Microsoft is making subreddits more searchable with Bing

Microsoft today announced a partnership with Reddit to surface the social news site's content high up in Bing search results, so that searching for specific Reddit communities, pages, and info will spit back information gleaned from subreddits, AMAs, and other threads in a dedicated section. The news, part of a suite of new artificial intelligence-powered features underlying Bing's search function, works by way of what Microsoft calls intelligent search. The company says intelligent search uses natural language processing to pair Reddit content with the appropriate search terms.

The Reddit integration works in three ways. First, by typing in the name of a subreddit on Bing, you'll get a live snapchat of that subreddit's top threads displayed in the search results with links to the individual pages. Bing will also include Reddit AMA questions and answers for a celebrity who's done an AMA, with the content showing up on the person's search card, which will be accessible just by searching that person's name. The last feature the integration provides will let Bing populate Reddit answers to questions typed into search that are gleaned from popular subreddits like AskReddit. That way, typing a question into Bing with the word "reddit" tagged on the end will surface answers from within relevant on-site threads.

Reddit has desperately needed a good way to search its mountain of content

Reddit users have long clamored for a better way to search the site's wealth of information, nearly all of which is user-generated and difficult to parse after it's been organized by Reddit's algorithms and largely replaced by a new wave of

images, text posts, videos, and links. Working with Microsoft, and using the company's sizable computing resources and AI prowess, is a solid way to make its site more searchable and to bring users back to old threads. Reddit says it will also start including upcoming AMAs in search results, something the site hopes will drive even more interest for its custom Q&A format.

"All this amazing content is sitting there. As long as it is just on Reddit, we know we're missing out on a much broader audience. We know there are people who are searching for this content, but now we're providing them a world-class product to find it," Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian said today at Microsoft's AI-focused Bing event in San Francisco. "We're just getting used to talking to the robot and expecting a good answer. The challenge here is that there's a lot of nuance when you're asking these kind of open-ended questions. Reddit is the largest data set in the English-speaking world of vetted, nuanced responses."

Yet whether this partnership will really spur more people using Bing is less certain. Microsoft's search engine has under 5 percent of the global search engine market share on desktop and mobile, compared with Google's 80 percent share, according to NetMarketShare's November 2017 statistics. Microsoft hopes that by partnering directly with websites that generate a substantial amount of the web's most engaging and highest viewed content, it might lure some users away from Google. But it's hard to see how any AI advancement, no matter how sophisticated or how tailored to specific internet communities, will be able to break the ecosystem lock-in Google has over Chrome, Gmail, and Android users. At the very least, it gives existing Bing users a more pleasant way to find valuable Reddit threads that would otherwise be lost to time.

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