Yahoo drums up business  
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The Australian  
AUGUST 04, 2004

ONLINE media company Yahoo is taking on the might of Telstra with the launch yesterday of a local search engine designed to make it easier to find businesses and products in Australia and New Zealand. Yahoo Local Search, available at au.yahoo.com, provides directory and mapping information for businesses as well as other product and service details. Yahoo head of search Peter Crowe said it would specifically target the 1.2 million small businesses in Australia that might consider advertising online and was compiled over the past year from publicly available directory and information sources.  

Mr Crowe said it did not incorporate White Pages and Yellow Pages directory information included in the rival Sensis.com.au search site launched by Telstra's Sensis directories division last month.  

Mr Crowe predicted the local search launch could increase Yahoo's traffic by up to 20 percent in the next year. About 4 million users visit Yahoo in Australia each month, and 20 per cent are looking for local information.  

"We've seen search activity change in the last year to a lot more business-related activity," Mr Crowe said. "Statistics from the US show 25 per cent of all commercial inquiries are local."  

The Yahoo launch is the latest salvo in the battle for the fast-growing global search advertising market, estimated by Microsoft's internet arm MSN to be worth $US7 billion ($10 billion) by 2006.  

In Australia, the search advertising market is tipped to reach $40 million this year, with Sensis, Yahoo, online search engine Google and the PBL and Microsoft joint venture NineMSN all vying for their share.  

Each of the major players is rushing to launch local search products that will provide Australian consumers with more relevant business information and give local companies a better reason to advertise.  

Last month, Sensis was the first major player to launch a locally relevant search web site, Sensis.com.au, following the launch of its Sensis 1234 telephone search service.  

MSN, which recently upgraded its global search engine, plans to overhaul its service to make it more intuitive and more relevant before the end of the year.  

Yahoo's paid search advertising arm, Overture, has said it will launch a service for local businesses wanting to advertise on search engines through paid listings by December.  

This report appears on australianIT.com.au.