

Yahoo grabs for Android smartphone homescreen (Update)

June 23 2014, by Glenn Chapman



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Yahoo on Monday ramped up its move to mobile, grabbing for Android smartphone home screens with an Aviate application tuned to where people are.

Yahoo bought Aviate early this year in a deal reported to be valued at

about \$80 million dollars. The software was subsequently honed with a test group.

An English language version of Aviate for handsets powered by Google-backed Android software made its global debut on Monday, in a move to give new prominence to Yahoo on the smartphone.

"We created Aviate to connect you with the information you need at the moment it's useful," Aviate founder and Yahoo product manager Mark Daiss said in a Tumblr post.

"Yahoo Aviate simplifies everything about your phone."

The Aviate application available at Google Play online shop is touted as creating an "intelligent home screen" that serves up applications or information based on where users are and what they might be most interested in a given moment.

"It starts with a clean, new layout and apps automatically organized for you," Daiss said.

"But it's not just about making your phone simpler—Aviate also makes your phone smarter by offering intelligent information throughout your day."

Showcasing content

The Aviate release comes as part of a campaign by Yahoo chief executive Marissa Mayer to revitalize the faded Internet firm as a premier digital content company at the heart of people's daily routines in the mobile age.

"At the end of the day, Yahoo is trying to be a content site again; really

connect you back to the content you want to read, watch, and enjoy," said analyst Rob Enderle of Enderle Group in Silicon Valley.

"It is like next-generation TV on steroids."

To succeed, Yahoo needs to seize control of smartphone screens and put its content, along with money-making advertising, at the center of experiences on mobile devices, according to the analyst.

Online retail titan Amazon last week made a move in the same direction by unveiling "Fire" smartphone infused with software tightly tied to its online offerings.

Amazon founder Jeff Bezos unveiled the device, Amazon's first smartphone of its own, which has a 4.7-inch display, a high-definition camera and Amazon's free help service.

The phone also ties in to Amazon's vast array of other offerings, serving as a platform for digital content such as books, films and music and connecting users to the firm's cloud storage.

"Amazon is doing exactly what Yahoo wants to do, but with their own devices," Enderle said.

Amazon's tactic sidesteps potential bumps that might be put in Yahoo's path by carriers, handset makers, and Android-backer Google when it comes to vying for control of smartphone home screens.

"If Yahoo does get a beach head, it is unlikely they can hold it; and getting that beach head is going to be difficult to begin with," Enderle said.

Building a news team

Yahoo has been shedding its online search engine past in favor of a future as a venue for premier digital content and services, particularly aimed at smartphones and tablet computers.

Yahoo has also been investing in original programming. US media reported on Monday that Yahoo has added former NBC News investigative reporter Michael Isikoff to its lineup.

"Yahoo is trying to build out a news program," Enderle said. "They are hand picking people who they think can bring them an audience."

Yahoo in January enlisted news, music and television stars for the launch of online magazines focused on technology and food.

In May, the Sunnyvale, California-based firm launched an online magazine for film lovers.

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