

Google leads in search, trails elsewhere

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While recently released numbers show Google continuing to dominate the search-engine market, statistics from industry researchers Hitwise suggest other Google products and services have a way to go to catch search competitors Yahoo! and MSN.

Online analysts comScore Networks said Monday that Google's market share in search-engine use in the United States in April rose to 43.1 percent, up half a percentage point from March, and up 6.6 points from April 2005.

Yahoo! and MSN searches remained strongly in second and third place respectively but lost chunks of their market share from last April as well.

However, Google still lags behind in many other services, including e-mail, where its Gmail service claims only 2.5 percent of the market.

Gmail trails e-mail king Yahoo! mail, which claims 42 percent of the market, as well as MSN Hotmail and MySpace Mail, which claim 23 percent and 19.5 percent respectively.

"Despite early adopters glowing about Gmail, it still has low numbers," said Charlene Li, analyst at Forrester Research.

Li said that Gmail's relative newness compared to the long-established Yahoo! Mail and MSN Hotmail make it hard to take command in the marketplace.

"It's hard for users to switch, especially with Gmail, where the interface is really different," she said. "Overall, Google is playing catch-up on mail."

Similarly, the recently debuted Google Finance claims only 0.3 percent of the business and finance information market, trailing a slew of competitors.

Meanwhile Yahoo! and MSN's finance services rank first and second in the market, in that order.

In map services, online-based Google Maps claims third place in the market with 7.5 percent, while the downloadable application Google Earth is in fifth place with 2 percent.

Mapquest, owned by AOL/Time Warner, leads the industry with more than 50 percent of the market. Yahoo! Maps claims 20 percent, and MSN Virtual Earth holds 4.3 percent.

Li said that building a cohesive portal of services is key to retaining users.

"Many users use multiple services," she said. "Search is so easy to switch from one place to another."

Li said that Google's expansion is following in the footsteps of what Yahoo! and MSN have done to diversify services previously.

"(Yahoo! and MSN) have always had a portal strategy," she said. "It's been their bread and butter. They had a more robust strategy whereas Google started more traditionally from search."

A wide array of offerings is what Google must do in order to continue dominating the search market, Li said.

"They have to do it," she said. "They can't just remain a search engine. They can't risk it."

Li said that no one product or service will make Google as successful as having strong options in a variety of markets.

"I don't think there is a key to winning the relationship with the competitors," she said. "People have different preferences."

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