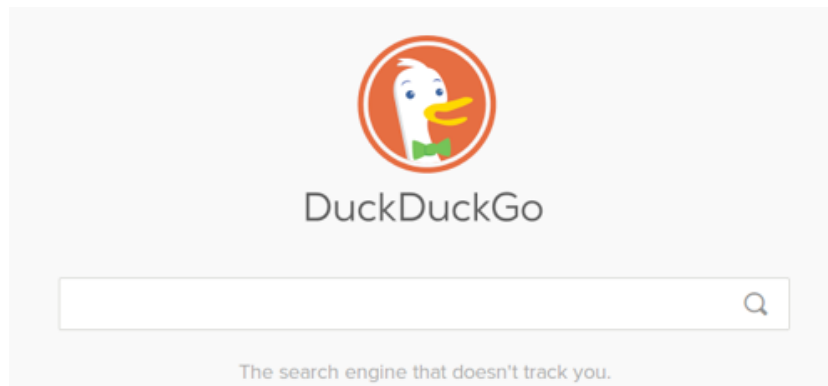# DuckDuckGo

Reviewed February 2015 Matt Morgan, President Concrete Computing
matt@concretecomputing.com

DuckDuckGo is a Web search site that competes with Google, Bing, and other major players. DuckDuckGo's premise, and its major competitive advantage, is its commitment to user privacy—and backs up that commitment through its powerful, accurate, and flexible searching capabilities.

DuckDuckGo ensures privacy for users because it does not do the following:

- collect any personal information
- log any CGI data that identifies your computer
- save your search queries
- share your search terms with the sites you visit from DuckDuckGo's results pages.

While this may seem to take web privacy to an excessive degree, consider this author's results on the EFF's Panopticlick, which gauges how specifically a person's browser can be identified strictly from settings that it will share with any web server it contacts:
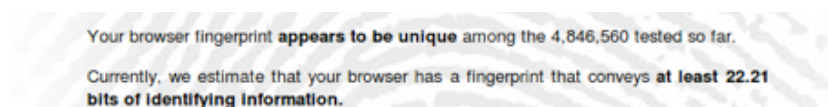
This shows my browser to be unique among almost 5 Million—vividly demonstrating how much information can be unknowingly shared. Or, if you think you already share so much on social media that it can't hurt also to share your search queries, consider that many of us are cautious on social media with queries about health issues, breaking our leases, or looking for new jobs, but we don't hesitate to enter those terms at Web search engines. It may indeed be time to think more critically about what we use to browse and search.

As good as DuckDuckGo may be with your privacy, few will make the switch if its results aren't comparable to Google's. Many reviewers (e.g., see Fast Company's write-up) have lauded DuckDuckGo's results, so to highlight: DuckDuckGo's basic results and suggested results compete with Google's and are superior to Bing's. DuckDuckGo excels at identifying official results (e.g., search for "NYPL") and ranking them highly. Finally, DuckDuckGo doesn't personalize results, which is generally better for information professionals. However, Google still outperforms on searches that leverage its other properties--for example, search for your flight on Google, and you'll get an instant result with the current departure time. Furthermore, Google's results often surpass DuckDuckGo's as search topics become more esoteric .

In addition to providing high quality results, DuckDuckGo has an ace up its sleeve in its "!bang" commands—simple keyboard controls for controlling search scope. By typing keystrokes for websites, like "!a" (Amazon), "!w" (Wikipedia), and "!nypl" (New York Public Library"), searchers will be provided results from those site's own searches; it also works for subjects, like "!images," which are limited to the subject domain. With a browser's search default set to DuckDuckGo and just a few of these commands, web searching is much faster and better than with any single search engine.

But DuckDuckGo's killer app is !g, which searches Google while affording all of DuckDuckGo's privacy protections. That means what it sounds like: with DuckDuckGo and !g, searchers can use Google completely privately, more easily than typing "https://encrypted.google.com." With so many strengths across the board, setting DuckDuckGo as the default search engine for your browser seems more and more worthwhile. Plus, on the occasion that its results are unsatisfactory, or when you suspect they won't be, using "!g [search terms]" is easy.

Given these considerations, the question becomes: would it behoove libraries to set their public browsing stations' default search engine to DuckDuckGo? If the institution's mission includes any measure of support for information literacy, I recommend that it does—accompanied by clear instruction to patrons that it's being done, and why. Patrons need to understand to what degree they're sharing private information about themselves online, and what simpler way is there to educate them? They can always go to Google if they must.