

Personal Intelligence is the new moat: Google vs. Perplexity

We have reached the phase of the AI cycle where “intelligence” is no longer the bottleneck. The bottleneck is *amnesia*. Until recently, every time you opened a chat window, you were talking to a brilliant stranger who didn’t recall what you have been talking about the day before, or whether you even had any interaction. You paid a “context tax” at the start of every interaction.

That is changing fast. Both Google and Perplexity have rolled out significant updates centered on “Personal Intelligence” and “Memory.” While they sound similar, they represent two divergent philosophies about where AI fits into our lives.

Google: The “Life OS” Approach

Google’s vision of Personal Intelligence is deeply entangled with the ecosystem they already own. With the introduction of Gems (custom versions of Gemini) and memory capabilities, they aren’t just trying to remember your chat history; they are trying to triangulate your life.

The value proposition here is **integration**. Because Google already holds your calendar, your emails (Gmail), your documents (Drive), and your location history (Maps), their version of memory is about connecting those dots. It’s the difference between an AI that knows *what* a flight is, and an AI that knows *your* flight is delayed and you’ll miss dinner.

This is the “Her” model of AI (minus the romance, hopefully). It aims to be a proactive layer over your personal logistics, reducing the friction of simply existing in a digital world.

Perplexity: The Research Partner

Perplexity’s approach to Memory is less about your personal life and more about your **intellectual workflow**. Their feature is designed to capture preferences and constraints: you are a developer who needs code in Rust, or a marketer who needs summaries in bullet points, or a researcher who strictly avoids non-academic sources.

This is a subtle but critical shift. Perplexity isn’t trying to be your secretary; it’s trying to be a specialized research partner that doesn’t need to be retrained every morning. It solves the frustration of “I told you this yesterday.” By layering memory over search, they are building a tool that gets faster the more you use it, not because the model gets smarter, but because the prompt engineering is increasingly automated by your own history.

The Divergence: Living vs. Knowing

The comparison clarifies the future landscape:

- **Google** wants to minimize the friction of **management**. It wins if you spend less time coordinating your schedule and finding your files.
- **Perplexity** wants to minimize the friction of **discovery**. It wins if you get to the answer faster without wading through noise.

The trade-off, as always, is privacy. To have Personal Intelligence, you must surrender personal data. Google’s advantage is that they already have it. Perplexity’s challenge is convincing you that the utility of a personalized search engine is worth the data admission price.

In 2026, the moat isn't the LLM. Everyone has a good model. The moat is **context**—who has it, who protects it, and who uses it to save you time.

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