Amit Tharani

The Search Dilemma: Challenges & Opportunities

Cracking the Code: What are searchers *really* saying? We'll dive into the whispers of user frustration

The Great Migration: Users are quietly fleeing to Reddit, Instagram, and AI chatbots for answers — but why?

Trust Issues: In a world of SEO-manipulated content, users are questioning what - and who - they can believe

Digital Amnesia: Once users find valuable information, it vanishes into the digital ether

The Paradox of Choice: When presented with multiple sources, users feel less informed, not more

Unveiling the Arsenal: Discover how we can address these pain points to make Google Search even more indispensable

Voice of Users

Who: Young professionals with moderate technical proficiency

"I research on Perplexity because I can have natural conversations and give feedback on the results. Plus, I also avoid SEO-manipulated results."
- Deepanjal, Analytics

"I prefer reddit over Google as the answers there are not Search Engine Optimized"
- Himanshu, Developer

"Google throws multiple answers from different sources, and I'm left wondering which ones I can actually trust."
- Harsh, CA Articleship

"For work research, I stick to books, biographies, experts, and teachers. For personal stuff like travel, Google's results are too varied - I default to other sources, for example, asking a friend"
- Cherisha, Movie Producer

"Google forces me to sift through multiple sites instead of directly answering my questions, like when I needed help with Google Sheets."
- Sonika, Analytics

"When Google highlights an answer it pulled from a website, I have no way to know if it's coming from a reliable source."
- Aesha, Corporate lawyer

Voice of Users

"For math problems, I go straight to ChatGPT or Gemini - they give me the solution and explain the approach without making me hunt for the right page."
- Ayush, Preparing for a competitive exam

"Gemini/ChatGPT are better for step-by-step instructions, like explaining ERP implementations."
- Aditi, IT consulting

"For tracking order, delivery, application status, etc, I wish I could just type my ID and the website (like Bluedart) in the search box and see my delivery status right there."
- Amit, Product Manager

"When I search on google, it's always keywords and not in a natural language. I'm often paranoid that I'm not using the right words"
- Ojus, Doctor

"When I try to find something I've searched before, the results are totally different, leading me to different conclusions. Plus, I can never remember which links were actually helpful."
- Suraj, Health Coach

"The results lack crucial real-time updates. If there's a landslide in Wayanad or a hurricane in Florida, that should be the first thing I see."
- Upasana, Analytics

Key Paint Points

Information Reliability
- Skepticism about source credibility
- SEO manipulation affecting result quality

Search Experience
- Difficulty finding previously useful answers (just an indicator of visited links)
- Lack of confidence in using natural language queries
- Multiple sources have to be checked for simple queries

Information Quality
- Missing critical real-time updates (ex natural disasters)
- Lack of a credibility indicator on featured answer snippet/widget

Alternative Preferences
- Forums like reddit for authentic discussions & varied opinions
- AI tools for Step-by-step approach, natural language conversations & feedback on results
- Direct website integrations for tracking (orders/delivery/applications)

Leveraging Community Wisdom

Problem: Users prefer answers from forums like Reddit, and they append ‘reddit’ keyword to their searches for: authentic opinions & varied viewpoints from real people (vs articles on the web incentivised to push sales), and to avoid SEO manipulation.

Solution:
1. Increase weightage of forum results (reddit, stackexchange, etc) for opinions & discussions topics rather than fact seeking.
2. On topics with fewer answers: "Ask on Reddit" widget – allow users to directly post questions to relevant subreddits from the Google Search results page (requires Reddit profile authentication)
3. A ‘Community Insights’ section on the SRP that presents various forums links, summary of different perspectives, & their popularity
4. Combating AI-Generated SEO Content: Assuming this is an active area of development already

Focus Area: Improved task success for users and increased user trust

Measurement:
- % of queries ending on forums
- Search session duration (lower is better)
(requires access to visited links on the browser)

Adoption: “Ask on reddit” widget - Educate users through tutorials & tooltips on first impression: how to use, what is required from user, etc

Building Trust

Problem: Users lack confidence in the reliability of resource links as well as highlighted answers.

