

# **Google v Yahoo!**

## **The Importance of Brand and Design**

**A White Paper by  
Bunnyfoot Universality**

## Executive Summary

Bunnyfoot Universality conducted a series of investigations into the importance of brand online and how it influences trust and confidence. For this research we used the two well-known search engines **Google and Yahoo!**

Research involved 84 participants ranging from 14 to 55 years of age.

We measured the effect of the brand by asking our users to conduct searches on what ostensibly appeared to be Google and Yahoo! search engines. We monitored the users' browsing and questioned them on their opinion of the results provided. To accurately assess the influence of the brand on the perception of 'best search results', half the results viewed were actually branded with the other company's logo and site layout.

The main findings were:

- **Brand is more important than results**
- **Ease-of-use is more important than results**

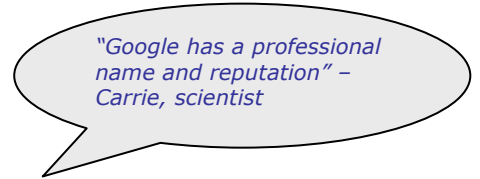
This is potentially very bad news for Yahoo!, who recently purchased Overture (\$1.63bn), Inktomi (\$235m) and AltaVista (\$140m), presumably with the strategic goal of regaining market leader position.

This discovery suggests that even if their new search engine returns better results than Google, it will still not return to being the number one search tool.

To regain the market leader position, Yahoo! must create a better user experience than Google and more relevant search results.

## Background

Google is the strongest Internet brand in the world<sup>1</sup>. In order to learn from their success, **we must understand what factors have made the Google brand so strong** that users have more confidence and trust in Google than in any other search engine.



This question is covered in the first part of this white paper. To understand **Google's success relative to Yahoo!**, it is necessary to track the developments of each search engine to their current positions and this perspective is covered in the second part of this paper.

Google is often quoted as 'the best search engine' available today. Virtually all Internet users regardless of their expertise are aware of Google and the main service they provide.

While many search engines are struggling to retain their existing users, Google has managed to build up a loyal fan base as well as attract many new users.

**What is the secret behind Google?** There is no reason why the factors contributing to Google's triumph and strong online presence cannot be identified and employed as a basis to improve other online businesses.

## The Experiment

In order to investigate the factors behind Google's success, Bunnyfoot Universality conducted a two-part study of 84 people (as part of wider research into Internet branding). We examined just how strong the Google brand is and how much it affects users' perceptions of results.

**Part 1:** Participants completed a questionnaire concerning their personal preferences in relation to search engines.

**Part 2:** Participants were asked to find information on the Web using Google and Yahoo! They viewed the results of key word searches and were then asked a series of questions to ascertain their level of trust and confidence in the relevance of the returned results.

The twist in the experiment was that **half the tests conducted were with genuine results** from each search engine, whereas **the other half had all the results switched** (e.g. Figures 1 & 2). The users were not made aware of this substitution.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Interbrand, Readers' Choice Brand of the Year, 2003.

**Google** [Advanced Search](#) [Preferences](#) [Language Tools](#) [Search Tips](#)

cheap holidays

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Searched the web for **cheap holidays** Results **1 - 10** of about **3,470,000**. Search took **0.12** seconds.

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**Bargain holidays and cheap flights from Bargainholidays.com**  
 Order online from an ABTA bonded and IATA licensed travel agent. Bargain holidays, city breaks and cheap flights with Bargainholidays.com! ...  
[www.bargainholidays.com/](http://www.bargainholidays.com/) - 40k - 18 Mar 2004 - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)

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 ... ATOL Protection: The air holidays and flights shown are either ATOL Protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (our ATOL number is ATOL 5346) or we act as ...  
 Description: Travel agent offering holiday requirements through the web, telephone, teletext or in person.  
 Category: [Regional > Europe > United Kingdom > Scotland > East Renfrewshire](#)  
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 Barhead Travel offers a superb range of holidays to destinations worldwide. Our holiday packages and late deals are among the best available ... **Luxury Holidays ...**  
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Sponsored Links

