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Yahoo Fine-Tunes Its Search Engine

By VERNE G. KOPYTOFF

SUNNYVALE, Calif. — Since [Yahoo](#) surrendered its search engine to [Microsoft](#) two years ago as part of a major overhaul of its business, it has been trying to innovate on top of Microsoft's technology to keep people coming to its site.

The latest effort was announced Wednesday when Yahoo introduced a refinement that gives users answers to their questions without having to click on the search results. Search Direct, as the product is called, provides weather forecasts, celebrity biographies and news reports before users finish typing the question.

If it sounds familiar, that is because it is Yahoo's response to [Google](#) Instant, which automatically pulls up search results as people type their queries. Yahoo's version goes a little bit further by presenting edited information and images just under the search box instead of a page full of links.

Shashi Seth, senior vice president for Yahoo's search and marketplaces, said that the new service helped users find what they were seeking much faster because they did not have to click away from the search page. "People are looking for answers, they're not looking for links," he said.

"I think it's very interesting conceptually," said Greg Sterling, an analyst with Sterling Market Intelligence. "As for the execution let's call it limited or nascent."

By entering into a search alliance, Yahoo and Microsoft had hoped to better challenge Google and cut costs. They succeeded in cutting costs, but Yahoo also found its share of Internet searches eroding. Google still holds a wide lead in search with 65.4 percent of all queries. Yahoo has slipped to 16.1 percent from around 20 percent two years ago, according to [comScore.com](#). Much of that loss was picked up by Microsoft, which now has a 13 percent share.

Mr. Seth declined to predict that Search Direct would bring people back to Yahoo's search page. But he said that it would raise the number of searches by existing users based on their increased satisfaction with the results.

Search Direct is available on Yahoo's search page, but not from its home page. Yahoo intends to test the performance of the new design before introducing it more broadly in the coming months,

Mr. Seth said.

Typing “Kobe,” as in [Kobe Bryant](#), the basketball star, brings up a box with related search terms along with his playing statistics and a photograph. Searching for “Paris, France” automatically shows the local time and a list of the top three things to do in the city.

For now, such information is limited to about 15 categories and is far from comprehensive. Yahoo executives acknowledged the shortcoming and said more would be added over time.

Yahoo is considering whether to place ads in the Search Direct box, including video ads. Those details are still being worked out, as is whether Yahoo would share the revenue from them with Microsoft.