



DuckDuckGo: Privacy, Yes; Liberty, Not So Much

As millions of Internet users have sought alternatives to Google for searching the web, DuckDuckGo has emerged over the past few years as the premier non-Google search engine. But now, DuckDuckGo has announced that it will begin using the same types of censorship that have chased so many users toward it and away from Google. And DuckDuckGo users — many of them previously staunch advocates for the alternative search engine — are abandoning DuckDuckGo as a result.



DuckDuckGo®

In a tweet late last week, DuckDuckGo CEO and Founder Gabriel Weinberg openly stated that the search engine down-ranks “sites associated with disinformation” and “often place[s] news modules and information boxes at the top of DuckDuckGo search results (where they are seen and clicked the most) to highlight quality information for rapidly unfolding topics.”

This bold admission came immediately after a tweet tying the censorship of Internet searches to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Weinberg tweeted:

Like so many others I am sickened by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the gigantic humanitarian crisis it continues to create. #StandWithUkraine

At DuckDuckGo, we’ve been rolling out search updates that down-rank sites associated with Russian disinformation.

The firestorm of users criticizing DuckDuckGo for acting more like Big Tech than the freedom-oriented search engine it claimed to be came swiftly. Tweets such as “Bad move. I don’t need mommy anymore. I’m a grownup; treat me as such or lose my business,” “You just tanked your whole brand,” “What’s the point of DuckDuckGo anymore?” and “The end of duck duck...” filled the thread.

In an apparent effort to offer a response, Weinberg tweeted:

DuckDuckGo’s mission is to make simple privacy protection accessible to all. Privacy is a human right and transcends politics, which is why about 100 million people around the world use DuckDuckGo. (We don’t have an exact count since we don’t track people.)



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on March 14, 2022

But that was just fuel to the fire.

The first tweeted reply to that post read, “Make that one less user, just switched to Brave Search. Many of us use DDG to look at stories from different angles without any bias or at least we thought we did. If we wanted biased, curated searches we’d use Google.”

One user tweeted, “DuckDuckGo had a nice run.” Another pointed out that Weinberg’s tweet about openly censoring information is a departure from what DuckDuckGO has claimed to be, tweeting, “The whole point of DuckDuckGo is for you to NOT do that.”

And that is when Weinberg went all in, plainly admitting that censorship of information is perfectly in keeping with what DuckDuckGo does:

The whole point of DuckDuckGo is privacy. The whole point of the search engine is to show more relevant content over less relevant content, and that is what we continue to do.

Not only is this an admission that DuckDuckGo censors search results and makes no bones about it, but it also implies that this has been going on for some time, despite Weinberg’s earlier tweet indicating that this is a new practice. After all, Weinberg did not say this is something DuckDuckGo “will do,” he said DuckDuckGo it is something DuckDuckGo will “continue to do.”

That these tactics are the same as those used by Google and other Big Tech masters is not a matter of debate. During the height of the COVID “pandemic,” Google and other Big Tech entities — such as social-media sites — routinely blocked or down-ranked information that was deemed to be “misinformation” — though the rapidly changing definition of that word often meant that what was “misinformation” one moment (masks are useless for preventing the spread of the virus) was “approved science” in the next moment.

The same was true in regard to the election, the “insurrection” of January 6, and a litany of other topics. By censoring searches, Google and other Big Tech companies only allowed the “official narrative” approved by government to be allowed. This is not unlike the same tactics used in China, the former Soviet Union, and myriad other dictatorial, authoritarian states.

As Breitbart [reported](#):

Google has ramped up its censorship efforts in recent years, particularly around large public events such as the coronavirus pandemic and the recent invasion of Ukraine. Breitbart News recently reported that Google-owned YouTube removed a six-year-old documentary by filmmaker Oliver Stone on the Ukrainian uprising that overthrew president Viktor Yanukovich and installed a pro-EU, pro-NATO government.

Breitbart News reported extensively in 2020 on Google’s blacklisting of Breitbart using techniques similar to those described by Weinberg. Leading up to the 2020 election, Google blacklisted all Breitbart page results for searches related to Joe Biden.

While this writer — a self-described privacy nerd — has long promoted DuckDuckGo as a private alternative to Google, this changes that. After all, Weinberg is only partly right about what a search engine is supposed to do. And that means he is mostly wrong. Yes, a search engine should return “more relevant content over less relevant content,” but the content should be free of political bias and based



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in honesty. To cull information that the masters deem wrong is to turn a search engine into little more than an online portal for the Ministry of Truth.

Fortunately, there are still other alternatives. StartPage.com is a good option. For a fairly in-depth explanation of what StartPage does, check out [my interview](#) with StartPage’s Senior Product Manager Alexandra Kubiak and Director of Brand and Content Kelly Finnerty on my podcast *Enemy of the [surveillance] State*.

But since ridding oneself of both surveillance and censorship requires using a privacy-friendly browser — which necessarily excludes Microsoft’s browser and Google’s Chrome browser — this writer recommends switching to the Brave browser. There is an interesting story behind the creation of Brave. [That story](#) involves Brendan Eich donating his own money to support the traditional view of marriage and then — years later — finding himself ousted from Mozilla (which offers the FireFox browser.)

This writer has been using the Brave browser since writing the article linked above. [Since then, Brave has introduced Brave Search — offering private, censorship-free, reliable searches.](#) Since Eich is not only not beholden to the liberal mindset, but seems to actually despise it, there is little chance of Brave Search culling search results based on “approved” information.

As the Twitter thread springing from Weinberg’s “we heart censorship” tweet shows, DuckDuckGo is poised to lose a great many users. And many of those users are turning to Brave Search and StartPage.



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