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 Thomson, First Choice, Thomas Cook  
 Save 50% + extra £10 off per person  
[www.thefirstresort.com](http://www.thefirstresort.com)  
 Interest: ■■■■■

**Late deals cancellations**  
 Late booking holiday bargains  
 View news for cancellations  
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**INSIDE YAHOO!**

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Categories: • [Travel Agents](#) • [Online Travel Booking](#)

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**Thomson.co.uk - Cheap Holidays**  
 Book a cheap holiday at Thomson.co.uk, one of the easiest ways to research, ...  
[www.thomson.co.uk](http://www.thomson.co.uk)

**Cheap Holiday at cottages4you**  
 Find your ideal holiday cottage from our range of 12,000 properties throughout the ...  
[www.cottages4you.co.uk](http://www.cottages4you.co.uk)

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- **Lunnpoly.com - Cheap Holidays to Florida**  Book your cheap holiday to Florida and save at least £20 plus free or half price insurance when you book online at lunnpoly.com - you'll get more for your lolly at Lunn Poly.  
[www.lunnpoly.com](http://www.lunnpoly.com)
- **Get Cheap Holidays with Hotfoot Holidays**  Visit Hotfoot Holidays for great-value late-availability holidays departing from the UK. We also have a range of holiday packages to the East and West Coast USA, Florida and the Caribbean.  
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- **Portland Direct - Cheap Holidays**  Visit Portland Holidays Direct for fantastic holidays at unbeatable prices - all hand picked to save you £££s. Plus, save an extra £20 per adult when you book online.  
[www.portland-direct.co.uk](http://www.portland-direct.co.uk)
- **Bid for Luxury Holidays at Auctionair**  Choose from many hand-picked luxury holidays at Auctionair. We have great-value bargains to choose from. Click here to browse holidays, flights and much more.  
[www.auction-air.com](http://www.auction-air.com)

**TOP 20 WEB RESULTS** out of about 2,450,000 ([What's this?](#))

1. **Cheap flights & holidays from the UK & Ireland**  **Cheap** Flights air tickets, air fares, discount flights, travel agents, air fares, late deals, and air travel from the UK ... **Cheap holidays. Cheap holidays.** Last minute holidays. **Cheap** short breaks ... **Cheap** accommodation & hotels | **Cheap** holidays | **Cheap** flights - USA | **Cheap** flights - Canada ...

**Figure 1 - The genuine articles**

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cheap holidays

**Web** | [Images](#) | [Groups](#) | [Directory](#) | [News](#)

Searched the web for **cheap holidays** Results **1 - 10** of about **3,470,000** Search took **0.12** seconds

**Cheap holidays - By Haven Europe** Sponsored Link  
[www.uk.havemeholidays.com](http://www.uk.havemeholidays.com) great value **holiday** parks and camp sites in France, Spain and Italy.

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[www.country-holidays.co.uk](http://www.country-holidays.co.uk) With over 3,000 properties and 25 years of experience, we'll help you find the perfect country cottage.

**Bid for Luxury Holidays at Auctionair** Sponsored Link  
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**Cheap flights & holidays from the UK & Ireland**  
**Cheap** Flights air tickets, air fares, discount flights, travel agents, air fares, late deals, and air travel from the UK ... **Cheap holidays** . **Cheap holidays** . Last minute **holidays** . **Cheap** short breaks ... **Cheap** accommodation & hotels | **Cheap holidays** | **Cheap** flights - USA | **Cheap** flights - Canada ...  
[www.cheapflights.co.uk/](http://www.cheapflights.co.uk/) - [More results from this site](#)

**Cheap holidays - Short Breaks and last minute deals**  
**Cheap** Holidays , short breaks, skiing, cruises. Find all the holiday deals in one place! ... The No.1 guide to **cheap holidays** . from the UK & Ireland ... Why Cheapholidaydeals is different to other travel websites. **Cheap holidays** . Last minute ...  
[www.cheapflights.co.uk/holidays](http://www.cheapflights.co.uk/holidays) - [More results from this site](#)

Sponsored Results

**Waterscape.com - Cheap Holiday UK**  
Waterscape.com is the comprehensive guide to enjoying the UK's waterways, offering ...  
[www.waterscape.com](http://www.waterscape.com)

