Blinkx Ups the Ante in the Search and RSS Markets

Benjamin Alfonsi

Blinkx's new SmartFeed service (http://www.blinkx.tv/), which lets users receive audio and video content from multiple sources via RSS feeds, is the latest advance keeping the search engine start-up in the news. This development, the first of its kind according to the company, follows their June announcement of the addition of fully searchable podcast and video blog channels to their Blinkx TV offerings.

"Blinkx has become a force in the search industry that has kept others on their toes," says Allen Weiner, research vice president at Gartner, an IT research firm. "By using advanced speech-recognition technology, smart business sense, and an understanding of how consumers look for and manage content, Blinkx provides the consumer a total end-to-end package to find and 'manage' content feeds."

Weiner believes this makes the company an attractive option for large media companies looking for a technology partner. Indeed, Blinkx has already attracted a string of content partners including Reuters, the BBC, the New York Times, BusinessWeek Online, the History Channel UK, iFILM, HBO, and CNN.

One-stop searching

"RSS is an increasingly important part of what the Internet experience is about," according to Blinkx founder and CTO, Suranga Chandratillake. "People get it [RSS] very quickly, and once they get it, they use it."
Using speech recognition and transcription technology, clustering algorithms, and context prediction, SmartFeed joins the next generation of search engines that go beyond text-based searches. Based on a user's channel specifications, SmartFeed searches the Web for audio and video content and delivers material that matches the RSS reader.

"There is a wealth of untapped information out there, and it's growing at an incredible rate," says Chandratillake. "But it's not easy to track [podcasts and video blogs] via the method employed by traditional search engines—essentially sifting through text."

**Nothing beats an email blast?**

The early success of Blinkx's offering notwithstanding, in terms of Web-based marketing, some experts say the influence of RSS is limited. Michael Gartenberg, vice president and research director of Jupiter Research, believes audio-video RSS won't affect traditional email marketing. "Both have their strengths and weaknesses," Gartenberg says. "But it's unlikely we'll see one replacing another at this point in time."

Weiner says that because it requires the consumer to already have an interest in the material to initiate an ongoing relationship, RSS doesn't play much of a role in terms of initially attracting customers. However, he says, "once a marketer has made a contact with a customer, RSS could help create an ongoing relationship."

As for the future of RSS, Weiner believes that it might mean the end of the Web browser. "RSS could allow content creators of all types to create widget-like services that sit on a consumer's screen and live outside the Web browser paradigm. I think this is on the immediate horizon," he predicts.

"RSS is going more mainstream," adds Gartenberg. "People will be using RSS for a lot more things... not just syndicating news sources."

**Related Links**
- Video Blogging: Content to the Max (http://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/MMUL.2005.41)
- Video Data Mining: Semantic Indexing and Event Detection from the Association Perspective (http://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/TKDE.2005.83)
- The Life Cycle of Multimedia Metadata (http://doi.ieeecomputersociety.org/10.1109/MMUL.2005.13)

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