What Is Google Really Up To?

The search giant's crusade against "annoying" ads isn't altruism.

By Eric Limer Feb 14, 2018   Google's been busy this week. First came the new push to make email interactive. Then the flashy "Google Stories"—a Snapchat-esque package that can live in Google's search results. Most importantly, we're about to get Google's newest version of Chrome, which will block "annoying" ads by default.

At first glance these projects might not seem unrelated. If anything, they look like a public good. Google is flexing its muscle to make the core experiences of the open web—email, searching, and reading web pages—a cleaner, better, more user-friendly affair.

That may be true, but make no mistake about the other side of this coin. These projects are different facets of a push that will tighten Google's stranglehold on the web.

Google AMPs It Up

One of the keys to unlocking the underlying connection is the "Accelerated Mobile Pages Project," or AMP. An open-source project led by Google and announced in late 2015, AMP is a combination of technology and standards ostensibly designed to make web pages load faster on mobile devices.

By using some of AMP's special code and adhering to its guidelines, websites likes ours can make a version of a web pages that loads lighting-fast—as much as three times faster—with no improvement in the user's internet speed. On top of that, Google will rank such pages higher in mobile search results. People searching Google on their phones get faster web pages, and because quicker-loading sites get more eyeballs, publishers hustle to make their sites load quicker on mobile. Everybody wins!

Well, not exactly. AMP also has considerable downsides. These pages load quickly because of the restrictions they place on the websites that use them, including limited options for page design, and crucially,