**Cheap Holidays in Cornwall**  
Why not beat yourself to a break in Cornwall? Henda holiday park has excellent ...  
[www.hendra-holidays.com](http://www.hendra-holidays.com)

**YAHOO! Search** [Search Home](#) | [Yahoo!](#) | [Help](#)

**UK-IRELAND**

Your Search: cheap holidays  [Advanced Web Search](#) [Preferences](#)

You are searching:  All of the Web  UK only  Ireland only

Related: [cheap holidays abroad](#), [cheap holidays in spain](#)

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[www.mytravel.com](http://www.mytravel.com)
- **Holiday Specials** - Fabulous offers to all destinations with leading UK travel agent.  
[www.holidaycity.co.uk](http://www.holidaycity.co.uk)

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[www.bargainholidays.com/](http://www.bargainholidays.com/) - 40k - 18 Mar 2004 - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
2. **Barrhead Travel cheap holidays cheap cruises city breaks cheap...**   
**Cheap** Holidays , short breaks, skiing, cruises. Find all the holiday deals in one place! ...The No.1 guide to **cheap holidays** . from the UK & Ireland ... Why Cheapholidaydeals is different to other travel websites. **Cheap holidays** . Last minute ...  
[www.barrheadtravel.co.uk/](http://www.barrheadtravel.co.uk/) - 98k - 18 Mar 2004 - [Cached](#) - [Similar pages](#)
3. **Cheap holidays Last minute holidays bargain holidays cheap holiday ...**   
**Cheap** holidays , late deals, Last minute **holiday** offers, bargain **holidays** , Superb last minute **holiday** deals to Greece, Spain, Cyprus, Caribbean, Mexico, Maldives ...

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Interest:

**Cheap Flights - Expedia**  
Compare prices. Great deals for flights, hotels & car!  
[www.expedia.co.uk](http://www.expedia.co.uk)  
Interest:

**Figure 2 - The sneaky switch**

## Summary of Findings

### Importance of Search Results

Our tests demonstrated that Google search results are perceived as having greater relevance than Yahoo!, regardless of their branding.

*"If it's not on Google it's probably not on the web" Jen - Paramedic*

Confidence in **Yahoo! branded results increased by 6%** when the results were in fact from Google. Yahoo! achieved a 70% confidence rating when using its own results and this increased to 76% with Google results.

Confidence in **Google branded results decreased by 3%** when the results were in fact from Yahoo! When Google was rated on its own results, it achieved an 83% confidence rating, which dipped to 80% when Yahoo! results were used.

While good search results did show positive effects on the user, the difference in perception is marginal and branding had more impact on users' confidence than quality of results, as will be illustrated in the next section.

There is merit in pursuing the best results, but Yahoo!'s spend of over a billion US dollars to achieve what could be a nominal percentage increase could have been put to better use by concentrating on improving their brand image and their site layout.

Condition	Average rating
Google	83%
Yahoo!	70%
Google - Yahoo! results	80%
Yahoo! - Google results	76%

*"Yahoo! is cluttered with adverts whereas Google is simple and has a nicer, less distracting, interface" Clark - Student*

### **Importance of Brand:**

By surreptitiously swapping the results of one search engine into the branding of another we gained an insight into the relationship between brands and trust.

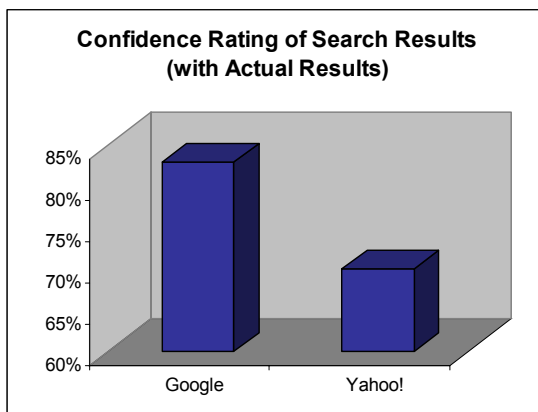
*"Google is easy to use and so well laid out - I wouldn't want to look hard for the search box, it needs to be really easy to access" Dave - Betting Tipster*

The experiment showed that Internet users develop a strong loyalty to their search engine. This allegiance is interesting given how easy it is to switch, and all of those tested could name at least two search solutions.

