



GOOGLE'S CREATORS BATTLE DANGERS OF SUCCESS

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As Google morphs from search engine to Internet powerhouse, its creators are searching for an elusive formula: how to be both big and good at the same time.

When plans for a Google classifieds site similar to the popular Craigslist leaked out recently, it was seen as another attempt by Google to gain footholds in every sphere of the online industry.

Now, as Google trades for close to \$385 a share on the stock market -- compared to \$25 for Microsoft and \$38 for Yahoo! Inc -- the company is in direct competition with some of the industry giants.

The start-up of an up-start

Seven years ago, graduate school dropouts Sergey Brin and Larry Page founded the company Google with the motto, "Don't be evil," in the basement of a friend's garage. The name came from googol, the number one followed by 100 zeros.

While graduate students at Stanford University, the two created an algorithm for a search engine because they were dissatisfied with the search engines on the Internet at that time.

They located investors, founded Google, Inc., and launched what became the most popular search engine. The site has become so popular it has spawned a commonly used verb -- "To google," means to search the Internet for information.

Google accounts for 45.1 percent of all Internet searches; Yahoo is the nearest competitor with 23.3 percent of all searches, according to a September 2005 report from Nielsen/NetRatings.

Google remains determined to innovate

Over the past few years, Google has unleashed a series of products that improved on already-popular services offered by their competitors.

Froogle, a shopping search engine comparable to a worldwide flea market, and Google News, a service that gathers headlines and photos from over 4500 news sources, served as another outlet for Google's algorithmic technology in 2002.

In April 2004, the company launched GMail, a free Internet-based e-mail service that gave users a gigabyte of storage space -- 250 times the amount of space provided by Yahoo! Mail at the time.

The following spring, Google reinvented the on-line mapping industry, posing a direct challenge to MapQuest and Yahoo! Maps.

Google Maps and Google Earth use satellite and digital imaging to coordinate local business searches and 3D maps. CNN used Google Earth recently to show the flooded neighborhoods of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Google tries to create an online library

Yet not all of Google's creations were met with high praise. In December 2004 Google announced Google Print, a partnership with the libraries of Harvard, Stanford and the University of Michigan.

Google Print hoped to scan the pages of all of the libraries' collections to create a digital card catalog that would be accessible to Google's 80 million daily users.

But critics said the plan violates the 1976 Copyright Act, which gives authors control over their "intellectual property".

Google claimed that since users would only be able to look at pages that come up in searches, and not browse through books, the project is covered under the "fair use" provision of Copyright Act.

Mary Sue Coleman, the president of the University of Michigan, said Google Print "...encourages the free exchange of ideas in the service of innovation and societal progress."

But the Authors Guild and the Association of American Publishers rejected the argument and are now suing Google to stop the project.

The president of the AAP, Pat Schroeder, told Newsweek, "The law does not say you can take my stuff because you're going to do something with it that is going to be really good for humanity."

Beyond search...

Google is now reaching beyond Internet search technology, proposing free wireless Internet to the city of San Francisco.

If successful, the wireless plan would provide a free public service and severely undercut telephone company SBC Communications and Comcast Corp, the local cable operator.

The company is also partnering with Sun Microsystems to challenge Microsoft.

The two companies are working on a competing software package that would make money through advertising instead of costing consumers anything. Microsoft Office costs about \$500.

Can Google remain "good"?

But as Google grows, it is more frequently being compared to the huge companies it sought to displace.

Technology workers in Silicon Valley complain that Google steals top engineers from other companies and has become too arrogant.

"Google is the new evil empire, because they're in such a powerful position in terms of control. They have potential monopolistic control over access to information," said Brian Lent, the president of a start-up in Seattle, who was friends with Brin and Page at Stanford, in the New York Times.

"I like and respect the Google guys, but let's just say that their ultimate aim seems to me to be, 'One Google under Google, for which it stands.'"

As Google grows, the question will be whether Brin and Page can stay true to their words that "searching and organizing all the world's information is an unusually important task that should be carried out by a company that is trustworthy and interested in the public good."

-- Compiled by Brian Wolly for NewsHour Extra

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