Italian professor launches challenge to Google

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Italian computer science professor Massimo Marchiori poses with a laptop showing his new site entitled "Volunia" at Padova's university. Marchiori, whose research helped inspire Google, launched a new search engine and social media network on Monday that he hopes will challenge the US technology giant.

An Italian computer science professor whose research helped inspire Google launched a new search engine and social media network on Monday that he hopes will challenge the US technology giant.

The new site entitled "Volunia" allows users to view the components of particular websites to find the subject of interest more quickly and to interact with registered users who might be looking at the same web pages.

"The web is a living place," said Massimo Marchiori, who came up with

the algorithm for the Internet page ranking service "HyperSearch" in the 1990s and used to teach at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

"There is information but there are also people. The social dimension is already present, it just has to emerge," he said in an online demonstration.

Marchiori said he believed the functions available on Volunia would soon become normal on all the major search engines including Google and Yahoo!

He has been working on the project for four years and has been praised by Italian commentators for giving up a more high-profile career in the United States to return to Italy, where his salary is 2,000 euros ($2,600) a month.

Marchiori teaches at the University of Padua in northeast Italy.

He has been quoted as saying that future Google founder Larry Page approached him after a conference in which he presented HyperSearch.

Page "was fascinated by it and asked if he could use it. Since it was not patented, he used it in the best possible way," Marchiori said.

Volunia, which has a US copyright, was only launched to selected users on Monday and will be rolled out more widely and in 12 languages including Arabic, English, Japanese and Russian over the coming days.

Organisers said they hoped to fund it by selling advertising space.

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