Google search quality guidelines update emphasizes users of diverse backgrounds

Google’s search quality evaluator guidelines were updated on Thursday, December 5. The revisions emphasized diversity, impartiality and pertained to language referring to users.

The search experience. The guidelines are now prefaced by an introduction (section 0.0, as seen below) explaining why people conduct searches and the ways in which they perform them.

Although the entirety of section 0.0 is new, the paragraph indicated by the red box makes reference to the complex nature of certain queries and sets the tone for the rest of the guideline revisions: “Different types of searches need very different types of search results.”

The term “people” has replaced “user” in certain contexts. For example, section 0.2 has been revised from “Raters Must Represent the User” in the September 5 iteration of the guidelines to “Raters Must Represent People in their Rating Locale” in the current version.

Removing rater biases. In addition to retitling section 0.2, a new paragraph was added instructing evaluators to base their ratings on the instructions and examples that appear in the guidelines.

Evaluators are also told that their ratings “should not be based on personal opinions, preferences, religious beliefs, or political views.”

The definition of a user. The terms “search engine” and “user” are new additions to the Important Definitions section.

Within the paragraph defining users, evaluators are again reminded that users are people of different backgrounds and viewpoints: “Keep in mind that users are people from all over the world: people of all ages, genders, races, religions, political affiliations, etc.” This definition appears again in section 12.1.

The red underline indicates new additions to this section. The user’s goal has been expanded to include finding information and evaluators are reminded that users come from all walks of life.

People and political affiliations. Two paragraphs within section 14.6 (pertaining to rating upsetting or offensive content) received small, but meaningful additions.

In both cases, the word “people” has replaced “users” and political affiliation has been added as another dimension of diversity.

Why we care. Although search quality evaluators' ratings do not directly impact rankings, they do provide feedback that helps Google improve its algorithms. Google made updates to the guidelines just three months ago, adding more detailed directions regarding interstitial pages and content creator expertise, and bucketing "E-A-T" (Expertise, Authoritativeness, Trustworthiness) within "Page Quality" in certain sections.

The increased emphasis on users being actual people who may be very different from the evaluators themselves may help keep biases out of the ratings. Google (and Facebook) has faced accusations of bias by political groups. Ratings regarding political content, in particular, seems to be an area that Google would like its evaluators to keep their personal viewpoints out of, as evidenced by the numerous new references to political views.

About The Author

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