



INSIDE THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

FHM TAKES UP RESIDENCE AT GOOGLE'S LONDON HEADQUARTERS AND TRIES TO FIND OUT WHAT THE ALL-CONQUERING, ALL-KNOWING SUPER-CORPORATION ACTUALLY WANTS FROM THE HUMAN RACE...

There is a telephone on the receptionist's desk at Google... but it never rings. It never has. The receptionist says she thinks it works, but she isn't really sure. So it sits there, silent and forgotten; as useful to a Googler (not our word) as two cups and a piece of string. "I've never used it once since I've worked here," she smiles sweetly. "I don't even know what it would sound like if it rang, let alone how to use it." We ask how she plans to tell our contact we've arrived. "Don't worry, I'll ping him – that's our instant messenger service," she says, as if explaining it to a confused geriatric. "Nobody uses telephones to communicate here; it's all done online."

FHM is late. Google has agreed to let us into its gleaming UK mothership in central London, but we've just spent the last 20 minutes lost in the lift. Every floor we arrive at looks exactly like the last: pristine, anonymous, white – like the Death Star with more MacBook Airs. When you finally work out Google's reception is on the 9th floor, you don't sign in with the human being behind the desk, but with the computer »

Matt Blake
 Will Bremridge

beside her. Once you've inputted your name and justification for being there, a page appears telling you not to take photos or videos or to 'share any confidential information you may hear or see during your visit'. Welcome to Google: the biggest, scariest, most powerful company on the planet. And now we're inside, we're not leaving until they tell us what the hell they're up to.

ON 17 AUGUST LAST YEAR, GOOGLE CRASHED FOR FIVE WHOLE MINUTES.

As a result, 40% of the planet's internet traffic shuddered to a halt. It was as if some celestial overlord had pressed pause on half the world. That's the power of Google. Not since 1463, when Johannes Gutenberg invented the mechanical type printing press, has any new invention empowered individuals and transformed the way we access information.

Google's almighty search engine, which handles 3.5 billion queries daily, has become so entwined into our lives that it's hard to remember how we survived without it. Its colourful, childish logo on pure white is now as recognisable to us as our own face in the mirror. Its predictive algorithms have become so complex that it seems to know what we're searching for before we do. And its magical ability to answer any query in a split second has made it more than just a bottomless encyclopedia of news and knowledge, but an almost natural extension of our very brains.

"We have embedded Google into our lives so that it has become as natural to us as oxygen," says Siva Vaidyanathan, media professor at the University of Virginia and author of *The Googlization Of Everything*. "The company's mission statement is to 'organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful', but that goes far beyond your computer, your phone or even the internet itself – Google has a self-declared mission to become the operating system of your life."

Indeed, Google doesn't just 'do' search anymore. That's what pays the bills, but recent years have seen the tech giant snap up tech start-ups like a Russian oligarch at a yacht sale. In the 10 years since its Initial Public Offering (IPO), Google has spent at least \$23billion buying more than 140 companies (including YouTube and Android, of course). But in the last two years, it's bought firms specialising in robots, artificial intelligence, product-delivery drones, driverless cars and smart homes. And last year, Google acquired Calico, a biotech life-extension firm with a mission, as *TIME* magazine put it, to 'cure death'.

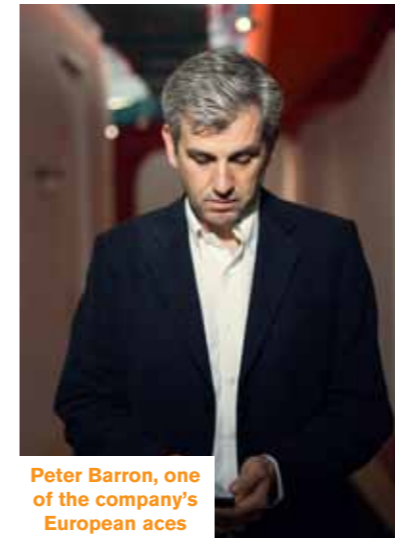
IT'S ONE O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON, AND WE'RE QUEUING FOR LUNCH AT ONE OF GOOGLE'S TWO MAIN RESTAURANTS.

