

IAC to Launch Ask Mobile GPS Service

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IAC/InterActiveCorp. said it launched on Friday a new mobile application for its Ask.com Web search service to help consumers find friends, shops and services based on their location at a given moment. "Ask Mobile GPS," or Global Positioning System, was launched on Ask.com's Web site on Friday and will be available next week on Sprint Nextel Corp. through a deal between the No. 3 U.S. wireless carrier and WaveMarket, which provides location-based services for mobile phones.

The service will be offered for \$9.99 per month on seven phone models currently offered by Sprint. IAC aims to expand the service to other U.S. carriers and may offer more basic tools to consumers for free, company executives told Reuters.

"The Web has evolved to being an essential daily tool in people's lives and that doesn't stop when you leave the house," Ask.com Chief Executive Jim Lanzone said in an interview ahead of the Reuters Global Technology, Media and Telecoms Summit in New York next week.

"Up to 30 to 40 percent of what is done on the Web could move to mobile," Lanzone said. "At the end of the day, everyone needs to go mobile. But being early in the game can help lock people in for the long term."

In addition to search and GPS-enabled maps and directions, Ask Mobile GPS will offer Web services from within IAC's family, beginning with its Citysearch guide for shops and restaurants and its Evite online party planner.

The company, home to over 60 Internet brands, plans to bring more of its services to the mobile application in the coming months, including box office service Ticketmaster, dating site Match.com and home listing site RealEstate.com.

"The challenge for mobile, which I think is easier for IAC to solve, is the content challenge," IAC Chief Operating Officer Doug Lebda said.

"We've got all of that resident inside of our brands."

Early Advantage?

Mobile Internet services and local search services are viewed as two of the greatest growth opportunities for Web companies, from Google Inc. to Yahoo Inc., as well as media producers and communications operators.

IAC, controlled by media veteran and Web investor Barry Diller, hopes that an early combination of the two will be an advantage in developing a new market for the nearly 75 million subscribers to its U.S. Web-based services.

But despite years of media attention on the developing mobile space, the difficulty of navigating the Web on small cell phone screens and the lack of mobile search on a major wireless carrier's service has slowed widespread adoption.

Ask Mobile GPS simplifies the search for anything from nightclubs to emergency car towing by suggesting categories with the first letter typed into its search box.

Appropriate local listings are automatically determined by the phone's location. Once a particular business is selected, a user can read reviews or immediately call the merchant.

Ask Mobile also helps a user find friends in the area and invite them to meet at a particular location. Address information is enhanced by maps, and voice-read walking or driving directions.

IAC executives also highlighted new advertising opportunities linked to the Ask Mobile service based on the phone user's location. A subscriber could be offered a coupon to an ice cream shop next door, or to a movie showing in the neighborhood.

Advertisers, on the other hand, will know not only who called their business from using Ask Mobile's service, they can even know who walked into their store due to the ad.

IAC shares closed 12 cents higher at \$34.85 on the Nasdaq on Friday.

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