

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for  
Social Justice: News,  
Issues, and Ideas

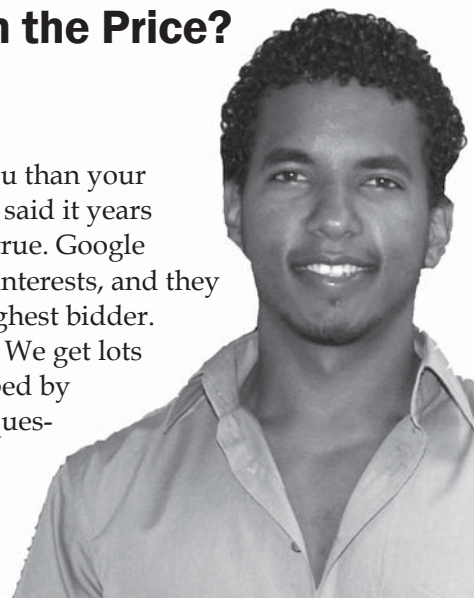
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## You Are the Product! Google Sells You to the Highest Bidder; Is It Worth the Price?

*Romenigque dos Santos*

Google knows more about you than your own mother does. Somebody said it years ago, and today we know it's true. Google knows most of our likes and interests, and they sell this information to the highest bidder. What do we get in exchange? We get lots of great applications, developed by them, totally for free. So the question is: is it worth it?



### Can't Eat These Cookies

Google uses a technology known as cookies to learn about what you do and what you search for on their Web pages. (Cookies are small programs placed in your computer that collect information about you and give it to Google.) For example, when you use Google to search for something like "gyms," Google knows you are interested in working out and probably other healthy things.

Moreover, Google doesn't use cookies just on their Web pages. They also use it on several thousands of other Web pages. Consequently, they know much more about you than you could imagine. Every day they get complete reports of the Web pages you visited, purchases you made, content you read and shared, music you listened to, videos you watched, and ads you clicked on.

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With all of this information about millions of people, including you, Google can provide a very accurate ad service for its customers. Do you

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### **Your personal information is the price you pay for these services. In a way, you are the product.**

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This is Google selling your personal information to companies so they can pitch their products and services.

### **Your Privacy in Exchange for Great Google Products**

Maybe this article seems scary to you, but let's look at it another way. Google is probably one of the most creative companies in the whole world. Typically, when you want to use the best products, you have to pay for them, and they're generally not cheap. In this case, every year Google invests millions of dollars, does research, and develops great products that everyone can use for free.

Think of all the amazing applications that Google provides. Google Maps allows you to know how to go to anywhere by car or walking. Google Earth will take you to virtually any place on Earth and even out of Earth—to the moon and to Mars. Other great Google services include

email and translation. The Google search engine is an awesome service that lets you know almost anything about any topic. How much does it cost? That's right. Nothing.

Google also offers special services for students and organizations. There's a set of Web applications that lets you study or work together with whomever you want regardless of time or place. That means you can share emails, calendars, or any kind of documents with your partners, and it will be accessible for all of you anywhere and anytime by any mobile device such as laptop, tablet, or even smartphone. How much does it cost? Right again. Zero.

As far as Google is concerned, your personal information is the price you pay for these services. In a way, *you* are the product. You — your history, your habits, your interests, etc. — are being sold to companies that want to sell you things. Is this a benefit for you? On the one hand, you can use all of those amazing Google services and pay nothing. On the other hand, Google will collect your information and sell it to the highest bidder. The point of Google, after all, is to make a profit for itself. Google may know more about us than our mothers do. But Google lets us know almost everything about any topic. What do you think? Does it sound like a fair deal?

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*Romenigüe dos Santos is 25 years old. Born in Angola, he moved to Cape Verde when he was 6. When he was 18, he went to Portugal where he got his Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Computer Science. He knew that to be a better engineer, he had to improve his English, so he came to the U.S. and studied ESL in Pawtucket, RI.*

### **Take it Further**

**Put it in your own words.** Explain what the author means when he says, "You are the product."

**Debate it.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Google model? What is your answer to the author's final question: "Does it sound like a fair deal?"

**Deepen your understanding.** Look at the cartoon on the next page. What would it mean if the wealthiest Internet companies could pay to have their content delivered to you faster?