The Web: Social networking searches

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Media mogul Martha Stewart is launching an online social network for women -- joining other entrepreneurs who are starting similar projects and are collectively propelling social networks into the mainstream of the Internet, sources tell UPI's The Web. The movement is becoming so pervasive that other media companies, including Google.com, with its Google Co-Op, and Yahoo! with its purchase of Del.icio.us, are starting search engines specifically for online communities -- creating veritable miniature Internets within the global Internet.

There are even search engines, like Fun Mobility's Connect engine, for those on the go, with mobile phones, who can't bear to be away from their online community for more than a few minutes.

"What's often referred to as social search or the human indexed Web is really a vision for an Internet that humans have indexed by using the power of the human intellect," said a spokesman for PreFound.com, a search engine for online communities, told The Web. "Then make that human-indexed information available to everyone by using a simple search engine metaphor."

Last month experts met in Lexington, Ky., at a forum, sponsored by PreFound.com, to explore how social networking communities are emerging, and enabling people to find, tag and share information about each other, or other topics, and share that information in an array of formats, like MP3 files, or even podcasts.

"One striking finding," said Steve Mansfield, co-founder and chief

executive officer of PreFound.com, "is that the concept of social search is so revolutionary that many people are simply not familiar enough with what social networks and social search can do together."

Some of the other findings from the panel, the so-called Derby Roundtable, of industry experts is as follows:

-- User-generated search results are a critical aspect of social search, whether the user-generated results are simply shared links, an array of related links, or a blog post, because they utilize collective knowledge of people;

-- User communities will probably have to be quite large -- though the exact size has not yet been determined -- for social networking search to be effective;

-- New technologies related to tagging -- highlighting certain postings -- are going to have to emerge to make it easier to find specific blog posts, online video, online audio and digital photos.

Experts said that that social search will in the coming years be "monetized," meaning that advertisers will start to be very interested, and will underwrite some communities that are active and thriving. The thinking is that social search features, on social networks, will give advertisers unprecedented opportunities to target individuals and specific groups.

In the mobile world, research already shows that more than half of mobile content purchases come from "peer referrals." That is, a fellow who likes a particular song by a particular act, say Gnarls Barkley, which has the popular U.K. hit, "Crazy," he usually recommends it to a friend for download, and that friend will quite often download it.

"For carriers to be successful in increasing their data revenues, they'll increasingly need to focus on solutions that create a stickiness that keeps their users involved," said Adam Levine, founder and chief executive officer of FunMobility Inc., a Pleasanton, Calif., developer of social networking platforms for mobile communities.

Some of the basics found on social networks on the Internet are also emerging on the mobile Internet's social networking sites. This includes the ability for consumers to post information about themselves, generate their own customized greetings and the functionality to buy, share or rate content, along with others in the community.

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