Living without Google
About Inge Kloepfer and her one week long experiment.

The upshot is that without Google, even the search engine that I work for in a couple of other circumstances, it is not possible. It becomes really difficult to find stuff because you can’t even look at it anymore. So I think that is the biggest impact that I have experienced.

In the end, the biggest impact of not using Google is that you have to rely on your own intelligence and reasoning. It’s a bit like going back in time to pre-Google days where people had to think for themselves and use their own resources to find information.

But overall, I think that the experiment was a valuable learning experience. It made me more aware of the role that search engines play in our daily lives and how dependent we have become on them for information. Without Google, it feels like a small but important step towards appreciating the value of this technology and its impact on society.

Robert Beens

A Dutchman challenges Google: The search engine Izquied doesn’t store data. And yet, it still makes money.

Mr. Beens, the search engine Izquied has existed for over a decade. Why does nobody know about it? We come up to an万辆 search request per day. Granted, that’s something compared to Google, who are in the terabytes of information a day. That’s quite significant. And yet, there seems to be an Izquied or our other site, Startquake, know exactly why they do it.

And that would be:

Because we’re different, do not store or IP addresses, and don’t generate user profiles.

There are claims I’ve heard from various search engine providers.

What we have ourselves certified by the EU on a regular basis, which is an incredibly complex and expensive process - but only in Europe. In the USA, one can simply buy a web domain and get going.

Your company, Startquake, provides both Izquied and Startquake. Where does the difference?

Izquied is a metasearch engine using many different search engines as its source. Startquake, on the other hand, is limited to Google results. If you have grown accustomed to Google, you can access their results through Startquake without giving away personal data.

Why do you run two search engines?

Because Google doesn’t want their results to intermix with other search engines under any circumstances, and that’s why they don’t want to give up Google results. They are excellent, after all.

How did you get the idea to make discrete your unique selling point?

I’m a lawyer. When first invited to Surfboard, the company that provides Izquied, Startquake and our encrypted e-mail program, Postmark, I asked my tech team what we actually know about our user base. They confessed they know everything, from IP addresses to search patterns concerning any topic imaginable, no matter legal, medical, or otherwise private. The idea to use the collected data both for improving our search results and on their mind yet. Data storage simply isn’t expansive. I could even use that for advertising of data we find. On the other hand, that advertising of our product would result in more information being stolen and abused.

That’s a problem Google is dealing with as well.

Indeed. Even this company might fall victim to a hacking attack carried out by the Chinese. Our search engines, for example, search engine users, there are three areas of risk: First of all, our data, which Google can keep its search data safe. Second, the company that read and check everything for possible usability, and make four times selecting personal information. And third, the governments that spy out and collect data on a grand scale. That’s a different problem altogether, because nobody knows how our national security interest might put that information in use. Being a private search engine that doesn’t collect personal data isn’t particularly easy, by the way.

What are the implications of this?

It is impossible to earn money using this model.

It is profitable. For more years we have been renovating our profit in the platform. Therefore, we don’t depend on external investors. Of course we come and ask if we need more money once in a while, and that’s the occasional bud as well. But for the leading internet companies, we are not attractive - because we don’t collect personal data.

How many employees do you have?

We are a small company with a staff of about 30 to 40. Right now, our main focus is on Startquake. It’s a service which allows users to send encrypted e-mail that can’t be read elsewhere even if the recipient doesn’t have an encrypted e-mail program of their own.

After all the revolutions surrounding the NSA spying scandal and the EU’s #StopErdogan, we demand for Izquied, Startquake and Startquake.

We experience benefits of growth each time. Big data” becomes a topic of public interest. During peak periods, we do indeed count more queries than on a regular day.

And yet people here come - to put it mildly - rather reluctantly when it comes to questions of privacy.

Why is that?

Google offers great products. And all from one source. The search results are excellent, and then there’s Pinterest, Maps, the enormous Alexa, and of course, Google’s instant feature that immediately provides users with suggestions what to search for. We’re able to get it better in that way.

Startquake takes its results directly from Google. Do you get them for free?

No. We do pay them. As for maps: in one or two months we’re going to offer OpenStreetMap on our site. What we’re building is a platform where users can see and change that and effortlessly obtain information or communicate. Is communicating discreetly that complicated?

Sending an encrypted message means more than just writing it as a mail and clicking the Send button. Our encryption is as complex. My team works on simplifying the process in a way that allows users to have their mails encrypted with just one click.

Doesn’t the recipient need any encryption software as well?

That would be ideal, but the world isn’t quite there yet. And because of that, it requires a little more effort on the reader’s part to protect their content.

We managed to develop a reasonably user-friendly solution to this problem - a question answer system. It works similar to providing a security question in case of a password loss. If you want to send an encrypted mail, you could red it without déjà vu being able to. Even if you’re using GMail - the Google service where nothing stays private, Google can’t decrypt the text. Encryption will be an important topic for the next decade.

How do you know that?

There are many startups which work eagerly on simplifying the procedure. If there’s anything that might pose a threat to leading internet companies, it lies here. Do you think it’s still possible to tap the market power of big internet corporations?

That is something I can’t predict. But thanks to the network effect, it won’t be easy. Network effect means the more people are using a service, the greater the benefits for all parties involved.

Is it of benefit that your servers are located in Europe?

Of course. Here in Europe there’s no general surveillance program, after all. Whereas searches within Europe does access European servers in Amsterdam.

Do you yourself still use Google?

Very much. And if I do, then I can see what new features they might have. Even more I’ve become a market player and know how powerful data is, I started being a little paranoid.