

Google to open R&D center in Israel

February 28 2006



Image: Internet search giant Google's logo. Google says it processes more than 200 million searches a day and leads the world for search engine usage with 57 percent of the current market, followed by Yahoo at 21 percent and MSN at just 9 percent.

Internet search giant Google will open a research-and-development center in the northern Israeli city of Haifa -- its first R&D center in the Middle East, the company announced in a statement Tuesday.

The R&D center will open during the second quarter of 2006, the statement said.

"As a country renowned for its thriving economy and passion for new technologies, Israel is home to many outstanding computer scientists and engineers and Google is looking to establish long partnerships with institutes and universities," the statement said.

"Google is also continuing to look at other locations in Israel for future engineering centers," the company said.

Google formally announced its arrival in Israel Feb. 20 with the opening of an office headed by Meir Brand, but the search engine has been available in Hebrew for several years.

Brand has so far kept mum on the company's plans for Israel, except to say the company plans to tailor its Hebrew service more to the Israeli surfer, who according to the company is more educated, tech-savvy and search-engine dependent than his U.S. counterparts.

He promised in an interview Monday with the Israeli business newspaper Globes that the company would have a long future in Israel.

The company's co-founder Sergey Brin started hinted at an Israeli R&D center in late January.

The company appointed Dr. Yoelle Maarek, until now senior manager of the Information and Media Technologies department at IBM's Haifa research labs, to spearhead the project.

Maarek has 17 years of experience under her belt at IBM, where she was responsible for information management in the labs.

She also had a hand in developing the Juru search engine, which was developed entirely in the Haifa lab and later won a prize for precision, the Hebrew news Web site Ynet said.

"I am delighted that Yoelle is joining Google," said Alan Eustace, vice president of engineering, via the company statement.

"Her appointment demonstrates our commitment to product research

and development, enhancing our international business operations in the Middle East and beyond. Israel's highly skilled engineering base makes it the ideal place to establish an R&D center."

Google currently runs R&D facilities in Tokyo; Zurich, Switzerland; Bangalore, India; New York; Kirkland, Wash.; Santa Monica, Calif.; and Mountain View, Calif.

The Google R&D center will join several other international Internet and computer companies with branches in Israel. Chip maker Intel has had a presence in Israel for over 30 years and recently announced the opening of an information-technology center at the Islamic University of Gaza.

Microsoft also has an Israeli branch in the city of Ra'anana near Tel Aviv.

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