

Google readying Web-only video search

By Stefanie Olsen

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Google is expected to unveil a search engine for Web-only video this summer that will let people preview media clips from its Web site, CNET News.com has learned.

Google's planned service will let visitors find free short-form videos such as the popular "Star Wars" video spoofs, according to sources who asked to remain anonymous. The engine will complement the search giant's existing experimental site that lets people search the closed-caption text of television shows from PBS and CNN, among others, and preview accompanying still images. The new capabilities will let people watch roughly 10 seconds of Web video clips for free before shuttling visitors to the video's host site, sources say.

Sources said the new video search engine will be unveiled within the next two months.

A Google representative declined to comment on the details of the search engine or the exact timing of the launch but acknowledged that a new service is in the works. "All those details are still being worked out," the representative said.

Video search has become a highly competitive field for many Internet companies because it's seen as a valuable new market for online advertising. Google and Yahoo, for example, are looking to expand their multibillion-dollar advertising businesses into videos, which will help them land ad dollars from TV commercial advertisers. Even Amazon.com's search unit, A9.com, is eyeing the video search market, according to one source. A9 could not immediately be reached for comment.

Longer term, Google is preparing a payment system for a premium video service that would let people pay to watch full video clips. Google is talking to several top-tier content providers, including Hollywood movie studios, to gain agreements for aggregating their video and selling premium or pay-per-view access.

"The ultimate endgame is streaming video, otherwise Google can't get video advertising dollars," said one source. "They have to figure a way to get video into their world to capture those dollars."

The Mountain View, Calif.-based search giant outlined plans for a payment service when it launched its video-upload program in April. The program solicits video submissions to Google's searchable video archives, inviting small and major producers alike to submit work and grant copyrights to the company. Google said on its "frequently asked questions" page that it will let content producers host and sell access to their video using Google servers. It has yet to launch the service for public consumption.

The first stage of the video search engine will put Google on par with chief rival Yahoo, which finished work on its own Web video search engine in May, as well as others such as America Online's Singingfish and Blinkx. Unlike Yahoo, which already has submission deals with companies such as Reuters, Google will avoid mining the Internet for video clips and will use only video clips that have been submitted by their producers.

But some content providers have reservations about Google's plans to offer and sell searchable video. One content owner, who asked to remain anonymous, said among the details to be ironed out are how much of a video's rights should be granted to Google and how much should be retained by the owner in order to drive traffic to its own site.

One key to easing content providers' concerns will be digital rights management technology that can protect producers' intellectual property, though Google has not revealed details of a DRM solution. Google also has to work with content publishers on labeling their videos, so-called programming meta tags, which make searching for material possible.

To a certain extent, Google is playing catch up. Reuters, for example, also has deals with America Online's Singingfish, Yahoo and Blinkx. It provides all those companies with a video content feed, which includes "meta data" or descriptive language that defines the content for automated indexing by the search engines. In turn, the search engines drive traffic to Reuters.com, which is trying to become a news destination site supported by online advertising.

"For video, advertising is our chosen business model (because) there's a strong demand," said Stephen Smyth, Reuters' vice president of media. "We continue to assess the market and evaluate it for paid models."

Regarding a search deal with Google, Smyth said that the company is "exploring all options," but he declined to comment further.

Another content producer, AtomFilms, has deals with Yahoo and Singingfish to provide feeds of its video, said AtomFilms CEO Mika Salmi. Yahoo, in turn, points Web surfers back to AtomFilms' site. In all cases, Yahoo does not host the video playback on its own servers.

Eventually, Google plans to leapfrog its competitors by creating a "walled garden" of video content hosted on its servers. The content will originate both from independent and A-list video producers, sources say. That way, Google can eventually sell access and video advertising, or online commercials.

For studios such as Sony Pictures, working with Google Video could be tricky. Studios must get permission from actors and various guilds to show clips of films for promotional purposes. Even then, the amount of material shown is restricted. It would likely be a long time before Google could secure searchable content from major film studios, but several sources have said that the company's executives have approached the film studios to seek approvals.

In a sign of Google's courtship of Hollywood, the company attended the Digital Media Summit in Los Angeles last week. Jennifer Feikin, director of Google Video,

acknowledged during a panel discussion that allowing playback of video clips was a complex issue given the copyright concerns and having to vet the content being submitted.

Google has already forged an alliance with former Vice President Al Gore to provide search features for his interactive television project, Current.tv, a 24-hour network with viewer-contributed broadcasts that range in length from 15 seconds to 5 minutes. The project is similar to Google's upload program, but for television.

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Google Video search ready for playback

By Elinor Mills

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Google on Monday launched its new Web-based video search service, which allows people to use keywords to search the company's indexed database of video from Unicef, Greenpeace, CNET Networks and others that have uploaded content since April.

As previously reported, the search engine complements Google's existing site, which lets people search, but not yet play back, the closed-caption text of television shows from PBS, CNN and others that Google has hosted.

Now the video index includes the new content, which is marked by a triangle icon. Users need to download Google Video Viewer from the site. Once they have, they can watch an entire video piece or start viewing at the section that includes their search keywords.

The content ranges from lighthearted video of break dancing or monkeys doing karate to such historical video as the Saddam Hussein statue being yanked down by American soldiers in Iraq. Google representatives declined to provide a more complete list of content providers.

Google is locked in a heated race with Yahoo to provide search for every type of content. Yahoo launched a finalized version of its video search in May.

Google Video is only available in English, and the video viewer works only with Internet Explorer versions 5 and higher and Firefox for Windows. There are no advertisements on the site yet.

The service is another step in the search giant's expansion into more comprehensive media services. Google has confirmed it is working on a payment system but says it will not be a direct competitor to eBay's PayPal online payment system.

However, there is ample speculation that the payment system will enable more broad-based video viewing.

Google is the only search provider that has all the pieces to bring movies on demand via Internet to the masses, said Allen Weiner, an analyst at Gartner. Google will be able to charge per-view or subscription fees, as well as insert ads into the video stream, he said.

"They are actually the first ones in this video search business to basically show us an end-to-end ecosystem," Weiner said.

"I think one of their strategic goals was to create a technology and business model to attract videos higher up in the food chain," such as from movie studios, he said. "It won't be a (lucrative) business until the next level of video comes. This is big stuff."

Peter Chane, senior business product manager for Google Video, declined to comment on the payment program. "We are not making any announcements about that," he said. "However, we are committed to building a system that allows any type of video content to be distributed and monetized through Google."

Yahoo won't be the only company worried about Google's video moves, one blogger said.

"Now, before we start discussing how this represents the Death of Comcast/The Networks/Windows Media Player et al, this is not quite that, but it is the start of something big," John Battelle wrote in his Searchblog. "For one, it's clear this will be integrated with the Google payment program which was revealed to be in process last week."

Battelle also remarked on how Google's video search service will provide free infrastructure for video producers who aren't able to host and stream their own content and help spread an "alternative universe" for video distribution and playback--"one independent of the walled garden business model in which video is currently locked."

The frequently asked questions portion of Google's video site says Google Video will only make content available to users for free now.

However, the option to charge will eventually be available and Google will take a "small revenue share to cover some of our costs" and Google may charge users a fee or take a larger percentage of revenue for popular video that takes up higher bandwidth, which anticipates a payment system.