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# TV's Future May Be Web Search Engines That Hunt for Video

By **KEVIN J. DELANEY** and **MARTIN PEERS**  
 Staff Reporters of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL  
*December 16, 2004; Page B1*

Search engines, which find text and still images on the Web, are starting to search video -- and offering an early glimpse at how people may one day find and view TV programs.

The startup search engine **Blinkx** today will begin allowing users to search the Web for selected video clips from 15 television channels, including **News Corp.**'s Fox News Channel and the British Broadcasting Corp.'s BBC News. The video searches work like ordinary Internet searches: Type in "Kofi Annan," and **Blinkx** offers a selection of digitized clips cued up to the point where the U.N. secretary general is mentioned.

The Internet giants won't be far behind. **Yahoo Inc.** yesterday released a test version of a similar service for finding video on the Internet. **Google Inc.** and **Microsoft Corp.** also are working on video-search features.

Today, these offerings are novelties in the competitive and expanding Web-search industry. But the long-term implications go far beyond the search function. Some search companies aspire to offer video programs directly to consumers via their computer screens and eventually on TV, potentially competing with TV networks and other video distributors.

Yahoo released its video-search engine on a site for test services ([next.yahoo.com](http://next.yahoo.com)) yesterday. The engine primarily searches video clips stored on the Web, but Yahoo says it also includes video feeds from undisclosed content providers. Yahoo also searches video clips offered on its own site, such as music videos and movie trailers. Eventually, "this will break the TV out of the 500-channel model and enable access to almost any content you could want," says Bradley Horowitz, Yahoo's director of

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multimedia and desktop search.

Search engines in the future may play a greater role in the technology people use to find programming on their TV sets. As cable operators offer a growing menu of programming through video-on-demand services, TV executives say improved navigation tools will be a key factor in determining consumer use of these new services. Consumers are being "bombarded" with video choices, says Tim Hanlon, a senior vice president with Starcom MediaVest Group, a unit of advertising giant [Publicis Groupe](#). However, "with infinite choice comes selection paralysis. How do you know what is available?"

But to fulfill these larger ambitions, Internet companies will have to resolve legal and licensing issues with creators and distributors of TV and other video, who closely guard the dissemination of their wares over the Internet. **Blinkx**, for example, in addition to searching video clips posted on the Web also has an agreement to digitize and search all Fox News Channel broadcasts, according to one industry executive. A Fox News Channel spokeswoman confirmed the agreement

**Blinkx** says it has analyzed and indexed about 42,000 hours of video, including networks such as CNN that don't otherwise offer free video on the Web. CNN, [Warner Inc.](#), generally limits online access to its video clips to subscribers. **Blinkx** provisions of copyright law allow it to show a clip of up to 30 seconds. A CNN hasn't authorized **Blinkx** to use its video.

"There are gray issues for all of that," says Daniel Harris, head of intellectual property law at the law firm Clifford Chance in San Francisco. "It definitely sounds like a number of lawsuits could be filed."

Executives at **Blinkx**, based in San Francisco, say they'll need agreements with video content owners before they can offer the service. "That's definitely a challenge," says founder Suranga Chandratillake. He says he won't show video from its index if the creator requires it.

Yahoo, of Sunnyvale, Calif., claims it is forging links with video content owners. Some of its top executives come from the entertainment industry, including Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, former co-head of the Warner Bros. motion picture studio, which traditionally has taken pains to protect copyrights. Yahoo says it plans to discuss with Hollywood studios how to make their movies and TV shows searchable. "We're getting clearances, royalties, etc. -- that's a very complex process," says Jeff Weiner, a Yahoo senior vice president.

Google, of Mountain View, Calif., has been discussing with broadcasters details of making TV shows searchable, according to people familiar with the matter. Or

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**Blinkx** search results include video from:

- BBC News
- Bloomberg Television
- CNN
- C-Span
- ESPN
- Fox News
- The History Channel
- MSNBC News
- National Geographic
- Sky News

Source: the company

Google expects to launch a version of its service in 2005. Google staffers public last year that mentions using closed-captioning information as a search tool. A declined to comment.

Microsoft, too, plans eventually to offer TV video search from the Web, a com says. Media Center versions of its operating system already allow users to search shows based on expanded TV listing information and record them.

**Blinkx** won't be the first company to provide Web-based video searches. But a combination of features, including free searches of some broadcast TV and key audio tracks. Services such as ShadowTV charge users to search news shows through a password-protected Web site. Time Warner Inc.'s America Online uses Singingfish, a Seattle company that searches about 20 million video clips on the AOL and other sites.

Blinkx's TV search ([www.blinkx.tv](http://www.blinkx.tv)) uses technology licensed from Britain's A analyzing audio tracks of video. The technology converts a text keyword to phon snippets of sounds. It then compares those phonemes with the phonemes in its analyzes the audio for additional contextual clues and displays the best matche

**Blinkx** also lets users save video in special folders, to which it adds similar clips available. So a user who puts "Kofi Annan" clips in a folder would automatically that mention him.

Other video-search services, such as Singingfish, don't search the audio track, but data attached to a video file and the Web page where the file is found. That is the approach, too, although Yahoo says it will ultimately deploy technology to search well.

**Blinkx** is "going at it with some pretty good innovation," says Gary Stein, analyst Research, a unit of Jupitermedia Corp., Darien, Conn.

**Blinkx** is still working out how it will make money on the service, though executives will include advertising. That's something some of its partners are already expecting News displays a short commercial before its video clips on **Blinkx** and runs off video on the Web page. The companies won't say whether **Blinkx** gets any revenue

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