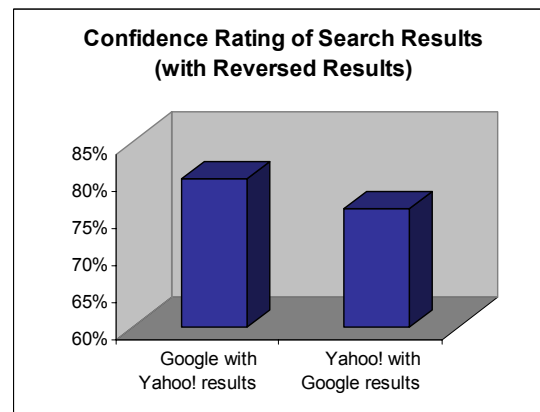
Brand had a greater influence on our participants' trust and confidence than results:

- When Google results were displayed with both the Yahoo! and Google brands, confidence levels were different despite the results being identical. The Google branded results scored 7% higher in trust ratings than Yahoo! with 83% to Yahoo!'s 76%.
- When Yahoo! results were used within both sites' branding, again the confidence levels were different despite the duplicated results. When the results were branded with Google, they boosted confidence ratings by 10%, up to 80%.

The implication of these points is simple and important; Yahoo!'s new search solution will not allow them to regain market leader position even if it produces the same or better results than Google.



**Graph 1** - Users have greater confidence in Google results



**Graph 2** - Google still scores higher than Yahoo! even with their results switched

## ***Importance of Design***

Our research definitively revealed that **brand has a measurable difference on user confidence**, however users were unaware of the effect brand was having on them.

Participants were asked for the top 3 things they look for in choosing a search engine. They answered spontaneously but the majority of responses could be unambiguously assigned to the 5 categories in the table below.

Response Category	First Response	Included In Top 3
Simplicity/ease-of-Use	62%	95%
Relevance of results	27%	75%
Speed	6%	45%
Habit	2%	37%
Brand	0%	24%

**Table 2 – Top 3 categories considered most important by users when choosing a search engine.<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> N.B. Not all participants gave 3 reasons and a small number of reasons fell outside the above categories. We would like to repeat the exercise with more participants and more sophisticated measures, though these results do suggest that design (in terms of ease of use and simplicity) is a high priority for users when choosing and utilising search facilities. The relevance of the results seems to be a secondary consideration.

## Why did Yahoo! lose out to Google?

How did Google attain its position as market leader and the world's top Internet brand? To answer this question it is necessary to go back to 1996 when Google wasn't the pre-eminent search engine and Yahoo! was reigning supreme.

Yahoo! initially achieved success because:

All indexing was carried out by people, who are more capable than computers to qualify what constitutes a good website.

Yahoo! had first mover advantage and became the dominant brand in the market.



**Figure 3 - Yahoo! homepage on 17 October 1996<sup>3</sup>**

By 1999 the dot-com mania was in full swing and Yahoo! was leading the pack and grabbing lots of land. This accumulation is evident in the increased complexity of Yahoo!'s home page design. The number of links nearly doubled from approximately 80 to more than 140.



**Figure 4 - Yahoo! homepage on 28 April 1999.**

<sup>3</sup> Note the prominence of the 'ADD URL' link just to the right of the Yahoo! logo.

Yahoo! was becoming **many things to many people** as the website grew from being an index of websites to include online auctions, shopping, Yahoo! email, Yahoo! Messenger, a URL garage, advertising and more.

The **'ADD URL'** button that had featured so prominently on the 1996 site had fallen below the fold, to the very bottom of the home page.

By **2002** the factors that made Yahoo! a success (human indexing and market leader status) had become their undoing;

People can only do so much work in a day.

Demand to be indexed on Yahoo! outstripped their resources:

The index became increasingly out of date as it took longer and longer to get listed.

