

WIRED.COM Has Google Popped The Filter Bubble?

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Google Tuesday launched [Search plus Your World](#), a significant change to the flagship product that just about everybody uses every day. It's a big deal, and Mike Isaac has the [deets](#) and some analysis. I'll post something myself on the broader issues later on.

For now, let me note one feature that may be lost in the larger news. Because some people may not want shared items from people on their social graph to intrude with their searches, Google offers a quick opt-out: a button that removes all social results from a search.

But it does more than that. Choosing that option blocks Google from using the history of your previous searches when it provides results. (Google still uses some personalization in choosing results, namely language and location. Otherwise, says Google's search quality guru Amit Singhal, the results would probably be unsatisfying if not confusing. If you're really motivated, though, you can plow through some menus and change those settings, too.)

According to the Google blog:

We're also introducing a prominent new toggle on the upper right of the results page where you can see what your search results look like without personal content. With a single click, you can see an unpersonalized view of search results..

This seems to address the complaint known as [The Filter Bubble](#), as popularized by Eli Pariser's cogently-argued book of that name. Pariser contends that when internet providers personalize their services, people wind up seeing only what those providers think they want to see — stuff in their comfort zone. Pariser engages in world-class hand-wringing at the prospect of people exposed only to things they already agree with or are familiar with. Google personalization is his *bête noire*.

I reached Pariser this morning. He had not heard the news, but I briefed him and he checked it out on Google's blog. His first reaction (pending a more thorough dive into the feature) was positive.

"It's definitely a big step in terms of transparency and control. It's kind of awesome to see them do this," he told me.

There are still issues he's like to look into — does the opt-out also block information like what browser people use? — but at first blush, he says it seemed to really address the concerns he raised in his book.

In one fell swoop, Google might have popped the Filter Bubble.