Solution:
1. Introduce "Verified Source" badges for trustworthy websites. Possible Tiers: Govt, Expert-Certified, Community-Vetted, etc
Challenges: Potential misuse by verified sites to manipulate perceptions, Avoiding bias (ex. excluding newer but accurate sources), periodic reverification

2. A “see other perspectives” option to show alternate viewpoints on the AI overview answer widget
Challenge: Balancing comprehensive information with interface simplicity

3. Intuitive/prominent design for granular feedback collection on accuracy/usefulness, on all search results.
Challenges: User incentives for feedback, preventing organized manipulation by employing trust scores, anomaly detection, rate limits, etc

4. Streamline the process for fact-checkers to identify and address flagged results: Utilize AI tools for enhanced fact-checking, by giving them more resources, more time to generate result, or elevated access to certain resources
Challenges: resource intensive, AI biases, explainability of AI decisions, scalability compared to automated systems

Focus Area: Accuracy / information quality, user trust, and a more robust feedback loop

Measurement: Change in % flagged content at an aggregate / subject level

Remembering the Past: Improving Search History

Problem: Even with highlighted visited links, important insights from past visits can still take time to find

Solution: 1. Enrich previous searches info on results page with:
i. Last visited date
ii. An overview/summary of the site
2. Integrating "Highlights", a browser feature allowing users to highlight text and add notes directly on webpages. Along with changes in the search history page that not only lists past queries and visited sites but also includes filtering options based on highlights, auto categorised topics, or user-assigned tags. Highlights can additionally be synced in the Google Keep App

Focus Area: task success - reduces time spent searching for the answer.

Measurement

1. [Highlights feature] - adoption (% users highlighting content)
2. Search query duration for visited queries

Adoption: Educate users through modals, tutorials & tooltips on highlights panel discovery on the SRP, how to use it, and where they can find the highlights.

Filling the Gaps: Addressing Information Sparsity

Problem: The intent behind the search isn't clear. If presented with more details, the query will lead to a concrete & accurate answer

Solution:

1. Context-aware prompts for query refinement. Ex: on searching "Slack login error", the result page can prompt for clarification on the nature of the error, or a list of clickable 'devices' as filters. This builds on the existing "Did you mean?" feature but adds intent-specific interactivity.
2. Group results by inferred intent, or suggest additional search keywords. "Python" -> "Coding Tutorials" | "Snake Species"

Problem: Complex queries for which an agreeable answer isn't available

Solution: Crowdsourcing answers: Similar to reddit/quora, but Google generated questions to complete it's knowledge base. User profiling to identify their areas of expertise. Aggregate answers across users and verify through AI or user feedback, since verification is easier problem than finding the answer.

Focus Area: Improved information availability, and a more comprehensive knowledge base

Delivering Instant Answers: Expanding Widgets

Problem: Users often need quick answers without navigating multiple websites.

Solution:
Similar to currency conversion, calculator, stock trends, game scores, flight status, etc, expand widget library to cover common queries by partnering with key businesses to integrate information directly into search results (or crons to crawl their sites)
Applications: order/delivery tracking, application status checks, public transit, appointment scheduling, exam results, utility bill payments, item search at local stores

Dev & Rollout: Prioritize basis search volume and partner API availability

Focus Area: Reduced search time and increased user satisfaction, & potential savings for partners due to reduced site traffic.

Measurement:
- Adoption: % interaction/impression
- Coverage: % common queries (by their share among searches) addressed by widgets

Adoption:
1. On Search page: Nudge users to add the widget on the home screen or search page for the duration of the event (ex till the application is approved/denied, a sports is live, etc)
2. On Partner site: nudge to add widget on search home / chrome landing page

Looking Ahead: Future Considerations

AI Overview strategy: When to providing answers vs presenting links - a complex problem of balancing user expectations, answer accuracy, cost, and monetisation. One way perhaps, is using a freemium model - ask users to opt in for a generative summary by spending tokens. Another is to make summarisation a premium feature. Or showing sponsored links in the overview (with a callout). Creators whose content is used should be compensated to ensuring fairness and sustenance of the web ecosystem

User confidence: Imbibing confidence that the search query was understood correctly and they don't need to worry about using the right keywords. This becomes even more important as Google onboards the next billion users.
Example Intent-Based Categorization: Label results with categories that reflect the underlying intent. Example: For a search on "fix leaky faucet," results could be categorized as "DIY Repair Guides," "Plumber Services in Bellandur, Bangalore," "Faucet Replacement Parts. Another approach can be to display Google's interpretation of the query, with an option to switch between the multiple interpretations.

Advanced search filters: Finding ways to better educate the users about features like 'site:', 'filetype:', filters like 'any time', 'size', etc. Example: through interactive tutorials; or contextual filter suggestions: "news about [topic]" suggest (pre-applied) time filter; or a visual search builder interface that helps users build nuanced queries.

Real world journeys: Integrate the search 'ecosystem' into real world journeys to make the platform indispensable. Example AR glasses & IoT devices; a search can be seamlessly triggered by virtually any real-world object or situation.

Thank you.