

Lycos Looking Forward, an Interview with COO Brian Kalinowski

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It's been a long time since we've heard from Lycos. Long lost amidst the choppy seas of corporate change, Lycos was once one of the ruling elite. Today, Lycos appears to be a number of fragmented shells of its former self. That might be changing soon though.

Last week, word of a restructuring phase at Lycos spread around the web based on a post on John Battelle's blog and an article written by me. As it turns out, the information was correct but our assumptions were wrong. Lycos is not getting out of search, exactly, it is simply changing the way it approaches the search engine marketplace as consumer use of search engines evolves.

In an interview with StepForth Tuesday morning, Lycos Chief Operating Officer, [Brian Kalinowski](#) noted Lycos was going to be releasing a series of products marketed to producers and distributors of web content over the next six months.

The firm's focus is shifting towards "... consumer created and specialty niche content". This means Lycos plans to support independent creators and publishers by building products, services and platforms that allow them to make professional content and distribute it through social-based search applications.

"Search is an absolute, necessary vehicle," said Kalinowski, "Web2.0 search is the primary vehicle for navigation and discovery. Lycos is not the general purpose [search] destination of choice but it will always offer competitive commercial search and specialty search for niche content."

Currently, the Lycos search network is fragmented with the "international version" of Lycos (the .com address) displaying results culled from the Ask Jeeves database. Regional versions of Lycos tend to draw results from the Google database. Both search engines databases are available through [HotBot](#), (another of the original search tools but now owned by Lycos).

"Territorial relationships are managed by separate groups", said Kalinowski, noting how Lycos.ca chose Google for organic results while Lycos.com has been showing results from Ask Jeeves since March 2005. Over the coming months however, Kalinowski says Lycos will "... dramatically be changing its overall search experience in the next three months", with a dramatic relaunch sometime in the next two.

Lycos is much larger than most people think. As it was one of the original search engines, it has been a part of the scene for a very long time. It has been involved with innumerable deals over the past decade, many of which helped shape the Internet as we perceive it today. In some of those deals, Lycos itself was a hot-commodity and in others, it appeared to be an asset too big to lose but too ungainly to hold on to. Along the way, the company picked up products as varied as, Wired Magazine, Quote.com ([sold to IDC](#) on Feb 1st.), Tripod, Angelfire, HotBot, Gamesville, Raging Bull, and Wired's WebMonkey.

Over the past year, Lycos has consolidated a lot of products. "We had 42 unique products in May but have boiled them down to 16 – 20," said Kalinowski. "Our primary focus is rolling them into 7 or 8 key properties." He went on to identify key areas as; news, entertainment, games, content, email, blogging, photo albums and multi-media / social networking products.

A glance at the [Lycos Network Help](#) page shows they already have many of the technologies in place. Anglefire and Tripod are services geared to helping beginning bloggers or website builders create web-ready properties ready to accept fresh content. Much of that content can be stored, shared and gathered using Planet, a youth-focused social network platform introduced by Lycos. New webmasters can register domains through Lycos and receive HTML tutorials, manuals and gadgets through the WebMonkey and HTMLGear services. Wired Magazine is considered to be among the most credible sources of Internet and technology news.

That collection of assets gives the management structure at Lycos a wide resource base to work with as it reinvents and reasserts itself in relation to its much larger competitors, Yahoo, Google and MSN.

For Lycos, reinvention is, "... the opportunity to go from a large public to a small private company." While admitting Lycos is, "... never going to beat Google," at pure search, Kalinowski says Lycos will focus on areas, "where we can make a big dent."

The area Kalinowski identified as Lycos' primary target is niche content created by independent producers. Lycos wants to become a, "... destination for not only consumers but for producers and creators where they can market and promote the goods they create." He noted there are several independent producers of films, music, video games, and written products.

As an example, it plans to create and promote a virtual record label associated with the Lycos brand along with becoming a virtual publishing house for games, films and text creations. "Anybody has the ability to self promote, produce and market their own goods," says Kalinowski. The system will enable end users to drop-ship product and can accept payments via Visa, MasterCard or Paypal.

"In the typical publishing industry, take music, 100 bands will be marketed from the 1000 bands that are signed and produce an album without promotion. We are trying to focus on that segment of content not large enough to make it without the support of the 5 or 6 big-boys [who dominate the various publishing sectors]."

Lycos sees a great deal of potential serving long-tail searches in order to aggregate content that appeals to small markets that control niches in the larger marketplace. The idea is that fresh content will draw viewers, "... creating a larger audience of varied, eclectic tastes." Lycos plans to be a big player in a lot of smaller markets.

"We see and use search as a discovery engine," Kalinowski said. "It will evolve in a few years to personalized content based on user interests and desires. Google needs to stay on the cutting edge of general search, sort of a one-trick-pony. We see many niches so if one falls off..."

If anything, Lycos is a survivor. When asked how search engine marketers should think about Lycos, Kalinowski replied, "As the sleeping giant. We will never come back and be the \$100 billion company. We're aiming at capturing a lot of smaller niche markets, satisfying needs that Yahoo and Google can't because that requires focus outside of their capabilities." Lycos intends to, "... take a significant position for indy content creators and content outside the realm of mainstream publishers. This is a very dedicated commitment for us."

As the search sphere segments, it will be interesting to watch Lycos' continued evolution.