up for Rep. Ted Lieu.

The error was quickly corrected. Moreover, Google doesn't write the Wikipedia entries, it just returns them in

search results.

Missed Opportunities

Besides the ill-informed questions lobbed at Google's CEO, Congress is widely being criticized for the opportunities missed during this hearing.

Congress could have asked Pichai about how Google uses the data it collects on users in advertising.

It can also be argued that Congress didn't follow-up well enough on the good questions it did ask.

Instead, Pichai was able to easily sidestep questions on important issues.

Perhaps more could have come from this hearing if the House Judiciary Committee spent less time debating each other about Google's alleged political bias, or lack thereof.

More Resources

Subscribe to SEJ

Get our daily newsletter from SEJ's Founder Loren Baker about the latest news in the industry!

<http://tracking.feedpress.it/link/13962/10899694>