

## The mind Googles

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From its humble beginnings in 1996 Google is now the most successful Internet company in the world. Its products range from search to office applications and have taken the world by storm ( and in doing so have forced other companies to change their habits) and created a completely new business model, whilst being extremely profitable. Google's search engine commands more than 80% of searches worldwide and is pretty much a monopoly, yet we love it. Most us use Google search everyday and many companies rely on Google for their success. Story by Peter Ricci.

### The Google Philosophy

Google loves information and it has built the whole business around giving users fast, simple access to that data. Google makes its money by running simple advertising alongside that information. Do a search on Google for 'real estate' and you will see a whole host of businesses competing for top spot in advertising at the top and to the right of those search results.

### Competition

Companies like Microsoft have thrown hundreds of millions of dollars trying to compete and have seen their market share actually diminish each time. Locally, Sensis tried to woo us with their own search tool and invested tens of millions of dollars marketing the product, yet it has not even seen a share gain of 1%. Google provides fast and relatively accurate responses to most natural search terms and this is where their success lies.

### Products

We all know Google Search, however Google has been steadily building its product base by buying or building new products or services that traditionally have had a cost associated with them. Google Docs allows you to freely create and share word documents, spreadsheets and presentations; Gmail and Google Apps allow you to create free email web and mail accounts; Google Analytics allows you to place a small amount of code in your website's header or footer and provides a range of visitor statistics reports; Google Maps have transformed what was once an expensive tool into a free mapping application you can use on your desktop, mobile phone, car or on any website, allowing you to overlay these maps with information of your choosing.

Google also has many other free tools such as Picasa Photo Tool, Webmaster Tools, YouTube, Calendars, Translation Tools, Checkout Tools, Blogging Applications and of course Google Base. All of these software packages and tools are free to use.

## Google Base Classifieds

In America, UK and Germany Google Base is a free classifieds system allowing you to post goods and services for sale - including real estate! This is where it gets interesting. Google allows you to bulk upload your property listings, just like you do to realestate.com.au and have these listings appear on the Google Base website.

## Google Real Estate Search

Google recently added Google Base items to Google Search, so that when a user searches for real estate or apartments on the Google search engine, a series of drop downs appear below the search box, allowing users to refine the search. This means a user can search for any property data stored in Google Base directly from Google search and if the user wanted more information on that property it would then take the user directly to the website (think yours) where the full data could be viewed.

This new service basically skips the need for a real estate portal like realestate.com.au or domain.com.au, the system is fast, intuitive and free for users and advertisers/ agents.

## Market Affect

Once launched here in Australia it will have an impact on the Australian real estate portal market. The reason for this is twofold, firstly all major portals in Australia charge agents to advertise on their portals and they also charge advertisers to market alongside listings.

Although traditional real estate portals will probably still charge for this service for a period it is only a matter of time before Google starts to hurt them and their bottom line, effectively making them all free for real estate agents to advertise their listings. There is a great deal of money being made by these portals from third party advertisers such as banks, so don't feel sorry for them.

## Australia Launch

You can already send listings to Google Base from Australia by XML data feeds, so it is good to start now, even though the Google.com.au search engine does not carry this information as yet.

Traditionally all Google's products like this are launched in America first. This has now been running for a number of years so it is only be a matter of time before it is launched in Australia and New Zealand. You can keep an eye on developments by going to the Google Base blog (type those words into Google search)

## Google Real Estate Portal?

So will Google ever create a product specifically for real estate? Yes, of course they will! Real Estate is one of the most popular search terms on Google and real estate is now a global

market, so if they are not already developing a tool they will either build one themselves or buy another company that already provides this service.

So what you should be doing is getting your listings on Google Base today, this way you will be ready for the Australian/ New Zealand launch.

### **Street View**

Google Street View is a new feature of Google Maps and Google Earth that provides 360 degree panoramic street views and allows users to view sections of cities and surrounding areas as if they were at street level.

Google basically drives a camera mounted vehicle around just about every street in Australia and captures the imagery along with GPS information. This is a great new research tool that Domain.com.au has already implemented into their online property maps.

### **The Good**

Put simply, this allows users to go directly to a property and view a street level photograph of the property and also pan around surrounding areas. It is another level of research a user can conduct on a listing and is particularly handy when agents only provide a couple of photos (or none at all) of a listing.

### **The Bad**

Some privacy groups have been up in arms over the use of this, as it can take pictures of vehicles and people outside of properties they have no business being in (let your imagination go wild here). Google have countered this by blurring out faces and also license plates. Agents also sometimes take great care with the photography of the property and as the Google Street View imagery is very basic at best, it can take some of the gloss off the style an agent wants to demonstrate in their marketing.

### **Overall**

I think it is a great tool even though you have no control over its look and feel. It also adds another dimension to the marketing of a listing. Buyers and potential tenants will no doubt love this extension and it is one I think all agents should embrace on your websites.

### **Links**

[http:// base.google.com](http://base.google.com)

[http:// googlebase.blogspot.com](http://googlebase.blogspot.com)

[http:// www.business2.com.au](http://www.business2.com.au)

[http:// maps.google.com.au](http://maps.google.com.au)

http:// maps.google.com.au

Peter Ricci operates agentpoint.com.au a real estate web development company and is also the owner of business2.com.au Australia's longest running and most successful real estate technology news site with over 400 articles.

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