

MSN adds new feature to take Internet's pulse

February 16 2012, By MICHAEL LIEDTKE , AP Technology Writer

(AP) -- Microsoft is hooking up MSN.com with a hipper sidekick to broaden its appeal and stay on top of the Internet's hottest topics.

The trend-tracking service, called "msnNOW," tunes into the buzz by sifting through millions of [Internet searches](#) and links circulating among the hordes on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). The chatter is then distilled into the equivalent of a digital water cooler - a place where people can go to keep in touch without taking up a lot of their time.

After months of development, the new feature debuts Thursday at <http://now.msn.com> .

The service is primarily aimed at college-age teenagers and [young adults](#) who are increasingly relying on smartphones and other mobile devices to remain plugged into what everyone is talking about from one hour to the next. It's an "information-snacking" addiction that msnNOW is looking to feed with a smorgasbord of morsels served up a team of about 20 editors who will write 100-word summaries of the stories driving online conversations, said Bob Visse, MSN's general manager.

Although it's tailor made for people on the go, msnNOW isn't offering an app for smartphones or computer tablets. It can be reached on all [mobile Web](#) browsers. The service also includes tools to make it easy to share on Facebook, Twitter and email.

Taking the Internet's pulse isn't new. The main page on Yahoo Inc.'s

website has highlighted the top trends for years and Internet search leader [Google](#) Inc. calls out the top queries each day. Twitter regularly updates its rankings of the most-tweeted topics.

But MSN believes its new service will prove to be even more effective because it is drawing upon [Microsoft Corp.](#)'s expertise in data management and relying on human editors to ensure the real-time site is more compelling than a list of words and links.

Facebook Inc. and Twitter also have negotiated deals that make more of their data available to Microsoft's Bing search engine than to Google, but msnNOW isn't relying on that privileged access, Visse said. Instead, msnNOW is conducting its analysis through the public entryways that Facebook and Twitter offers to all websites. MsnNOW is also leaning on [BreakingNews.com](#), a part of MSNBC that also pores through a variety of social media to find interesting stories as they unfold.

MsnNOW's reliance on Bing to monitor online search activity could be a drawback because it processes far fewer requests than Google. But Bing is picking up more cues now that it's powering Yahoo's search engine as part of a 10-year partnership. Combined, Bing and Yahoo have a roughly 30 percent share of U.S. search volume compared to 66 percent at Google.

Bing's second-banana status in [search](#) is a big reason why Microsoft's online division has been a financial albatross. The software maker's online operations have lost about \$8 billion since June 2008.

MSN.com remains one of the Internet's top destinations with about 520 million users. In comparison Facebook boasts 845 million users, Yahoo has about 700 million and Twitter has more than 100 million.

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