

Google, Facebook Kill Access to Alternative Care Information

John Weeks | DIGITAL EXCLUSIVE

The [blog post](#) to which my attention was called was entitled, "When Big Brother Went High Tech." The news from energy medicine author Lynn McTaggart jerked attention of the integrative community to a story I'd long anticipated: Google's censors turned their attention to the still-wild political-economical-medical frontier of "alternative medicine." Osteopath and Internet businessman Joseph Mercola reported that 99 percent of the traffic to his sometimes pugnacious Mercola.com "natural health" website was killed. "Integrative medicine" was not spared. Visits to the much more tame Dr. Weil site from that field's godfather dropped 66 percent. In an August 2019 e-blast to his list of Minnesota holistic practitioners on Google's incendiary actions, an integrative leader of 40 years, Bill Manahan, MD writes: "I think you will find it pretty scary for those of us in the integrative, alternative, and functional medicine fields."

It is. McTaggart's story is a doorway into a sectoral and global hell. The McTaggart piece first reached me from a leader at Consciousness and Healing Initiative for which I serve on a communications team. Other readers of the Integrator newsletter also tipped me. The news is stark. Changed Google algorithms cut in half traffic on her e-magazine site, What Doctors Don't Tell You. She reported Mercola's even more devastating losses while also sharing Mercola's belief that Google's additional manual manipulation of search targets cut down additional traffic where the algorithms hadn't already driven in the knives. Why? Via associative laws - such as Google's investment in pharmaceutical solutions - McTaggart puts Big Pharma at the calamitous keyboard. Manahan's e-blast shares that others, like author Christiane Northrup, MD, agree. McTaggart calls it "a massive concerted effort by Big Tech and giant corporations to censor the information you are allowed to see."

The ability to create such damage to choice, to freedom, and to health has multiple causes. The danger enveloping the situation is that we the people have allowed economic power to consolidate into very, very few hands. A few fallible human beings, as curtained as the Wizard of Oz, can flip a switch that is as massive in its reach as it is presently unassailable in its influence. The information related to so many governments, individuals and organizations have become desparcidos (disappeared) or are otherwise damaged in Google's own kind of subway poisoning that their activity has merited its own Wikipedia page: [Censorship by Google](#).

In "Forget Facebook - Three Reasons to Leave Facebook Immediately," [Mercola tells](#) his 1.8-million Facebook followers that he is leaving the site to work via e-mail newsletters. One reason: "Facebook is a monopoly." He shares how the business CrossFit's Banting 7 Day Meal Plan website with its 1.65-million users was summarily dropped by Facebook. (It was later reinstated.) Mercola notes that Senator Elizabeth Warren's "campaign against Facebook was censored by the site" - though also reinstated. Warren, notably, has [taken the lead](#) in raising anti-trust issues that might limit the damage a single company can do with a click of a keyboard.

What of smaller, less vocal and less powerful users? One of these, who wished to maintain anonymity, contacted me to note that his site and that of a colleague had each dropped by 50 percent. Neither was ready to blame Google, perhaps fearing repercussions.

He directed me to a frightening, though excellent resource that lays out the pattern of intentional suppression of traffic. The posting by Sayer Ji, the founder of GreenMedInfo, is called "Google's Digital Book Burn: Alternative Medicine Content Now Vanishingly Rare, Despite 1 Million Health Searches a Day." Credit Ji for the excellent reporting. He [provides a chart](#) titled "Health Sites Decimated by Google" that, in the time frame he measures [April 15, 2018 to Aug. 15, 2019], shows Mercola with an 84 percent decline in visibility; others are over 90 percent. Here are a few other examples, according to Ji:

- Top10HomeRemedies: -99.87 percent
- PaleoHacks: -91.18 percent
- LiveStrong: -69.32 percent
- DrWeil: -65.80 percent
- MindBodyGreen: -54.84 percent

For reference, Ji also includes the metrics at the bottom of the chart from Mayo Clinic and WebMD during the same period. They made gains in visibility of 59.98 percent and 30.71 percent, respectively. There are winners in this game - and they are medicine's business as usual, even if, like Mayo, they may have an integrative medicine program and show respect for non-pharmacologic approaches.

The whimsical taking - and sometimes giving back - of hard-won virtual real estate is a sort of privately sanctioned right of eminent domain.

Protection from bad natural medicine information does not even appear to be an aim. A surprising finding [explored at Self-Hacked.com](#) by its CEO, Joe Cohen ("Google is Taking Censorship of Health Websites to a New Level"), is that the 94 percent reduction of traffic on his site is in many cases sending people to sites that are less referenced. Cohen claims his site is thoroughly evidence-based and more referenced than most "institutional websites." After walking readers through evidence on natural remedies for sites at Mayo, Cleveland Clinic and elsewhere, he proceeds to show that the new algorithms are boosting traffic - and thus business - for posts from sites with less history of dedication to evidence. The net effect appears to be to send people to less responsible sites.

The "why" of Google's action is speculative, and as noted above, associative - linking the actions in a deterministic way to Google's business decisions in recent years. Here is McTaggart:

"In the last six years, Alphabet, Google's parent company, has set up two pharmaceutical companies: Calico (2013) and Verily Life Sciences (2015). Verily went on to partner with GlaxoSmithKline to create a third innovative drug company called Galvani Bioelectronics ... Climb down this hole some more. Mary Ellen Coe, Alphabet's president of customer solutions, also happens to be on the board of Merck, which happens to manufacture the MMR vaccine."

At GreenMedInfo, Sayer Ji hoes the same ground:

"In fact, signs of the coming purge came back in 2016, when GlaxoSmithKline signed a \$715 million contract to partner with Google, and with increasing partnerships with pharmaceutical companies in 201 like Sanofi. Google's parent company, Alphabet, is heavily invested in a vaccine company,

Vaccitech, founded by scientists at Oxford University."

The fact that there are many alternative health sites grossly overselling claims with no scientific merit made the field an obvious target for anyone interesting in policing fake news. The fact that many people in the alternative and integrative space deal with charges of being unscientific by puffing up their cases with studies of limited relevance doesn't help. Add to this the insecurities on the other side of the aisle due to multiple questions regarding the poor science for many extremely lucrative practices in regular medicine, then throw in medical deaths and the political-economic dimensions of the challenge to these from the insurgent "alternative" and "integrative" fields. One draws a perfect bullseye for refining the partiality of Google's censors.

Yet one cannot spend much time on the problem of Google's action on natural health, alternative and integrative medicine without going back upstream to the larger problem: A very few people in the private sector caucus privately to make very large decisions that change the lives of billions, immediately. It's deeply disquieting - especially when one realizes that sometimes the deciders at Google are bending the search engines to support outcomes one might like.

I have chosen to use strong language in this column. It's to make a point: just because it is virtual does not mean there is not blood on the tracks. Picture a 16th-century king decreeing that the lands of some subject they've perceived to be disloyal should be confiscated. That they should be stripped of their livelihoods. For many of these businesses, this is hard-won business real estate, guillotined. Meantime, the more significant harm is that in closing access to information, Google and Facebook are closing access to options.

Editor's Note: This article is a submitted version of a longer piece written by John and published in *The Integrator Blog*. [Click here](#) to access his original article as it first appeared.

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