

Lycos gets into online gaming

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Internet search giant Lycos entered the online gaming war this week with the launch of its Lycos Games service.

The online program offers free games, as well as pay-for-play, monthly subscription, and download-selection purchasing options. The site offers games such as Prince of Persia: Two Thrones, King Kong Deluxe Edition, and more common fare like Bejeweled, Zuma and card games.

As part of the launch, Lycos Games is offering all users free access to Albatross18: Realms of Pangya, an online multiplayer game that mixes golf with the popular fantasy/role-play style of games.

"The launch of Lycos Games is another step toward providing customers access to exclusive content like Albatross18 while giving creators a unique platform to showcase and market original games content," Alfred Tolle, chief executive officer of Lycos, said in a news release.

Lycos Games also offers game tournaments that offer cash prizes to users. All of the offerings previously found on Lycos' Gamesville site, which was geared toward more serious gamers, are still available on the new one.

Tolle said that that launch of the gaming site is not the culmination, but only the start of Lycos' work on online games.

"Lycos has been pretty dormant in the games space over the past three years," he said, "but in the coming months, we will continue to partner

with global companies, to bring exclusive new games content to the U.S., giving our millions of Lycos users access before anyone else."

According to a recent report by Forrester Research called "North American Video Gaming: Surviving a Midlife Slowdown," 39 percent of North American households use a PC for video gaming.

However, the report found that 43 percent of North American consumers reported playing fewer video games than they did two years ago, as opposed to just 34 percent who disagreed.

The answer to turn this trend around appears to be online gaming. Forrester found that 24 percent of current adult gamers who are online are interested in some form of online gaming against other users.

"Digital distribution is already starting to play a huge role in the PC games business, with many PC games now available to play or download online," Brian Kalinowski, chief operating officer of Lycos, said in a news release.

Kalinowski noted that the closed-transaction model of console gaming helps PC games in the eyes of consumers.

"Gamers also now have the opportunity to upgrade features to their purchased-box product PC games by downloading extras for free or a pay-per-download basis," he said.

"Lycos Games' platform offers game developers untapped revenue opportunities, greater control over their games, and a better end user experience," he added.

Last month Verizon unveiled its Verizon Game Network, a similar online gaming site that, like Lycos Games, offers gaming options for

casual gamers as well as more passionate users.

As part of VGN's launch, Verizon began holding weekly events where teams of 16 users met to compete in multiplayer games like Counter-Strike.

Many other Web portals, such as AOL, Yahoo! and MSN, operate similar online gaming sites.

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