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Is Google Becoming Microsoft Or Worse?

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By [Timothy D. Naegele\[1\]](#)

The users of Google’s Gmail were just forced to adopt its newest version, whether they wanted to do so or not. They were never given a choice, although they were warned that it was coming and given temporary “opt-outs” of the impending switch—which lasted only a brief period of time. Then boom, it happened. All of a sudden, the time-tested, simple and elegant version was swept aside, and in its stead is the “ugliest of uglies.”

There is an old adage: “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Simply put, this means that change for the sake of change does not make good sense. If there is no evidence of a real problem, and fixing the “problem” would not improve the product or service, then don’t waste time and energy trying to fix it. Microsoft changes Office to sell more products; however, only true geeks understand the changes, much less completely.

What seems clear is that Google—like Microsoft—does not care about what its customers think or want. Indeed, it may be in the process of morphing into Microsoft or worse, *inter alia*, because Google does not provide customer support or any interface with its Gmail users directly. The new version seems to be the latest example of Google’s “geeks gone mad with power.” The company might have given its users the option of staying with the old version, but this was not to be. Imposing the new version was a crude exercise of raw power, which is not a good omen for long-time supporters and lovers of Google.

Many of us have been with the company and supported its products almost from Day One, when it began with a simple search engine that has not changed—at least from the perspective of its loyal, non-geek users—which undergirds its astonishing success. This rather inauspicious and humble beginning has resulted in its owners becoming rich beyond their wildest earthy dreams, *because* of customer loyalty. I advertised with Google, and was given advanced access to Gmail many months before it was available publicly; and I loved it, and sent “invitations” to others who began using it as well.

Sadly, Gmail is no longer what it was. Google may be headed in the direction of Microsoft, a company that stopped caring about its users many years ago, and instead has shoved products down their throats that were hopelessly flawed, like its Vista operating system. Rather than change Gmail completely, Google might have tweaked it with changes that constituted “incremental refinements.”

Even Microsoft does not kill off earlier versions of Word for the Mac, which I have been using for about 20 years. Granted one cannot open documents created with them unless the older versions of the software have been retained, but anything is possible. After using Office (and Word) 2008 for the Mac successfully, I became a member of a Microsoft advisory group relating to the next version, Office 2011—called the “Office for Mac Advisory Panel”—and I was given a copy when it was first released. To my great surprise, its Word software would not open documents created with the previous version, Word 2008. I brought this to the attention of Microsoft’s Mac team, and never heard from them again.

Customer support like this drives the “faithful” away, who feel cheated and “used.” However, Google has gone a step farther and mandated the use of Gmail’s newest incarnation. One might think that the company would have learned from the fact that its time-tested search engine’s customer interface has not changed, while ill-fated Google products such as Chromebooks and Knols have never gained much of a consumer following and are disappearing. Also, Google does not address problems with its Chrome browser.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, in terms of customer service and satisfaction, are WordPress, FedEx, Costco and Canon—which go out of their way to keep things simple and help their customers, who inevitably become dyed-in-the-wool, enthusiastic advocates for the businesses, and spread the “gospel” about them far and wide. While Google has not succumbed to the level of disdain enjoyed by Microsoft yet, its heavy-handed changes with respect to Gmail and other similar actions may take the company in that direction and beyond.

Ultimately, customers might spurn its products; however, like Microsoft, Google’s owners and management may not truly care. IBM followed that arrogant path years ago, and suffered greatly because of it. Other companies have come and gone completely. Will this be Google’s fate?

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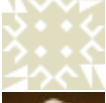
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