Google doc rekindles myth that click-through rate affects rankings

The debate around whether Google uses click data, CTR, for core ranking will not die. No matter how many times Google will outright say they do not use it, another debate will spark up in the community. Just a few weeks ago, Google said that CTR for ranking is made up, but Moz SEO Britney Muller on Thursday pointed to a new Google document that implies otherwise.

The document. The Google doc says “when you click a link in Google Search, Google considers your click when ranking that search result in future queries.” This implies that Google does indeed use click data for core rankings.

Here is Muller highlighting this on Twitter:

But no. This is citing a 2009 blog post around how Google uses personalization. Google can, when you are logged in to your Google account, adjust the rankings of your search results for you only based on your most recent click data. Google wrote “For example, since I always search for [recipes] and often click on results from epicurious.com, Google might rank epicurious.com higher on the results page the next time I look for recipes. Other times, when I’m looking for news about Cornell University’s sports teams, I search for [big red]. Because I frequently click on www.cornellbigred.com, Google might show me this result first, instead of the Big Red soda company or others.”

On record. Google has said numerous times over the past decade that it does not use CTR for core rankings. Meaning, Google doesn’t use click data in their ranking algorithm for ranking their search results, outside of personalized results. Google

said so as recently as a few weeks ago when Gary Illyes said, “Dwell time, CTR, whatever Fishkin’s new theory is, those are generally made up crap. Search is much more simple than people think.”

More than 10 years ago, Google’s Matt Cutts said, “bounce rates would be not only spammable but noisy.”

The point is, Google has said countless times, in writing, at conferences, that CTR is not used in their ranking algorithm.

What about the new doc? It is confusing, Google did write “when you click a link in Google Search, Google considers your click when ranking that search result in future queries.” They should clarify that it is used for personalized search. It is unclear who wrote that, it could have been someone not from the Google search team and someone who works on Google Cloud, where the document was posted.

Why it matters. Truth is, it doesn’t matter. It just confuses the SEO community and Google should make sure their messaging around CTR and behavioral signals are clear. At the same time, we doubt SEOs will go ahead and hire armies of people to click on their search results in Google to try to influence the page’s ranking in search. The last search engine that used click data for ranking was named DirectHit and they are no longer in business.

About The Author

Barry Schwartz is Search Engine Land’s News Editor and owns RustyBrick, a NY based web consulting firm. He also runs Search Engine Roundtable, a popular search blog on SEM topics.

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