

*"We could not rely only on click data in this study because clicks on ads are rare. We had to know where people looked. If you don't look, you won't click. In search, so much depends on placement. Search results layouts where sponsored results attract more attention are ultimately more cost-effective to the advertisers."*

Robert M. Schumacher, Managing Director, User Centric, Inc.

**User Centric, Inc., a user research firm based in Chicago, offers a glimpse into the battle between the newly launched Microsoft's Bing and the powerful incumbent, Google. Eye tracking technology was used to compare the distribution of attention on equivalent areas of the two search engines, and to assess how much attention is captured by elements that are unique to Bing.**

### Purpose

Immediately following Microsoft's May 28 launch of its new search engine, Bing, User Centric conducted an independent, non-sponsored eye tracking study to offer a glimpse into the battle between Bing and the powerful incumbent, Google. The purpose of the research was twofold; (1) compare the distribution of attention on equivalent areas of Bing and Google and (2) assess how much attention is captured by elements that are unique to Bing.

### Method

The Tobii 1750 Eye Tracker was used to capture 21 participants' eye movements as they completed two informational (e.g., "Learn about eating healthy") and two transactional (e.g., "Book a last minute vacation") search tasks using both Bing and Google. All participants were new to Bing but very familiar with Google.

### Results

Google and Bing did not differ in terms of the amount of attention on the organic search results. In each search, all participants looked at the organic search results, spending an average of 7 seconds in that area.

Attention on the sponsored links located above the organic results was similarly high for both Bing and Google. Over 90% of participants looked in that area during each search. As expected, during transactional searches, participants spent more time looking at the sponsored results on top (2.5 seconds) than they did on informational searches (1.5 seconds).

However, sponsored links on the right attracted more attention on Bing (42% of participants per search) than they did on



*Heatmaps showing the aggregate gaze duration of all participants on Google (top) and Bing (bottom) for one of the transactional tasks. The red color indicates areas that received the most total gaze time (4.5 seconds and above).*

Google (25% of participants per search). Participants who fixated on these links spent approximately 2.5 seconds looking at the area during transactional searches and 2 seconds during informational searches. These times were similar for the two search engines.

There are at least two possible reasons why Bing's right rail attracted more attention than Google's. First, there is less separation between the organic results and the sponsored ads on the right on Bing than there is on Google. Second, because our participants had not used Bing prior to the study, they might have scanned more areas than they would have had they been familiar with the site.

Another difference in the distribution of attention on Bing vs. Google involved related searches. On Bing, related searches are shown on the left, immediately below the categories. Google on the other hand displays related searches below the organic search results, toward the bottom of the page. Bing's related searches had a much higher visibility than Google's, attracting the attention of 31% of participants per search. Google's related searches attracted the attention of only 5% of participants per search.

We also investigated three additional features that differentiate Bing from Google: flyouts that appear when users hover over individual search results, a category list displayed on the left, and sponsored links at the bottom of the search results page. Most participants (67%) triggered a flyout at least once during the study, which shows that the flyouts are easily activated. Nearly all of these activations were categorized as accidental because participant's attention was away from the mouse pointer which triggered the flyout. Usually, the sudden appearance of an element in the visual field attracts attention but this was not the case in this study. Only 14% of participants (a

quarter of those who activated at least one flyout) looked at the flyouts. Users' tendency to ignore the flyouts was likely a result of the learned strategy to devalue motion as a source of information on the Web. This behavior may be compared to "banner blindness."

Bing's categories displayed on the left attracted much more attention than the flyouts. Half of the participants discovered the categories and three participants even selected a category to refine their search. Each of these three participants chose to use the categories on subsequent searches, which suggests potential value.

The sponsored links at the bottom of the search results page did not generate any attention. None of the 21 participants looked at the bottom links on any of the four searches. This does not mean that users never look at the bottom sponsored links. Rather, the incidence rate of this behavior may be too low to detect with our sample size.

### Why Tobii?

*"We have been using Tobii Eye Trackers in our research since 2003. We chose Tobii not only for its ease of use but also for the efficiency with which it allows us to conduct studies and extract various eye movement metrics for quantitative analysis. Over the years, Tobii has continued to improve its analysis tools based on customer feedback. Each new release of the Tobii Studio software offers additional features that increase our flexibility, precision, and/or efficiency."*

- Aga Bojko, Associate Director and Chief Scientist, User Centric, Inc.

### Eye tracking at User Centric

Tobii eye trackers help us gain insight into the cognitive processes involved in user interaction with visual stimuli. We have applied eye tracking to a variety of studies involving commercial and informational web sites, major search engines and portals, product packaging, medication labels, and



A participant in front of the Tobii Eye Tracker.

email advertising. By using eye movement measures to supplement data collected with more traditional user research methods (e.g., usability testing, user interviews), we can determine what users find important or interesting and what they tend to ignore, assess users' decision-making processes, explain inefficient or ineffective performance, identify search patterns and strategies, and evaluate the match between visual designs and business objectives.

Our eye tracking research has been published in books and professional journals. It is also presented regularly at national and international conferences.

### About User Centric, Inc.

User Centric is a global consulting firm that focuses on improving user experience. We apply our expertise to projects involving handhelds, web sites, software, medical devices, print, packaging, and telephony services. Our services include user research, user-centered design, usability testing, expert evaluations, eye tracking, and online surveys. Learn more about us at [www.UserCentric.com](http://www.UserCentric.com).

**To find out how Eye Tracking can improve your business, please visit [www.tobii.com](http://www.tobii.com) or contact one of our offices.**

**EMEA**  
Tobii Technology AB  
Karlsrovägen 2D  
S-182 53 Danderyd  
Sweden  
+46 8 663 69 90 Phone  
+46 8 30 14 00 Fax  
[sales@tobii.com](mailto:sales@tobii.com)

**NORTH AMERICA**  
Tobii Technology, Inc.  
510 N. Washington Street  
Suite 200 - Falls Church,  
VA 22046 - USA  
+1-703-738-1300 Phone  
+1-888-898-6244 Phone  
+1-703-738-1313 Fax  
[sales.us@tobii.com](mailto:sales.us@tobii.com)

**ASIA**  
Tobii Technology, Ltd.  
3-4-13 Takanawa, Minato-ku  
Tokyo 108-0074  
Japan  
+81-3-5793-3316 Phone  
+81-3-5793-3317 Fax  
[sales.jp@tobii.com](mailto:sales.jp@tobii.com)

**CENTRAL EUROPE**  
Tobii Technology GmbH  
Niedenau 45  
D-60325 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany  
+49 69 24 75 03 40 Phone  
+49 69 24 75 03 429 Fax  
[sales.de@tobii.com](mailto:sales.de@tobii.com)



[www.tobii.com](http://www.tobii.com)