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## MSN, Yahoo Go Local in India

**Both will offer several Indian-language portals to attract non-English Internet traffic.**

*October 5, 2006*

Rediff, a general-purpose India portal, has launched a Hindi version of its instant messaging service.

The IM service launched by the portal Wednesday, known as Rediff Bol (the word means "speak" in Hindi and rhymes with "goal"), is an extension of Rediff's Indian-language email service, which covers 11 Indian languages.

Local-language email is also available from Webdunia.com, the most popular Hindi language portal, as well as from Hotmail, Sify, and Rediff.

Local-language web sites, mail, and instant messaging—all web-related traffic builders—are hot in India's online world.

It took six years in India before Microsoft launched MSN portals in several local languages in September of this year, but the move prompted rival Yahoo to announce it would do the same in a few weeks.

The homegrown portals Sify and Rediff already offer content in some Indian languages, while *Indiatimes* is happy with its English site.

Microsoft is even trying to build a community of developers who will make Indian-language computing easier so larger numbers of non-English-speaking Indians can use PCs and hence use the company's Office desktop software, which is now available in a few Indian languages.

If MSN took time to reach out to the masses, there was a sound business reason: low rates of Internet connectivity. But an online revolution could be around the corner.

Computers can be bought for as little as the equivalent of \$210 in India, broadband rates have plummeted to about \$6 a month, and content is finally getting interactive. No numbers are yet available on how popular Google's Indian-language search is.

Raftaar, a startup that's experimenting with its own search system, says it's getting a few thousand visitors a day, without any advertising.

India's leading matrimonial portal, JeevanSaathi.com (meaning "life partner"), hit upon a winning strategy with its Hindi version. Now a database of potential brides and grooms is available to parents looking for an ideal match for their son or daughter. Who said tradition can't be kept up by modern means?

### **Rupees Clinking**

Smart companies like Google, Microsoft, Rediff, and Sify can hear the sound of cash, even if it's in the future. Convert some of the educated Hindi-speaking millions into Internet and e-commerce users, and you get about half of Europe's population.

The largest-selling English newspaper, with sales of over 10 million copies a day, trails at No. 11, behind several Hindi, Tamil, and Malayalam newspapers.

*Dainik Jagran*, the No. 1 paper, sells over 21 million copies daily and prints only in Hindi. National readership surveys say there are over 300 million readers of Hindi newspapers, and the numbers are growing.

The possibilities of e-commerce are tempting too. Google actually has a team targeted at businesses that have never advertised on the web. Yahoo India has launched its search marketing service in India. And eBay holds training sessions in one-horse towns for small entrepreneurs to sell their wares on the Internet.

### **Search Marketing Opportunities**

A study by the Internet and Mobile Association of India, along with the search marketing consultancy Pinstorm, pointed out last week that Indian online users did 1 billion searches per month. Total annualized spending by advertisers targeting Indian users reached \$52 million.

That number might seem small until you realize there are only 37 million Internet users in India. The user base is expected to grow to 42 million by March 2007 and to 52 million by March 2008.

The study had other interesting findings. Searches by Indians that bring up sponsored links have reached 308 million per month. Total clicks on sponsored links by Indian users amount to over 4.8 million per month.

The survey also found that small metropolitan areas and towns are increasingly embracing the Internet and account for 25 percent of all users in India.

"The next round of growth will be driven by new and innovative applications such as blogs, P2P, video on demand, and online gaming, while the old favorites such as email, chat, and IM will drive first-time users to the medium," said Mohan Krishnan, country manager (eTechnology Group) of IMRB, a market research firm.

With Web 2.0 companies the flavor of the season, the day isn't far off when a social networking site draws users from across the globe, all writing in their own languages, but perfectly understood by each other because of the translation magic hidden in the heart of the software.

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