

Google Gets Political

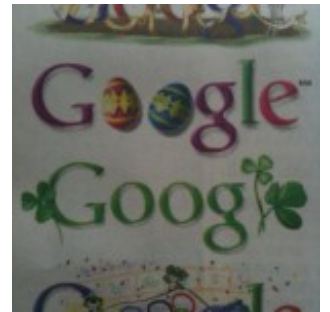
 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/02/21/google-gets-political/

2010-2-21

Is it a sign of weakness or strength that Google is now having to listen to critics and competitors as well as customers?

A few years ago Google didn't bother to do publicity and public affairs. It thought its global dominance in search spoke volumes for its popularity and success. But with growth comes corporate responsibility.

The dispute over security with Beijing was taken up by Hillary Clinton putting Google on the geo-political stage. And the recent screw-up over privacy and Google Buzz showed that you can't just launch in Beta and hope everyone forgives you when you push too far and fast.



That's why I found myself in a Soho hotel dining room last week with a crowd of media analysts and lobbyists being entertained by top Google executives. The fact that Google hired top BBC journalist Peter Barron (my former colleague at Channel 4 News) and former media policy wonk and Downing Street aparatchik Sarah Hunter shows that they are now serious about their place in the real as well as digital world.

This is a bit sad for people who felt that Google's original principle of 'do no harm' was enough of a policy statement. Now it is like any other corporate giant. It has to feed lobbyists chicken dinners and write technical papers for civil servants.

As Ken Ausler's sensible new book, [Googled: The End Of The World As We Know It](#), points out, Google is a fantastic success that has helped change the world, generally for the better. But as you grow up life gets complicated. Not everything Google does works. Not everything makes money. Facebook is still king of social networking. New rivals will emerge.

Despite Jeff Jarvis' enthusiasm for the company, he agrees [see comment below] you can't solve all the world's problems – or even the media's – simply by asking [What Would Google Do?](#) Google knows this now. That is why it is now much more concerned with working out how it gets along with other animals in the digital jungle.

It was made very clear at our Soho shindig that Google understands that content creation has to be rewarded and that Google must be part of the solution not just the problem. It was Chatham House rules so I can't give details and to be honest, there was nothing very remarkable to relate. The fact that Google was listening was perhaps the most important thing said.

In effect, Google is getting political. That's no bad thing. With politics comes the possibility at least of accountability and that is generally a Good Thing. Welcome to our world, Google.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science