

Blekko launches human-driven search engine

November 1 2010, By DANA WOLLMAN , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- If Google and Wikipedia were to procreate, their offspring might look something like Blekko, a new search engine with results culled by people, not computer algorithms.

The site's users are in charge of assigning tags such as "colleges," "autos" and "recipes" to Web pages indexed by Blekko, much the way Wikipedia users keep the [online encyclopedia](#) up to date by adding and changing entries as needed. If a tag doesn't already exist, a user can create it.

The search engine, which launched in public beta testing on Monday, claims improvement over competitors such as Google Inc. in that it's designed to weed out spam - sites whose owners have gamed the system so they appear at the top of search results, even if their content isn't relevant to the search keywords used.

Blekko also strips out results from content farms, which research trendy topics and then pay writers to pen short posts about them. These pages, which live on large sites such as eHow.com and Answers.com, rank highly on engines like Google, even if the content itself is too brief to be useful.

The company expects that the quality of search results will improve as more people add more tags - and remove irrelevant ones - to organize the Web pages.

All told, Blekko has 3 billion Web pages in its index; industry leader

Google has more than a trillion.

Users can narrow their searches by, say, asking Blekko to report back only on products sold at Best Buy Co. Inc. As with Google, people can also filter out certain types of results, such as images, that won't be useful to them. The search engine's intelligence has its limits, though; users will need to know to distinguish "Best Buy" from "bestbuy."

The company has received \$24 million in funding from U.S. Venture Partners and CMEA Capital, as well as angel investors including Marc Andreessen, who was instrumental in developing the Web's first commercial browser, Netscape. In the future, the site plans to make money through ads that appear next to results for certain tags, just as Google sells ads tied to search keywords.

Its founder, Rich Skrenta, has been developing the site since 2007. Before beginning work on Blekko, he created the Open Directory Project, which similarly relied on more than 80,000 volunteer editors to organize [Web pages](#) into more than 1 million categories. Ironically, before he set out to build a spam-free search engine in Blekko, he gained notoriety as the first person ever to let loose a personal computer virus - a quarter century ago as a ninth grader.

Blekko isn't the first [search engine](#) that attempts to let volunteer editors organize search results. Jimmy Wales, founder of [Wikipedia](#), launched Wikia in 2008, only to shut it the following year, saying it wasn't as successful as hoped. When Wikia launched, it indexed between 50 million and 100 million websites, a fraction of what even Blekko searches.

Other search engines have also attempted to compete with [Google](#). Search engines such as Delver, Silobreaker and Cuil, the brainchild of ex-Google engineers, never took off. Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft Corp.

recently merged their search efforts to better compete, with Microsoft's Bing service handling the back-end work for both companies.

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Citation: Blekko launches human-driven search engine (2010, November 1) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-11-blekko-human-driven.html>

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