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## Will Google Be The Google Killer?

by Chris Copeland, Friday, Sep 14, 2007 12:01 PM ET

Earlier this week I received two different media requests for quotes that were focusing on the development of new search engines. The journalists working on these pieces wanted to understand everything -- from why new search engines were needed, to which ones seemed to have the best chance of succeeding. And, as many journalists like to push their angle, they each asked the following salacious question, "Will Engine XYZ be the GoogleKiller?"

### Waiting for GoogleKiller, now more fun than watching paint dry and grass grow

Whenever I'm asked this question, I have to reign in my cynical nature and harness my own journalism background. Asking the question serves a purpose, but it is usually the author's purpose of pitching a story with an exciting hook versus solid reporting. Take, for example, the question about an emerging engine. Could a new engine -- Mahalo, ChaCha, Spock -- be the next Google?

First of all, we are comparing apples to oranges. The true question is, "Could one of these engines become bigger than Google as a desktop search entity?" On that question I am prepared to report that with 92% of the precincts closed, we are declaring Google the winner. Google's lead in desktop search is so large and steady that it would likely take a catastrophic misstep from Google, much more so than a revolutionary entry into the space, to topple it.

So, if Google isn't going to be caught, then what

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value do other engines serve?

## What would it take to win at desktop search?

Long before Google became a media company and was still thought of as a technology company, it gained its reputation as a dependable and highly relevant search engine. Google went two years, from beta launch in '98 to the introduction of AdWords in 2000, without accepting any advertising, focusing solely on the most relevant search experience possible. People started Googling things because they trusted they could find the answer more precisely than anywhere else.

Now, seven years later, the cries coming from many mainstream-focused start-ups and even established players in the search space is that they each improve on the consumer experience. But what's enough improvement to make people shift? I, personally, think the Ask 3D model and the usage of silverlight to create rabbit holes of information within MSN Live are great steps forward in the space. But, I'm in the space. When you consider the average person who has become loyal to Google, just how great is the barrier to change? And more important, how much more relevant must an engine be on a consistent basis to draw attention from not just people in the space -- but people, period?

## Niche solutions for niche market problems

In responding to one of the columnists, I outlined two potential scenarios where Google could be topped. In both cases these are merely sideswipes -- not full frontal assaults -- to the kingdom, but at least one seemed to be born out by rumors in the trades this week.

The first area, and this has been well chronicled, is in vertical search. There are far too many specialty areas for Google to put out the best experience in each. This is not because Google couldn't if it put its vast resources behind the effort, but because the money and focus may simply not be worth the Google energy.

That's not to say that there aren't areas where Google won't focus vertically. Take this week's [rumors](#) about a potential Google takeover of WebMD. It is no secret that pharmaceutical advertisers have all flocked toward the Web and Yahoo, Google, MSN and others, and have invested in the space heavily. There will continue to be search engines that can

focus on specific areas, especially in the B2B, tech and services sectors that will have a leg up on a Google solution

The second scenario, and this is far more debatable, would be the creation of an engine that from day 1 was built around personalization. While everyone discusses various types of cookie-level and user-level data customization, the notion of an engine that is exclusively used by those who embrace a better experience through complete understanding of past behavior has yet to be unveiled. This would certainly not be for everyone -- but for a very specific group, this would be a no-brainer. Then, over time as the buzz got out and as the privacy concerns were proven to be overstated, this could gain some traction. But my sense is, this would have to be an all-in proposition, not something people could float into and out of when they did or didn't want their search history chronicled.

### Is Google the only hope for taking down Google?

As always, with Google one needs to only point back to the company's mission statement for a glimpse into how it could evolve the desktop search game: "Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

Now comes Universal Search and its attempt to integrate more and more elements. Whether it is news or videos from YouTube, or images and other assets, this is clearly the current direction of the industry at large. While Ask beat Google into this area, there is only so far that 5% market share can take Ask. We've been working with and watching Google as the company continues to store and index all the assets of our clients. From SKUs and local store information to images and videos, Google has everything necessary to create the complete experience.

So, when anyone asks if someone can beat Google as it is today, the answer is "Yes, it's the Google.com of tomorrow."

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