

Google to help small India businesses build websites

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Internet giant Google has launched a low-cost scheme to help small Indian businesses start their own websites as the country's booming economy increasingly moves online.

Internet giant Google on Wednesday launched a free start-up scheme to help small Indian businesses host their own websites as the country's booming economy increasingly moves online.

Firms will be able to set up and maintain basic websites to boost their Internet profile and find new customers, the company said at the unveiling of the programme in New Delhi.

Registry costs and all technological support on building the website would be free for a year before pay-as-you-go fees kick in.

"Out of eight million small and medium enterprises in India, only 100,000 have a website of decent quality," Rajan Anandan, managing director of Google India, told reporters.

"We aim to get 500,000 businesses online over the next three years by offering a quick, easy and free tool to set up and host a website," he said, adding it would take just 15 minutes to get online with a .in domain name.

Google is the search engine market leader in India with a 89 percent share, according to a report last year by the Aegis research group.

The Indian government expressed support for the scheme, saying it would help the small business sector.

"This initiative has come at an opportune moment," Jairam Ramesh, the federal minister for rural development, said at the launch, stressing that small businesses were crucial for future economic growth.

Google declined to give details of charges after the first free year but said the programme, which has been run in several other countries, was not aimed at generating immediate profits.

"In terms of revenue, there are no near-term expectations linked directly to this initiative," said Nikesh Arora, senior global vice-president of Google.

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