Standing in front of us is a man of about 24, casually dressed in jeans and a yellow T-shirt. Perched precariously on his head is a Google-coloured propeller-cap with the word 'Noogler' stitched across. He looks ridiculous, but we tell him it's a strong look. "It's my first day so I have to wear it," he says. "New Googlers are called Nooglers. Get it?" We ask how his first day is going. "It's amazing. Have you ever seen cooler offices than these? I'm going to get my free massage after lunch." With that, he taps the propeller into a mini-twizzle and wanders off towards the gourmet canapé counter.

Standing in line, it is quite clear that Googlers have it good. For starters, absolutely everything is free, from the packets of Polos in confectionary baskets to the herb-crusted guinea fowl with carrot and parsnip mash we've just piled on to our plate. On the wall there are posters with inspirational mottos such as, 'Keep calm and eat vegetables' and 'Eat healthy, be nutrition wealthy'.

"Our mission in the food team is to inspire and enable the Googlers to make healthy choices and really enable them to be at their best," Jim Glass, the company's European food services manager tells us over lunch. "That's important because the Google food team supports Google as a company so Googlers can eat good food that's good for the brain that helps them avoid the highs and lows that come from eating too many carbs."

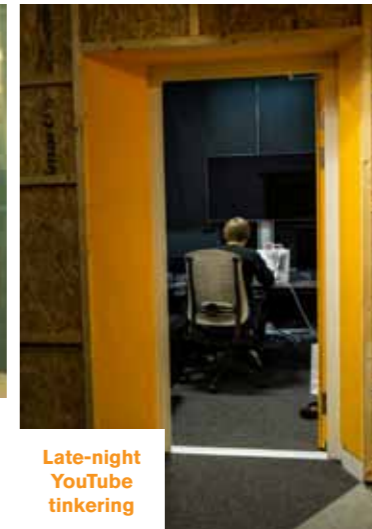
Free food is not the only perk to working at Google; the offices themselves have more than a touch of the Willy Wonkas (employees even refer to it occasionally as 'the chocolate factory'). There's a library with beanbags; sofa-lined workspaces; a state-of-the-art gym; a massage parlour offering treatments from facial-rejuvenation to Reiki; and a roof-top allotment area where Googlers grow their own vegetables. There's a ball pool on the sixth floor, between marketing and events and a 'napping pod' for when the fun gets too much. One of the canteens has a pool table, a futsal table, a table-tennis table and a candyfloss machine. We feel as though we've stumbled into a sort of open-plan Shangri-La. No wonder everyone we pass seems so chuffed with themselves. "Our team mission is happy, healthy and productive Googlers," says Yvonne Agyei, vice president of Global Benefits. "We find that when people are more engaged in the workplace, they do more work. Yesterday we threw a well-being day with a sleep workshop, laughter yoga and free hugs from Winnie the Pooh."



Peter Barron, one of the company's European aces



Canteen, with candyfloss and popcorn machines just out of shot (really)



Late-night YouTube tinkering

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GOOGLE



1995
Founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin meet at Stanford University

1996

They build a revolutionary search engine and call it Google after the word 'googol', the mathematical term for a one followed by 100 zeros



1998
Sun Microsystems co-founder Andy Bechtolsheim writes a cheque for \$100,000 and Google Inc. is born



1998

The first 'Google doodle' is published to let visitors to the homepage know that the company's minders are offline at the Burning Man Festival in Nevada

2000

AdWords, a self-service program for creating online advertising campaigns, is introduced



2004

Google launches Gmail. It includes features like speedy search, huge amounts of free storage and threaded messages

2004

The company goes public on 19 August for \$85 a share, raising around \$2billion in the process



2005

Google Maps and Google Earth are launched



2006

YouTube is purchased for \$1.65billion



2007

Google launches Android, an open platform for mobile devices



2008

Chrome – the tech giant's very own web browser – is released

2010

The company announces that it has developed the technology for driverless cars

2011

The Android Market exceeds 10 billion app downloads with a growth rate of one billion app downloads per month



2012

Google Glass is unveiled

2013

Google acquires Calico, a biotech company with a mission to prolong life

A cynic might say it feels more Hotel California than Disneyland Florida, and rather creates an environment that ensures workers never actually leave. But we're here to learn.

