

What do Microsoft need now?

I'd never really thought about the internet advertising market til the Microsoft-Yahoo thing came up. I mean, I know that when I search on G, a load of adverts appear above and beside my search results and there's an order to the search results that may or may not have a commercial bias (at least it will if the companies are canny about things like keywords and Dmoz), but I'd never really thought about how they got there and what it means.

So. The Microsoft-Yahoo marriage is off, the bride's run away, the Maid of Honour (News Corp) won't be forgiven because she took her dress off and played best man instead, and the groom's still on the hunt for a pretty girl to hook up with (but choose wisely my friend; divorce costs). Except it's all gone a bit [Babylonian bride market](#).

So again. If Microsoft wants to take on the internet advertising market, what does it need? In one word: [eyeballs](#). In more words: eyeballs, search histories, processing and trust. And that's the hard part. People stay in business because they understand transactions (or genuinely do have a product that a) people want and b) not many other people can provide. But that's rare). And there are at least three sets of people in these transactions: the companies paying to gain access to people who might want to view their sites, the viewers and the matchmakers (staying on the marriage theme for a moment) between them.

Google (and this is at base all about Google)'s [internet advertising](#) works because it brings in an incredible volume of traffic (through both search and all the other tools it punts, e.g. Google Earth etc), knows what that traffic thinks it wants (search histories and profiles) and doesn't chuck too many unsuitable matches at the user (does Google have a dating service? Maybe it should...[silly me; it's horrifying](#)). Microsoft wants to match this. Although it could be argued that a more lateral approach than building its own Google would be more sensible, I'll indulge that idea for a moment. So who would I buy if I were Steve B at the moment?

Well. Potentially Murkysoft has its own eyeballs and processing, but not much in the way of search histories or trust. So a search engine or information site, preferably something large and generic (Ask? Dogpile?) or failing that a set of more topic-specific ones (Kelkoo? Multimap? About?). Trust is a difficult one; to pull this off, Microsoft would either have to get its own teams working closer together (it seems it suffers from the same [internal markets](#) that made [NASA fail](#)) or front its efforts through a more-trusted third party (in a hand-sweepy way, nobody trusts big business but everyone likes a friendly puppy). It has enough access to ideas (through its own [research teams](#) and university links); it just needs the front, the stringy bit that holds them together. Me, I'd be kicking myself for not having started a small esoteric search site, if I hadn't been doing so many cool things instead. But it will be fun to watch all the other girls applying their makeup and practicing their winks. I just hope they don't fight too badly if the answer is a harem.