Russia's Yandex launches web browser to rival Google

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Russia's dominant search engine Yandex on Monday launched its own Internet browser in the continuing face-off with its American rival Google for supremacy in the growing Russian market.

The browser became available for download at 1300 GMT and offers a relatively minimalist Russian-language interface based on the WebKit platform and Google's Chromium code.

The "cloud-based" browser "integrates the best of our products and services and is open to other web developers," Yandex CEO Arkady Volozh said in the official company statement.

It incorporates the anti-virus technology of Russian security company Kaspersky Lab and "considerably expands the browsing territory for those who speak only one language," the statement said.

The browser's logo, a white sphere with a red "Y" stretching across it, was instantly nicknamed "the thong" by Russians commenting the company's announcement on Facebook.

Yandex is the world's fifth-largest search engine that claims over 25 million daily visits to its main page Yandex.ru.

Like Google, it also offers an array of services from email to blogs and web storage, as well as a popular page for navigating Moscow's traffic jams and an electronic money system.

Despite the advancement of Google, which now holds a quarter of all Russian searches, 15-year-old Yandex is still far ahead with about 60 percent of the share, and had a successful public listing in 2011.

The company clashed with Google earlier this year when founder and CEO Volozh, who also holds a stake of just under 20 percent in Yandex, accused the US company of being anti-competitive by making it difficult to use other search engines with its browser Chrome.

"Two years ago... everyone started eating everyone else. Google began advancing its Chrome browser and actively pushing out competitors from it," Volozh said in an interview to Vedomosti Monday.

"If the product is good, then our share will grow," he said.

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