

GMAIL

The Google Muddle

The new look Gmail, is unfriendly, clumsy and irritating

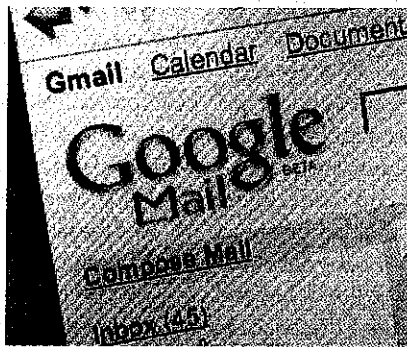
Google has changed the way we live. Today, even when we misplace our car keys, we tend to rush to Google to search for them. So, even as Google worms its way deep into our psyche, does it realise its responsibility towards the millions whose sociology stands altered by it? The truth is we live in an era of information and interaction overload and Google has, willy-nilly, contributed to much of it. If, as a consequence, we are unable to live away from Google for half an hour without suffering any withdrawal symptoms, and our lives have become more stressed, surely Google can't claim complete innocence?

This should heighten Google's responsibility towards all Google users in every aspect. Google's experimentation with its new look for Gmail users, in some of their English-speaking markets, without offering them an option to continue with the old look, shows a degree of insensitivity towards users, especially in the light of the large number of online complaints in this regard.

The new look Gmail, which has been there for a few months now, is unfriendly, clumsy and irritating. One needs more clicks for a standard search on the web; one finds oneself scrolling the wrong panel; the 'Compose' button unexpectedly covers up the dropdown menu that shows MAIL, CONTACTS and TASKS; the 'Send' button or the menu panel containing the font size, font colour, *et al*, goes into hiding in the middle of an email; the 'Sent

Mails' and 'Drafts' often disappear under a difficult-to-spot dropdown menu... The list of irritants is long.

Of course, one eventually gets used to the lower level of efficiency, but is it necessary? In the old version, a search word contained two options right next to the search box—Search Mail and Search the Web. Now, these options are removed. So if we want to perform a search on the Web, we have to first click on the search icon on the top of the page, hang around for a



good five seconds for the Google Homepage to appear, and then type our search words all over again (unless we had the foresight to copy the words beforehand spending a few more key punches, so that we could paste them in the current search box with another click or two), and click again to initiate the search! Occasionally, we think we

are lucky because when we first type our search words on the new page, an automatic dialogue 'Search the Web' pops up. So we click on it hoping it will take us to the relevant search results directly. But no, it will merely take us to the Google Homepage, where we have to type out the search words all over again! So while the old page called for a single operation, we now have three! The cached search option, highlighting our search words in a single action, is gone. There is now three-stage operation, with the 'highlight' feature generally missing. There is the 'Quick View' option in this new version, but this is without highlights which makes specific search of words cumbersome. The reality is that search, which was an important feature of Google, has become a chore. Surely, it should be obvious to Google, even without experimentation, that one likes one's next page just a click away and does not like hanging around killing time, as the new look Google makes up its mind.

It is difficult to imagine what prompted this re-design. If Google was trying to make the page more efficient or faster, it simply has not. Has it increased the options available to the users? No again. Has it tried to solve some serious bug in the previous version? It has, in fact, added to them. So why has Google chosen to frustrate the millions of loyal users, needlessly?

What is worse, a large number of users are complaining all over the Internet. But, it is as if Google, the elephant, couldn't care about the shrill cries of lesser mortals. ■



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