

Chapter 10

YouTube and Google: Glorious Days

ABSTRACT

Google's purchase of YouTube created a partnership between the world's largest search engine and the fastest-growing user-generated content (UGC) site. Over the past 10 years this combination has produced a great number of domestic and international news stories. This chapter highlights the salient issues regarding the business partnership between YouTube and Google, focuses on how an economic and capitalistic-driven mandate dominates YouTube's virtual space in the form of advertisements, and explains how YouTube's social networking activity is designed to encourage user activity in support of Google's revenue-generating business model. Some predictable but unintended legal consequences of YouTube's meteoric growth and the overall growth of video creation and sharing on the Internet present copyright challenges for YouTube in its role as a third-party distributor for content. YouTube copyright cases involving Viacom and YouTubers themselves are notable. Technology, in the form of YouTube's Content ID software, has consistently provided an umbrella of protection for YouTube in its claim that the company makes efforts to enforce U.S. and international copyright laws. YouTubers continue to upload copyright-protected work and utilize the legal doctrine of Fair Use, thwarting efforts by large movie studios, artists, and television networks to enforce their copyright privileges. YouTube and Google continue to forge partnerships with traditional major media outlets to produce original content, repurpose and distribute older content, and extend mass media's reach.

INTRODUCTION

In December 2013, CNN.com reported Google's sixth point of its official core values statement: "Do the right thing; don't be evil. Honesty and integrity in all we do. Our business practices are beyond reproach. We make money by doing good things" (Rushkoff, 2013, para. 12). In a check of that motto using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (2010), in a link from April 19, 2010, Google's Code of Conduct supported, somewhat, what CNN reported.

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“Don’t be evil.” Googlers generally apply those words to how we serve our users. But “Don’t be evil” is much more than that. Yes, it’s about providing our users unbiased access to information, focusing on their needs and giving them the best products and services that we can. But it’s also about doing the right thing more generally—following the law, acting honorably and treating each other with respect. (Google Company, 2012, para. 1)

However, in Google’s current Code of Conduct (as of July 2015) from Google’s *Ten things we know to be true* webpage, the motto “Don’t be Evil” has now become:

“You Can Make Money Without Doing Evil”

Google is a business. The revenue we generate is derived from offering search technology to companies and from the sale of advertising displayed on our site and on other sites across the web. Hundreds of thousands of advertisers worldwide use AdWords to promote their products; hundreds of thousands of publishers take advantage of our AdSense program to deliver ads relevant to their site content. To ensure that we’re ultimately serving all our users (whether they are advertisers or not), we have a set of guiding principles for our advertising programs and practices.” (Google Company, 2015b, para. 6)

On the face of it, this new Google motto looks innocuous enough. At the very least, the motto is straightforward, although some might consider it to be a bit naïve. Regardless, the current motto certainly is clear: Google believes in making a profit. This philosophy is a company imperative, along with “doing no evil.” By design, therefore, Google products and Google companies have the mandate to generate revenue. As a Google company, along with DeepMind Technologies (artificial intelligence), Boston Dynamics (military robotic applications), Makani Power (Airborne wind turbines) and many, many other companies (Blodget, 2014), YouTube’s (UGC and advertising) *raison d’être* is also to make money.

WHAT DOES THE PARTNERSHIP MEAN?

One way to look at the Google/YouTube partnership is to look back at history for examples of this type of partnership. Since social platforms and social media are very new technologies, there are only limited historical records regarding how these companies operate and the cultural and socioeconomic impact of large acquisitions. However, there is precedent for Google’s business structure and philosophy.

According to Google, “The revenue we generate is derived from offering search technology to companies and from the sale of advertising displayed on our site and on other sites across the web” (Google Company, 2015a, para 1). Google is in the business of selling advertising. Google owns, in whole or part, more than 156 companies, of which only a handful have anything directly to do with the business of Internet advertising.

YouTube is a large company in the Googleverse. YouTube videos often contain the parent-company Google’s advertising and the YouTube homepage now has banner advertising at the top its Landing Page that, according to reports, now costs \$300,000 per day and runs in what is known as the YouTube Homepage Redzone (Search Engine Watch, 2013).

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