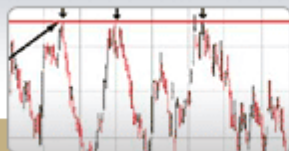


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Google's Latest Bid To Boost Revenue: Interest-Based Ads

BY PETE BARLAS
INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

Posted 3/11/2009

Google ([GOOG](#)) wants to let users choose what ads they see, in its quest to drum up more ad dollars.

The search leader on Wednesday launched a first-of-its-kind program that lets consumers pick the kinds of ads they see when they visit Web sites that get ads from Google. Users can select to see ads only in certain categories, such as animals, autos, entertainment or sports.

Google's program, which it calls "interest-based advertising," advances a concept already used by Google and rivals such as **Yahoo** ([YHOO](#)), **Microsoft** ([MSFT](#)) and **Time Warner's** ([TWX](#)) AOL. These firms use so-called behavioral targeting. These programs serve up ads based on the content on the sites. So for example, a sports-related Web site might carry ads for sports drinks or exercise gear.

But Google is the first to let consumers select the kinds of ads they will see, says Greg Sterling, principal at Sterling Market Intelligence.

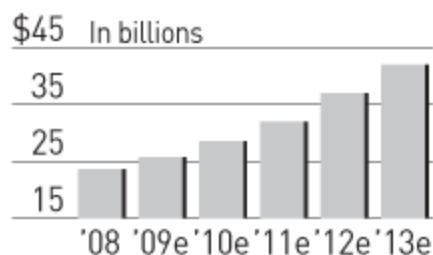
"Among the big players — Google, Yahoo, Microsoft and AOL — Google is the only one that is currently doing this preferences/interest kind of thing," he said. "This is an effort to deliver more value across the board in a bad economy."

Google's interest-based ad program will serve up ads based on Web sites

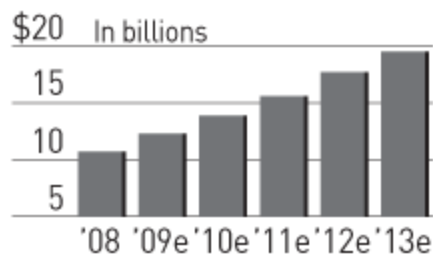
Online Ads

Google is looking for a bigger piece of the growing U.S. online ad market, which is led by search ads

U.S. online ad revenue



U.S. online search ad revenue



Source: eMarketer

that consumers have previously visited. Such data is collected and stored by so-called "cookie" software in an Internet browser. Some categories of Web sites, such as medical sites, won't be included to help protect consumers' privacy.

Users have the option of declining to see ads based on their prior Web site visits by clicking an "opt out" button on Google, but then of course they can't select what categories of ads they want to see.

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Google says it will test the service with text-based search ads and graphical display ads on its network of partner Web sites. Those sites include AOL, Ask.com and YouTube. The ads will start to show up in about two weeks.

Google is responding to requests from its Web site partners, Susan Wojcicki, Google's vice president of product management, said in a posting Wednesday on the company's official blog.

"Our advertisers and publishers have been asking us for a long time to offer interest-based advertising," she wrote. "Advertisers need an efficient way to reach those who are most interested in their products and services. And publishers can generate more revenue when they connect advertisers to interested audiences."

By including sites the consumer has visited hours or days before, an interest-based ad program takes this sort of behavioral targeting one step further, says Sterling.

"I might be reading a story about the NCAA tournament and maybe yesterday or an hour ago I was looking for a rental car in Los Angeles, so theoretically you could see a rental car ad on that March Madness page," he said. "Before, all of the ads would have been somehow tied to the content of that page."

Google continues to increase its revenue — almost totally from online ads — despite the economy.

In the fourth quarter, Google's own Web sites accounted for 67% of its total revenue, up from 64% a year earlier. Ad revenue from partner sites that carry Google-brokered ads accounted for 30% of total revenue last quarter vs. 34% a year ago.

Google and its partner sites might not be the only beneficiaries if the interest-based program succeeds, says Danielle Leitch, executive vice president of client strategy for MoreVisibility, a search marketing firm that helps clients advertise online.

"I also see it as a way to keep the advertisers happy in some pretty tough times," she said. "It could deliver more bang for their buck and get them to spend more."

Unknown is how many people will take the time to visit the "ad preferences

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manager" feature on Google.com to select the categories of ads they want to see, Sterling says.

"I don't know how many consumers are going to actually navigate to this page and then set this up," he said. "That is where this program may break down."

Setting up ad preferences might be asking too much of Internet users, Leitch agrees. "I can't imagine there would be a mass adoption across the board," she said.

Consumers that opt out will find a drawback, said Nicole Wong, Google's deputy general counsel, in a company blog post on Wednesday.

" . . . It means they will see advertising that's less relevant," she wrote.



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