Google News mistakes Jackson queries for attack

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A visitor walks past the logo of internet search engine giant Google at a trade fair. A deluge of search queries for Michael Jackson led Google News, the news aggregator of Web search engine Google, to initially believe it was under attack, the Internet giant said on Friday.

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Google, in a blog post on the company website, said that "millions and millions" of people around the world begin searching for news about the pop star on Thursday as reports emerged about his hospitalization and death.

It rated the "hotness" of Jackson-related searches as "volcanic."

"The spike in searches related to Michael Jackson was so big that Google News initially mistook it for an automated attack," Google said.

"As a result, for about 25 minutes yesterday, when some people searched Google News they saw a 'We're sorry' page before finding the articles they were looking for," it said.

The "We're sorry" page tells users their query "looks similar to automated requests from a computer virus or spyware application" and forces them to type in a series of squiggly characters before it will process their request.

Popular micro-blogging service Twitter also suffered a slowdown in performance on Thursday as users exchanged thousands of messages per minute about Jackson's death at the age of 50.

Web portal AOL said its AIM instant messaging service was down for about 40 minutes.

Yahoo! said the news area on its front page received five times its normal traffic and its front page story "Michael Jackson rushed to hospital" was its "highest clicking story" ever with 800,000 clicks within 10 minutes.

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