Online reviews: Does Google really forget?

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How is your relationship with Google? Do you love or hate it? Does it display negative information about your dental practice? With right to be forgotten legislation, relief from career-damaging reviews now seems to be at hand, but does Google really forget?

In May, the EU Court of Justice found in favour of a Spanish citizen who sued Google for listing information about him that he asserted was no longer relevant. He alleged that this information was prejudicial to his selling a property. Fortunately for him, the court approved his appeal, contributing to the floodgate for requests for thousands of links to be removed from its search engine results page from residents in the EU. By July, it was estimated that the company had already received at least 70,000 such requests. Many applicants have made use of lawyers or search engine optimisation professionals, creating a niche for companies, which are charging the price of an implant per month to manage their clients’ online reputation on Google.

The company’s hands are tied in managing this, as Google has been deleted, Google still knows everything about you. Everything is in the privacy rights of the individual and the public’s right to know and distribute information. When evaluating your request, we will look at the full story regardless of the public interest in the information—for example, information about financial scams, professional malpractice, criminal convictions, or public conduct of government officials.

Will you be safe once a link has been removed from Google? There are sites such as hiddenfromgoogle.com that openly display all hidden results. Even if a result has been hidden, the bottom of the results page on Google states that some results have been removed. At times, it even provides a link to hiddenfromgoogle.com.

It appears that even if something has been deleted, Google still knows everything about you. Everything on the Internet is recorded forever.

In the first week of Google making available a means for search removal requests, 22 per cent (the greatest number by nation) of all applications came from the UK. When requesting removal from Google’s search engine results page, the user must not only list all links he or she wants to be removed, but also provide the reason that he or she wants to have such links removed. Invasion of privacy appears to be a popular reason.

Unfortunately, the company has also had numerous cases of fraudulent removal requests from impersonators trying to harm the competition. It seems that there is always good and bad practice, whatever the medium.

In order to manage this, Google states: “We will assess each individual request and attempt to balance the privacy rights of the individual with the public’s right to know and distribute information. When evaluating your request, we will look at whether the results include outdated information about you, as well as whether there is a public interest in the information—for example, information about financial scams, professional malpractice, criminal convictions, or public conduct of government officials.”

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