

LookSmart: On The Comeback Trail?

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By DAVID SIMS

TMCnet CRM Alert Columnist LookSmart, an online media and technology company specializing in vertical search, is throwing out 161 new vertical search sites in a variety of categories, Categorically focused and "demographically defined," the sum of 13 vertical categories and 181 total sites makes LookSmart, in the eyes of its press officer, "the largest single provider of vertical search destinations on the Web."

The move has been hailed as a "rebirth" and "comeback" for the company, which Search Engine Journal calls "one of the major search engine workhorses of the 1990's which is striving to reinvent itself and appease its users & investors." As industry observer Pamela Parker writes, " LookSmart has been fighting for its life since losing MSN as a distribution partner back in 2003. Since that time, when its main products were paid inclusion listings, the company has made cutbacks, shaken up its management and refocused around three initiatives -- a paid search and contextual ad network, vertical search sites, and technology licensing." If it succeeds it could arrest the company's falling share price enough to keep it from being booted off NASDAQ. The Company's "brand promise" is to provide consumers with essential information for passions, needs and repetitive tasks encountered in everyday life.

"Like cable was to television, vertical search is the Web's next logical step," LookSmart officials say. "Consumers embrace many media choices and integrate them into their lives, creating a desire for 'vertical' services and content."

David B. Hills, president and CEO of LookSmart said they've designed the sites and functionality to "augment what consumers do with more generalized and portal services."

For each vertical category, LookSmart has developed an array of niche sites. For example, LookSmart's Money web sites include: mutual funds, real estate, retirement, savings, stocks, taxes and more. Unlike many other sites, content and articles found on LookSmart's vertical search sites are freely accessible and from a wide variety of sources.

LookSmart's expansive set of sites is designed to make it simpler and easier for advertisers of all sizes to locate the audience they are after. Advertisers can now reach these highly targeted audiences with search ads, banners and other creative formats.

"Few people thought that Cable would transform the television industry like it did. They thought the consumer and advertiser would not adopt and embrace vertical alternatives," said Hills. "The online medium and search in particular have these same elements."

Within each vertical site relevant content is broken out first by topic, then by source, and all information is compiled to suit the visitor's needs. On LookSmartFamilyMeals.com, for example, a parent can find content on a wide variety of realistic "family friendly" recipes and cooking information such as: "quick cook," "cooking for kids," "breakfasts" and even as exact a search as "chicken dishes" for kids with particular eating habits.

David Sims is contributing editor for TMCnet. For more articles by David Sims, please visit:
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