There's another way of making colleagues happy too: cold-hard cash. "We have a programme called Peer Bonuses to recognise people who have gone above and beyond," says Yvonne. "Each Googler is allocated five £100 bonuses a quarter with which they can reward colleagues who help them out. There's no maximum as to how many you can receive."

Intrigued, we set out to learn more. But we don't want to hear it from a Willy Wonka; we want to talk to the Oompa Loompas themselves. So, after some wrangling, we manage to blag entry to the company's end-of-week party, TGIF, or, Thank Google It's Friday. It's held in the canteen where we ate our lunch a day earlier. We arrive a couple of hours late because it started at 4pm. We've already missed the magician, but the DJ is still on, mixing *Champagne Supernova* with something by Taylor Swift. About 100 Googlers, none over the age of 35, are milling about drinking free wine and Becks. We sit down at a table with some nice-looking people to find, that even at Google, you sometimes have to put up with shit.

"I gave a peer bonus recently to a colleague who helped take clients to and from a VIP dinner," says Matthew from marketing. "Not only was she sporting a black eye from fighting off muggers the night before, but at the dinner, she spotted dog poo on the pavement outside and took it upon herself to guard it while escorting clients around." Stephen from PR adds: "It doesn't matter what you do for a peer bonus, whether it's inputting data or picking up poo. It's about helping each other out." Can Googlers really be this upbeat all the time? "We're wankers at dinner parties," Stephen says, chugging his beer. "People get depressed about their jobs and they hate us for being so happy in ours."

IN THE 15 OR SO MINUTES SINCE YOU STARTED READING THIS STORY, GOOGLE HAS MADE \$1,727,250

– almost five times more than Facebook and Yahoo combined. Ninety percent of that figure comes from the targeted ads that pop up each time you search.

But search alone does not pay. Google's founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page learned that the hard way after they launched the company from a friend's garage in Menlo Park, California, in 1998. Then, both just 25 years old, the pair of scruffy, slightly weird PhD

students invented an ultimate algorithm that trumped rivals by judging the relevance of a webpage, not solely by the keywords it contained, but by how many other webpages linked to it. Today that remains Google's 'special sauce'.

But by 2000, they were running out of money. "While Brin and Page didn't care about getting rich," writes David A Vise in *The Google Story*, "[they knew] if the business couldn't sustain itself, they would not be able to fulfill their vision of making all of the world's information easily available to users without charge." They came up with AdWords – an auction-based advertising system that allows businesses to bid for ad space on results pages. Almost overnight, Google the Search Machine became Google the Money Machine, with information as its life source. "We live in the information age where access to information is so important," Peter Barron, Google's head of communications in northern Europe, tells us. "To put that into context, a kid in Africa now has more access to the world's information than the president of the United States had 15 years ago. The internet has transformed the world in an extraordinary way."

IN TODAY'S WORLD, INFORMATION IS POWER.

And to control the world's flow of information is, surely, to control the world. That's not, of course, what Google would have us believe. "We are not controlling the world's information but giving people access to it," says Peter, who was also former editor of BBC's *Newsnight*. "The only thing that brings people back to Google every day is the fact that they like the service that we offer. There's nothing that persuades them. And if people want to use a different service, then they are free to do so."

Why, then, has Google tripled its annual lobbying budget – used to get into the ears of politicians in Brussels – to \$2million since 2010? And in Washington, its attempts to guide policy makers' hands has cost more than \$9.3million already this year, making it the second-biggest spender among private companies.

