Google logo tweak sends critics into orbit

By Jim Puzzanghera, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
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WASHINGTON -- Should the world's most-used search engine be more of a Yankee Google Dandy?

Google Inc. occasionally features light-hearted doodles on its colorful home-page logo to commemorate special occasions. But now they are drawing criticism from conservatives for not being more patriotic.

The Mountain View, Calif., company bathes its logo in stars and stripes every Independence Day, but last week's decision to honor the 50th anniversary of the Sputnik launch -- the second "g" in Google was replaced with a drawing of the Soviet satellite -- is being blasted by some conservatives.

Not only did Google honor an achievement by a totalitarian regime that was our Cold War enemy, they griped, but it did so without having ever altered its logo to commemorate U.S. military personnel on Memorial Day or Veterans Day.

"It's a kick to your belly," said conservative blogger Giovanni Gallucci, 39, a social media consultant from Dallas. "I understand these guys are scientists and engineers and they have their quirks and want to make sure people are recognized who might not normally be recognized . . . but why not celebrate the struggles that we've come through as a people?"

Conservatives see the Sputnik logo as particularly galling because the search giant's in-house artist has tweaked the Google logo for a variety of obscure events, including World Water Day, Persian New Year, painter Edvard Munch's birthday and China's Dragon Boat Festival.

Google regularly gives other U.S. holidays the logo treatment, including Halloween, Thanksgiving and St. Patrick's Day (but not for Columbus Day, which was Monday).

"When they ignore Veterans Day and Memorial Day, I think they're telling us something about the way they view America," said Joseph Farah, editor of WorldNetDaily.com, a conservative website that has criticized Google's logo decisions.

Conservatives have found plenty of reasons to complain about Google, which they see as a liberal enclave because of the corporate causes it champions and the political candidates its employees support.

The company, started in 1998 by two Stanford University graduate students, prides itself on progressive thinking. Google set up a $90-million foundation in 2005 to fund the Google logo for a variety of obscure events, including World Water Day, Persian New Year, painter Edvard Munch's birthday and China's Dragon Boat Festival.

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The company, started in 1998 by two Stanford University graduate students, prides itself on progressive thinking. Google set up a $90-million foundation in 2005 to fund causes widely seen as liberal, including climate change and global public health.

What's more, the company's employees contribute overwhelmingly to Democratic candidates. While the company's new political action committee has given nearly half of its $22,100 in contributions this year to Republicans, 93% of the $141,000 donated by individual employees went...
to Democrats, according to Federal Election Commission data provided by CQ Moneyline.

Google's decision to self-censor its search engine in China to comply with the Communist government's online rules also has drawn condemnation from Republicans.

The company defended its decision to let Veterans Day and Memorial Day pass without a special logo, saying it was trying to be respectful.

"Google's special logos tend to be lighthearted and often scientific in nature," spokeswoman Sunny Gettner said in an e-mailed statement. "We do not believe we can convey the appropriate somber tone through this medium to mark holidays like Memorial Day."

Google has altered its logo more than 140 times since 1999, according to a gallery on the company's website.

The choices sometimes reflect Google's corporate fascinations. For example, the company is so enthralled with space exploration that it recently agreed to sponsor a $30-million contest to land unmanned rovers on the moon.

That passion has been reflected in logos that commemorate some of America's crowning achievements in space exploration, including lunar landings and Mars missions, and the birthday of noted American astronomer Percival Lowell.

Still, outrage increases in some corners of the Web for each year Google fails to honor Memorial Day.

In May, the website www.zombietime.com started a Memorial Day logo contest to "show Google that it's not so hard" to make respectful ones. It has received about 250 entries, including ones that replace the second "o" with a Purple Heart medal and the "l" with the flagpole in the Iwo Jima flag-raising.

"I have no problem with Google commemorating obscure holidays or some of the trivial anniversaries that they note," the site's owner, who declined to give his name, said via e-mail, "just so long as they also make special logos for the more significant holidays."

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