Discarded websites were not efficiently cleared out, resulting in an escalation of **"Error 404 Page Not Found"** messages. This made the index look and feel increasingly out of date.

Yahoo! effectively started **charging for listings**. This resulted in an index controlled by money rather than by the quality of the site. Yahoo! continued to increase the complexity of the already busy homepage. By 2002 it contained over 250 links.



**Figure 5 - Yahoo! homepage on 23 May 2002**

The overall effect has been to degrade the user experience for those wanting to search the World Wide Web.

If we look at the **Google homepage** from April 1999, we see a simple interface with a sophisticated solution for ranking the importance of Web pages. It is interesting to note that at this time they were using an exclamation mark, like the forerunner Yahoo!



Google!  
B E T A

Search the web using Google

Google Search    I'm feeling lucky

[More Google!](#)

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**Figure 6 - Google homepage on 28 April 1999**

In the last five years **Google** has dropped the exclamation mark and struck out on its own. It has succeeded, and has become a major player for two main reasons;

They employed the **human element** in the same manner as Yahoo!, but harnessed the power of the people **for free**. Instead of having employees trawling through websites, Google form their statistics by calculating the number of links made to each site on the valid presumption that designers will be selective in the quality of their links.

They concentrated on what was core to their business: producing **relevant search results**. In this way Google have been able to maintain their simple interface, with further options available behind the simple homepage and core search facility. This is illustrated below. (Note the periodic addition to the Google logo, the only frippery ever admitted to the homepage)

*I like the look and feel of Google, I don't like things to be too fancy or with tons of ads -I would be put off using Google if they started getting into advertising and banners too much" Fred - Carpenter*

The overall effect was to **improve the user experience** for those wishing to search the World Wide Web.



**Figure 7 – Google homepage on 23rd August 2004 for the Olympics**

## Current status

Yahoo! continues to charge for new listings, biasing results in favour of those which are paid-for. The complexity of the home page and number of links remains relatively unchanged at around 240. It will be interesting to see how they incorporate the methods of their new acquisitions.

The overall effect of development on Yahoo! has been to degrade the user experience

Google home page has remained almost unchanged, with the notable addition of the Google News tab and a doubling in the number of searchable pages to four billion.

The overall effect of development on Google has been to improve the user experience

## Conclusions:

It is all credit to Yahoo! that they became too successful for their business model to cope. However they did make a number of **sub-optimal strategic decisions** including;

- Trying to over-diversify.
- Charging to be listed on the Yahoo! directory.

Partnering (thereby endorsing) Google and exposing loyal Yahoo! customers to the efficacy of Google's search engine.

Yahoo! have further compounded these mistakes by continuing to employ these same unsuccessful strategies, except that they are to move away from using Google's search results. However it could be suggested that the damage is already done and many previously loyal Yahoo! customers have now become faithful Google users. Yahoo! lost sight of their core business and what their users really wanted; reliable, relevant search results delivered via an easy-to-use and elegant interface.

## Recommendations:

- Spend \$20,000 on understanding what users really want, before spending \$2,000,000,000 to try and regain market leader position.
- Or for most of us – ensure an appropriate budget for usability and customer research. A general accepted amount is no less than 10% of any

## About Bunnyfoot Universality

Founded in 1999, Bunnyfoot Universality is a business-focussed behavioural consultancy operating primarily in interactive media such as the Web, mobile devices and iTV.

We are used to being first:

We were the first UK consultancy to offer professional accessibility consulting services in addition to usability services and have consolidated this leading position ever since.

We developed the UK's **first Internet-enabled car** as a concept piece designed to demonstrate the wider advantages of usability and accessibility good practice.

We were the first usability consultancy in the UK to own our **own eye-tracking solution**. We offer eye-tracking as standard on all our user testing and have done for over a year and a half.

Bunnyfoot Universality employees are first class; we currently employ 8 full-time members of staff and have no plans to grow much more than this. All our consultants hold at least one relevant advanced degree and have extensive practical experience of the Internet industry. We think of ourselves as a high-class boutique rather than a department store – our clients receive bespoke and personal service, not rolled-out wisdom from juniors. This is the future of behavioural consultancy.

Cue usual logo splash:

