

Google's new privacy policy in the spotlight

LONDON, UK: Scheduled to come into effect on March 1, Google's much publicised new [Privacy Policy and terms](#), which it says will give users better search results, ads and improve their experience overall, have come under scrutiny from the European Union's (EU) data protection authorities.



The authorities have asked for rollout to be delayed in order to verify the terms are not in breach of EU data protection laws. From a search engine optimisation (SEO) perspective, Adam Bunn*, SEO director at leading digital marketing agency Greenlight, says this likely is the most transparent Google has ever been about how it uses consumer click through rate (CTR) data in its algorithm. It gives credence to conclusions the firm had drawn in its own [research](#) last year which in Greenlight's view showed Google was already doing exactly this.

Google explains the main change, which is for users with Google Accounts, as follows:

"Our new Privacy Policy makes clear that, if you're signed in, we may combine information you've provided from one service with information from other services. In short, we'll treat you as a single user across all our products, which will mean a simpler, more intuitive Google experience."

In the privacy policy, Google says:

"To bring you the most relevant results for each search query, we look at the usage patterns of millions of people using Google every day. It is by analyzing these search patterns via our logs data that our engineers are able to improve the search algorithms that determine the order in which our search results appear. If our engineers can see that people are consistently clicking on the top result for any given query, they know they are doing something right. If people are hitting "next page" or typing in another query, they know they're not delivering the results that people are looking for, and can then take action to try and improve the search algorithms."

"From a search engine optimisation (SEO) perspective, it may well be the most transparent Google has ever been about its utilising click through rate (CTR) data in its natural search algorithm, something we at Greenlight have long suspected," says Bunn.

"The new Privacy Policy and terms serve as a reminder, if one were needed, of the importance of the following:

- Using micro-formatting to create 'rich snippets' that enhance your search engine result page (SERP) listing with

additional information such as product listings, comments, post counts, ratings and reviews;

- Optimising your title and meta description so that they are compelling and readable, not just keyword rich;
- Having a clean, concise URL structure so that users can see from the display URL that the page they are going to is the right one."

Bunn points to recent results from earlier research by Greenlight showing [Google ranking fluctuations](#).

"There's an interesting link between the cyclical rank fluctuations we saw in our experiment (what we termed "Algorithm Testing or User Testing Fluctuations") and Google using CTRs in its algorithm."

Bunn had suggested then that Google was testing how well users respond to a particular page ranking in the search results by artificially improving its ranking for intermittent periods, looking at user signals like CTRs, bounce rates, engagement time and so on. Google's transparency over using CTR adds a lot of credibility to this theory.

**Adam Bunn is SEO Director at Greenlight and is responsible for the strategic direction of the agency's SEO consultancy and link building products and services. Adam has trained, strategised and provided consultancy for clients including Vodafone UK, American Express, Monarch, Legal & General, Santander and Sky.*

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