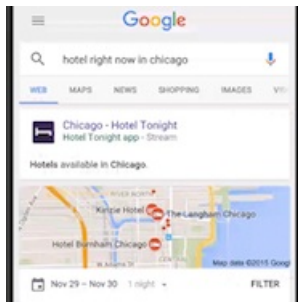


MOBILE

## Google smashes through Web barrier to stream apps in search results

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*Apps now have a bigger presence in Google search results*

By CHANTAL TODE

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With Google's dominant role in search under pressure in the quickly evolving mobile space, the company has thrown down the gauntlet by surfacing application-only content in search results and eliminating the need to install an app to take advantage of its offerings.

The news has significant implications for search users and app developers and reflects previous moves by both Apple and Google to deliver more integrated digital experiences. Potentially, this will also rewrite search engine rankings, with some apps being catapulted to the top.

"Although done without much fanfare, this is a huge announcement and a defensive move from Google," said Scott Allan, chief marketing officer at [Pure Oxygen Labs](#). "It shows how hard the company is working to maintain its dominant market position in search.

"'Apps-first' content appearing in Google search results combined with the ability to stream' app content and even complete transactions will blunt the idea that we're moving quickly toward an app-only world," he said. "This announcement significantly muddies the app vs. Web waters.

"For consumers, it could negate the need to install most apps if I'm an occasional user. For app developers it may enable them to further focus on their best and most loyal customers who take the time to install the app and use it frequently."

### Closing the gap

Google is closing the gap between native mobile experiences and the Web by surfacing content previously only available in applications as part of Web search results, even making certain apps available to stream without downloading them.

For example, HotelTonight, one of several initial partners, can be streamed in search results for hotels, enabling searchers to book a room via the app even they do not have it on their phones.

Google understands that much of search has moved to mobile and, increasingly, some of the best answers to users' searches are going to be found inside an application.

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"For retailers, it will force them to optimize their app vs. Web strategies in new ways," said Brian Klais. "Since there is no equivalent Web page for this "app-first" content, the traditional link equity model Google uses to calculate rankings doesn't (or can't) apply - at least not initially.

"So this presents an exciting opportunity for brands like Hotels Tonight to immediately leapfrog deeply entrenched SERP competitors like Orbitz or Expedia, by jumping to the top of results, for free, presumably just by implementing the Google app indexation SDK," he said. "Incentives related to deep linking are needed because our research shows less than 5 percent of top 100 app retailers have implemented app indexation."

### **The best information**

Two years ago, Google made a first step toward addressing this reality when it started indexing the content in apps. However, Google has only been able to show information from apps that have matching Web content.

Yesterday's announcement acknowledges that finding information in apps still too hard, as much of this useful information exists only in apps.

By surfacing this app-first content in search results, Google hopes to make its search capabilities more relevant to mobile-first users so it can hold onto position here. While Google is still the clear leader in mobile search, the space is so new and uncharted that a number of competitors are trying to chip away at its position.

The new capability will enable some neat use cases. For example, someone needing a hotel for a spur-of-the-moment trip to Chicago can now find results from the HotelTonight app. Or, someone thinking about visiting Arches National Park can find details about its 18-mile scenic drive from the Chimani app.

Other initial partners include Daily Horoscope and New York Subway.

Google's earlier step to start indexing app content reinforced the notion that there was a need here. Google says it now has more than 100 billion deep links into apps, including some popular apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Airbnb and Pinterest. Additionally, it reports that 40 percent of searches on Android surface app content.

### **Streaming apps**

The other innovation is the ability to stream some apps that are not installed on a phone right from Google Search. The caveat here is that users need to have good Wi-Fi, according to Google.

For example, with one tap on a "Stream" button next to the HotelTonight app result, users will get a streamed version of the app enabling them to find what they need and complete a booking just as if they were in the app.

Users will also be able to install the app if they choose to.

The streaming offering uses a new cloud-based technology that Google is currently experimenting with.

More integrated mobile experiences are increasingly a focus for mobile leaders.

In a recent report, Forrester predicted that mobile users next year will gravitate towards using a contextual stream on a single platform or an ecosystem of integrated applications. As a result, Apple and Google could increasingly see their mobile dominance challenged by platforms such as Amazon, Facebook and WeChat ([see story](#)).

"At this stage, this is evolving so quickly it is unclear who will come out on top but Google is moving faster [than Apple] on all fronts and they have the most to lose in an "app-only" world," Mr. Allan said.

Google is also trying to address the fact that the typically mobile users will download a finite number of apps but may still want access to the information in certain apps that are not on their phones.

"This is very significant news for Web site owners and app developers," said Brandon Schakola, senior director of earned media and strategy at [The Search Agency](#). "Up until now, the only method was to move through deep linking content currently also available on websites.

"Some Web sites have been slow to adopt responsive design, and have instead focused solely on native mobile experiences," he said. "Google is now offering this content, and making native experiences easier to surface in the results.

### **Final Take**

*Chantal Tode is senior editor on Mobile Marketer, New York*

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