Google Wants The Government's Data On You

Google's president for the Americas urged government officials Friday to open all municipal data so Google can use it to become everyone's perfect personal assistant—an invisible entity that knows what you want before you do.

"Think about all the information that the government has," Margo Georgiadis told 800 city planners, municipal officials and philanthropists gathered for the Metropolitan Planning Council’s annual luncheon in Chicago Friday.

"It has a huge wealth of information that would be incredibly useful to what we're all doing every day."

The audience briefly interrupted Georgiadis's half-hour speech with a rumble of uncomfortable laughter and chatter when she explained how Google would use the data:

"You used to go to that search box, and you used to go look for something. And you just wanted an answer. And now, we don’t think that’s good enough," she said. "If you tell us a little about who you are, where you work, where you live, if we can look at your calendar to tell a little bit about what you’re doing, we can actually become a personal assistant.

"You don't have to ask the question because we already know what you're looking for."

Local governments have shared transportation data (see your local bustracker app) but they can share much more, she said, mentioning data on neighborhoods, jobs, schools, events - "you name it."

"Cities are starting to make progress in this area. But think about how to be much more useful."

A Harvard Business School graduate, Georgiadis leads Google in North and Latin America. She worked as chief operating officer of Groupon for a few months in 2011. Prior to that, she was Google's vice president of global sales.

Technology will become seamless, she predicted, a simpler and easier part of life. For example, if Google can read your calendar and it knows traffic conditions between you and your upcoming destinations, it can guide you to them efficiently without being prompted. If it knows you'll be flying, it can call up your boarding pass when needed, check on departure times, get you from the airport to your hotel.

But these tasks are minor, Georgiadis said, compared to what more data could enable.

"A huge cornerstone of the ability to do this is access to information. And I would advocate that our city needs to think about defaulting to open, all of its data and its processes, so that people can tap into that anywhere they are," she said.

"We're only at one percent of the way tech can change our lives. So if you think it was a wild ride in the last five years, saddle up."

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