Microsoft announces new AI-powered search features for Bing

Today, Microsoft announced a series of artificial intelligence-driven features for its Bing search engine to make it more conversational and nuanced. The news, unveiled at an event in San Francisco, means that Bing will make better use of object recognition, so-called machine reading (for parsing text and extracting meaning), and other techniques tuned and improved using AI training methods.

Search results will now show both multiple perspectives and multiple sources, culled from a list of pre-approved news sources, to show Bing users different sides of issues ranging from the benefits and downsides of kale to the pros and cons of contentious political issues. This builds on an earlier feature, announced back in September, in which Bing added fact checks to search results in an effort to cut down on misinformation, fake news, and other distorted stories from manipulative information sources.

Microsoft is using image and object recognition and machine reading to improve Bing results

In a new partnership with social news site Reddit, Bing will also surface information from subreddits right in search results by using algorithms to read and analyze the user-generated text across Reddit's many communities. The integration includes AMA questions and answers populated within the search card for popular celebrities, AskReddit-sourced answers to broad service questions, and top threads for specific subreddits that will show up in search results just by searching the name of the community.

Another AI-powered Bing feature is a new conversational search

function, powered by the learnings Microsoft gained from deploying natural language chatbots like Xiaoice and Zo and deploying machine learning algorithms on billions of text documents. The company’s search engine will now deploy a more advanced form of auto-complete to help users better phrase a query to get a more desirable answer on the first search. Similarly, Bing’s more powerful image search function, trained on object recognition models, will be able to better identify objects in photos, including products worn by people featured in the photo, and landmarks.

Conversational and intelligent search will both be coming to US Bing users in the next month, while Bing’s improved image search is available now. Microsoft is also bringing intelligent search to Office 365 products, including OneDrive and SharePoint, to let users search for text within image and presentation slides. The AI tools underly a new Excel feature Microsoft calls Insights, which will automatically highlight spreadsheet patterns the company’s software detects from the structured data to make it easier to analyze. These Office 365 features will be rolling out by the end of the month.

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