

Google showcases local businesses in a new 'place'

October 27 2010, By MICHAEL LIEDTKE , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Google Inc., world's most popular search engine, started rolling out a new way to show information about local businesses on Wednesday.

When Google detects that a search is for merchants or things to do in a specific city, it will now devote the entire results page to key data about the places mentioned in the request. For example, a query such as "San Francisco Mexican restaurants" might produce an entire page of results listing different places to eat, accompanied by a map, phone numbers, addresses and reviews.

Google traditionally has presented information about similar merchants in the same city over several pages. The company's engineers recognized this scattershot approach was frustrating users and making them do multiple searches.

The new system will begin affecting results Wednesday, although it could take several days before the new "Place Search" feature is available throughout the world. Google has sifted through hundreds of millions of Web pages to compile information about more than 50 million different locations.

Google expects the new feature to become a cornerstone of its service because more than 20 percent of its search requests include something about a particular location. When Google doesn't automatically detect a request is about a particular location, users will be able to re-focus the

results by clicking on a "Places" link on the left side of the page.

Place Search is another example of how Google is taking what it has learned about its users' interests and desires to build features that attempt to anticipate what they want to know. Last month, it introduced "Instant Search" that shows results that change with each character typed into a request.

Google also is trying to boost revenue from local advertisers. If Place Search brings more people to Google, it will probably be able to persuade more small businesses to buy ads next to the results. In another move to attract more local advertisers, Google is testing a service called "Boost" that allows merchants to include more information about themselves in their commercial messages.

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