

The Shadow Knows and So Do Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon

by *Liz Gibbons*

When I was about 10 or 11, I began listening to the radio program, *The Shadow*. Each show was introduced by the line, "Who know what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!" followed by a maniacal laugh. Today we could say it is Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Amazon who know. They know our location, our tastes, friends, political inclination, what we buy, where we vacation, what websites we visit, and record our conversations. Most of us are aware of this.

Yet, we willingly supply information about ourselves to Facebook and Twitter with our social media postings. Amazon has loads of information about our buying habits. We may even invite spying into our home with personal home assistants such as Amazon's Alexa or Google Home. And with the advent of the Internet of Things, all later model refrigerators, washers, TVs, and other appliances record our conversations.

But the biggie is Google. We may think of Google as primarily a search engine, but it is really a surveillance tool. Dr. Robert Epstein, a psychology researcher at the American Institute of Behavioral Research and Technology has spent the last seven years exposing Google's deceptive practices. In 2013 he began doing controlled randomized experiments to determine if he could use Google's search engines in various biased ways to change people's opinions and thinking and even their voting decisions. He was shocked to see how easily this could be done. He concluded Google has three powers: surveillance, censorship, and manipulation, and it does all of these without leaving a paper trail. Dr. Epstein says, "No Mussolini, no Hitler, no dictator anywhere has ever had even a tiny fraction of the power that this company has." It is the biggest monopoly in the history of mankind. It can influence our beliefs, opinions, attitudes and what we purchase.

I doubt that the average person realizes how pervasive the surveillance really is. We are constantly being shadowed. But what is more frightening is the way we can be manipulated and influenced by search engines without being aware of it.