"We talk to governments all over the world and that is painted as 'lobbying', which is seen somehow as a dirty word that we should be ashamed of," Peter says, growing slightly impatient. "They are asking us questions all around the world and we need to be in a position to answer those questions." And what about the probe by European law lords into claims that Google is muscling out smaller competitors by favouring its own services on search results over theirs? "We've worked very closely with Europe to resolve those issues," says Peter. "Don't forget there

was a similar case in the US that has now been closed. So every aspect of our business has been looked at in great detail over a total of more than eight years and we have been found not to have abused our position."

So far, so Google. But according to Siva, there's more to worry about than the fact Google has single-handedly ruined the pub quiz for everyone. "Google is not about moving data on a flat screen anymore; it's about monitoring and monetising and tracking data in every aspect of our lives," he says. "The beauty of its strategy is that every time you put some information through one of its services, you tell Google's giant artificial brain a bit about yourself, whether it's how you drive, what you email about, what you're looking at, where you go. All that feeds the value of advertising."

If you want a real insight into what Google plans for our future, you could do worse than look at its top-secret testing lab in California, Google X. That's where Google Glass and driverless cars were conceived. It's where its elite team of 'moonshooters' – who literally have job titles like 'captain of moonshot' and 'head of getting mmoonshots ready for contact with the real world' – are reportedly trying to conquer all manner of sci-fi fantasies from teleportation to hoverboards, as well as an actual elevator that travels into space (unlike Willy Wonka's, theirs is not, apparently, made of glass).

WE ARE BEGINNING TO OUTSTAY OUR WELCOME.

Our attempts to probe one junior Googler at the free coffee station about Google's Grand Plan has already resulted in being told we're not very 'Googly' – the term used in-house to determine whether a prospective employee would 'fit in' at the company. Then we hear Matt Brittin, former Olympic rower and a Google vice president, has entered the building. We find him in his glass-walled office with spectacular views across London. Matt himself is tall and muscular, dressed in suit trousers and an open-collared blue shirt (nobody wears ties at Google). He is disarmingly friendly too, and very slick. "What we are doing is trying to put the internet in the pocket of as many people as possible," he tells us.



Google after dark

"Today, there are 2.5 billion people online. By 2020, there will be 5 billion people, most of whom – if things continue to go the way they are – will be using a device powered by Android. For me, the sense of purpose in trying to make the world a better place is genuinely there. We want to remind you that we built Google for users, not for profit."

Why, then, didn't Google just leave it at search? "We're optimistic about putting technology to work to solve big problems for millions of people," says Matt. "So we are putting efforts into new areas like health, transportation and robotics, where our skills in computer science may bring breakthroughs that have as large an impact on people as the search function has over the past 15 years."

Siva sees it differently: "Google is a company like any other. It is operating in the best interests of its shareholders. There's nothing wrong with that, of course – it only becomes a problem when we forget it."

OUR TIME AT GOOGLE IS UP.

We can stay no longer; even the lovely receptionist seems a little wary of our presence now. Standing in the cold, looking up at its towering London HQ, seeing workers head happily home after a long day of datasheets and table tennis, it is quite clear that as far as these people are concerned, there are few places nicer to work than at Google. We also get the lingering feeling that they genuinely believe what they are doing is for the good of humanity. Probably most of it is.

Still, says Siva, it's not a done deal. "Apple, Microsoft and Facebook all want to play that role of operating systems of our lives too. It's just that they aren't in the same place. I have to say, though, my suspicion is that Google's will be a benevolent dictatorship; I'd sooner choose that over Facebook."

Like it or not, the future is coming, and that future is looking more Googly by the day. It's a future where a computer plans your holidays, delivers your shopping and anticipates your every whim; where monetisable data flows through everything, from your fridge to your clothes to your every interaction with other human beings. And if you have a problem with that, just remember to file your complaint via email... there's absolutely no point in doing it by phone. **FHM**



GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN-HOUSE AT GOOGLE

Googler
Someone who works at Google

Noogler
New Googler

Gaygler
Gay community

Jewgler
Jewish community

Xoogler
Ex-Googler

Gleegler
Member of the glee club

Woogler
Welsh Googler

Doogler
Dog of a Googler

Indoogler
Indian Googler

Greyglers
Googlers over 40