‘Reddit can survive without search’: company reportedly threatens to block Google

The Washington Post reported Friday that Reddit might cut off Google and force users to log in to Reddit itself to read anything, if it can’t reach deals with generative AI companies to pay for its data. Initially, Reddit seemed to deny the report. “Nothing is changing,” Reddit spokesperson Courtney Geesey-Dorr told *The Verge*, adding that the *Post* would soon be correcting its story.

But after the *Post* corrected that story, only one major detail had changed — the *Post* no longer suggests Reddit users would need to log in. The publication now writes that if Reddit can’t get AI to play ball, the company may block Google and Bing’s search crawlers, which means Reddit posts wouldn’t show up in search results.

“Reddit can survive without search,” said the *Post*’s anonymous source.

Reddit isn’t denying that it might block crawlers. “In terms of crawlers, we don’t have anything to share on that topic at the moment,” Reddit spokesperson Tim Rathschmidt tells *The Verge*, clarifying that the company’s earlier “nothing is changing” comment only applied to logins.

We got a taste of what Google without Reddit might look like when many subreddits went dark to protest the company’s API pricing changes — at that time, many Reddit results took you to private communities, which was a pain. Appending “site:reddit.com” to a Google search has become a popular

trick for weeding SEO farms and other attention-seeking websites out of Google results, but if this change goes through, you might not be able to access Reddit from search at all.

While the Reddit protests were largely about how the API pricing changes would force some third-party app developers to shut down their apps, Reddit's original announcement about the pricing changes positioned them as a way to get AI companies to pay for hoovering up Reddit's data to train large language models. It wasn't until later that the impact on app developers became clear. (In my June interview with Reddit CEO Steve Huffman, he said that "we're in talks" with AI companies about the pricing changes. When I asked for more details, he didn't elaborate further.)

The Washington Post's report wasn't just focused on Reddit — it's about how more than 535 news organizations have opted to block their content from being scraped by companies like OpenAI to help train products such as ChatGPT.

***Correction October 20th, 3:36PM ET**: We originally wrote that Reddit denied* The Washington Post*'s report that Reddit might wall off its content from Google search; Reddit has clarified it was only denying that users might be forced to log in to read content. We apologize for the confusion.*

https://www.theverge.com/2023/10/20/23925504/reddit-deny-force-log-in-see-posts-ai-companies-deals