

Ask.com adds mobile apps to its search results

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You're apt to discover more useful apps for your smartphone or tablet computer at Ask.com beginning Tuesday.

At least that's the thinking behind a licensing agreement that Ask's search engine has forged with Silicon Valley startup Quixey, which has spent the past three years refining a technology to analyze the services offered through millions of applications designed for iPhones, iPads, Android gadgets, Windows devices and BlackBerrys.

Results from Quixey's database will now appear among the answers that Ask delivers to questions posed on its search engine. The apps results primarily will be featured in a new section of Ask that is scheduled to debut at 8 p.m. ET Tuesday (0100 GMT Friday).

In some cases, though, an app might appear in the main results, even when a request isn't explicitly seeking a mobile application. For instance, someone looking for good places to take a hike might see an app for locating trails listed among the results. Or a query for the television series "30 Rock" may highlight apps from Netflix or Hulu that offer entire episodes instead of just listing Web links with information about the show.

Ask's addition of an apps section is another example of the accelerating shift from personal computers to mobile devices, a move that is reshaping the way people interact with technology. The evolution will force general-purpose search engines to change their ways or risk becoming less relevant, predicts Quixey founder and CEO Tomer Kagan.

"Search is no longer about just reading documents," Kagan said. "It's about finding the technology to help us with what we are trying to do."

Ask, which is owned by IAC/InterActiveCorp is hoping the new apps feature can lure some traffic away from the Internet's much larger search engines.

Although it processes more than a half billion requests each month in the U.S. alone, Ask remains a distant fourth among search engines with a market share of about 3 percent, according to the latest data from the research firm comScore Inc. Google Inc. runs the dominant search engine with nearly 67 percent share of the U.S. market, followed by Microsoft Corp.'s Bing at 16 percent and Yahoo at 12 percent.

"Apps are gateways to some of the most top-notch digital content out there, so this integration fits perfectly with where our product is headed," said Shane McGilloway, Ask's chief operating officer.

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Published on Electronic Component News (<http://www.ecnmag.com>)

The Ask alliance represents the largest licensing deal so far for Quixey, which has raised about \$24 million since its inception in October 2009. The company currently employs about 50 people at its Mountain View, Calif. headquarters. Quixey's technology is also available on its own website and through a few other partners. It is also featured in the Skyfire browser that's included on some of the mobile phones sold by AT&T Corp.

People already conduct regular searches for apps, usually within the individual stores set up for each of the major operating systems that power mobile devices.

The database that Quixey is licensing to Ask is meant to serve as a one-stop shop to find any app available on any operating system. Kagan believes Quixey is better equipped to point out apps that pertain to general search requests because its technology analyzes the tasks programs perform instead of just relying on the words contained in brief descriptions of the software.

"We are trying to show you an app that answers your question, not just an app that matches a word in your request," Kagan said.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/13/2014 - 3:20pm):

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