

Fast Search Sides with Newspapers in Web Sales War

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A Norwegian company that supplies search technology to business users is looking to help newspaper publishers make more money from online advertising without sharing it with big Internet services.

Fast Search and Transfer on Monday released FASTMedia, software that lets media companies like newspaper publishers deliver results tailored to their local markets without striking revenue-sharing deals with search companies.

"It's a way for media companies to create and manage their own advertising networks without using Google or Yahoo," said Nick Patience, a business software analyst at the 451 Group.

Norway's Schibsted is using the technology on its Sesam Web site. Reed Elsevier's Reed Business Information, is testing it, a spokesman said. Meanwhile, Fast is trying to build interest among U.S. publishers.

U.S. newspaper companies are looking to offset weakness in traditional classified advertising businesses by signing deals with Internet search companies such as Google or Yahoo, but such deals put added pressure on already tight margins.

FASTMedia is made of several existing products developed by the Oslo-based Fast Search and Transfer, which specializes in developing software for businesses to search both internal archives and Web-based information. Once a publisher purchases and installs the software, they

retain all resulting revenue.

Among those products are tools to present different kinds of search results including audio, video, images and text, as well as technology to deliver those results and accompanying advertising to mobile devices.

"There are so many companies that don't want to give any more money to Google and Yahoo because Google and Yahoo are sucking the life blood out of them," said Susan Aldrich, an analyst with the Patricia Seybold Group in Boston.

Newspaper publishers from USA Today's Gannett Co. Inc. to The New York Times Co. are looking for every way possible to increase online sales to offset declines in their print businesses, but growth rates are still slowing.

Some major publishers such as McClatchy Co. are working with Yahoo or Google on deals to beef up their online advertising in exchange for giving the search engine companies an entry into the publishers' local markets.

Fast's advantage, analysts say, is that it eliminates the need for sharing sales dollars. Its search technology also allows publishers to better target ads to local readers.

"Last week, I was looking for a restaurant and I went to Boston.com. Did I type that into Google, Yahoo or MSN? Nope," said Susan Feldman, vice president of content technologies at IDC, a research company based in Framingham, Massachusetts.

"It's just extending ... the expertise they already have in their local market, and then making money on it instead of having somebody else grab it," she said.

Other media companies that use various Fast products include Hearst Corp., The Washington Post Co.'s washingtonpost.com unit and Britain's Guardian, Financial Times and Reuters Group Plc.

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