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## Google rolls out TV search prototype

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Google introduced late Monday a prototype of a service to search TV programming, an anticipated move to broaden its search franchise for broadcast.

As previously reported, the Mountain View, Calif.-based company has been quietly developing Google Video, an engine that lets people search the text of TV shows. Immediately, the service will scour programming from PBS, Fox News, C-SPAN, ABC, and the NBA, among others, making broadcasts searchable the same day.

People can search on a term--such as "Indonesian tsunami"--to find the TV shows in which it was mentioned, a still image of the video and closed-captioning text of that particular segment of the program.

For now, people will not be able to watch the video clip, nor will the Web pages contain the company's signature text advertising. But Google expects to add video playback down the road, after ironing out the complexities of broadcasting rights and business models with various content owners. Jonathan Rosenberg, Google's vice president of product management, also said he could foresee selling commercial-like advertising, among other business models, with the new service.

"We've taken a conservative view of what we can do with other people's content," Rosenberg said. "We're open to possibility of very different ways to monetize this. We'll work out over time what's best for consumers and content providers."

Though in its early stages, the service underscores Google's ambitions to digitize otherwise analog content and make it searchable, similar to Google's recent library project scanning volumes of books. It also foreshadows a heated race with rivals Yahoo and Microsoft to be the de facto service for finding information wherever it resides: TV, the Internet, cell phones or other convergence devices.

Already in response, Yahoo has said it will begin promoting the video search engine it introduced in December by adding a tab from its home page. Also, the company has teamed with TVeyes to begin searching closed-captioning text of Bloomberg and BBC programs. That partnership will add to Yahoo's core capability of searching Internet video, putting Yahoo's service more on a par with Google's.

For now, Google Video will not search for Internet-only video clips, (for example, Jibjab short films), but the company said it plans to add that capability eventually.

"More and more video content is getting on the Web, and they need to be there to index it," said Gary Stein, an analyst at Jupiter Research. "What's most noticeable about this was how cautious it is. They've got the entire program, but they're not showing it."

Google is holding back because Internet distribution is a nascent market for many broadcasters, and securing rights over broadband could be tricky.

For example, if Google and Yahoo want to host and play video from their Web sites, they must clear those digital rights with broadcasters. And broadcasters themselves must secure Internet rights with actors, producers and musicians, as well as clear spectrum signal rights with affiliates. (Yahoo does not host video, but it points visitors to the content.)

Being careful of existing business models is an issue, too. For example, CBS News offers video for free online, while ABC News offers subscription and paid video services for the likes of AOL and SBC Yahoo. CBS may want to boost traffic in order to sell advertising, but ABC may want to promote its subscription services via video search.

Blinkx, for example, recently introduced a video search engine in partnership with Fox News and Sky Broadcasting. Fox agreed to give Blinkx access to hundreds of hours of program archives, as well as allow it to record some live shows for the search engine. Much of the video clips are ad-supported, so that Fox can make new revenue from the search deal.

Terms of Google's relationships with broadcasters were not disclosed, but PBS executives said no money has changed hands. Alex Hofmann, PBS' senior director of digital ventures, said the deal is a learning experience to determine what business opportunities would make sense. It's also a no-brainer, he said, given that Google already refers most of the broadcaster's online traffic of 4 billion annual page views.

"TV search is going to be a large advertising revenue driver in time," said Sean Morgan, CEO of Critical Mention, a corporate broadcast-search tool. "But broadcasters are still wondering if the search engines could cannibalize the TV viewing itself."

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