

# Internet giants muscle in on your mobile

## Google and Yahoo! link up with phone firms to tempt shoppers to stores as they walk close by

**Samantha Novick and  
Murdo MacLeod**

FINALLY, there is no escape from the advertising men. Internet firms are working with mobile phone companies on sending ads to customers as they walk near specific businesses.

The rival systems use the ability of phone networks to pinpoint the location of customers to within 50 metres.

Allied to mobile internet services and marketing information, that means a store could send an advert to a potential customer as soon as they approach.

Mobile phone users will get discounts on their monthly bills in return for signing up to the proposed service.

Advertising on mobile phones is regarded as being the next big battle between internet companies and both Google and Yahoo! have been working on systems to send "location specific" ads to users.

Last week software giant Microsoft announced its intention to take over Yahoo! for £22.5bn in an attempt to compete with Google, which makes its money through offering ads on its internet search pages and is worth about £12.5bn.

Last month mobile phone operator T-Mobile signed a deal with Yahoo! to develop targeted ads for mobile phones.

The systems typically send a

text message when the consumer is near a business which is advertising and which the computer thinks will be relevant according to analysis of recent online shopping and internet searches.

A subscriber who was checking the prices of televisions online the previous evening might be texted while passing by an electronics shop which was running a promotion on TVs.

Companies are already using more basic techniques to target adverts at computer users. Home PCs with access to the internet have addresses which can be analysed and which advertisers can use to display ads relevant to the consumer's country or home town.

In addition, online sellers such as Amazon analyse what people have bought in the past in order to suggest new products they might be interested in.

Mobile phones can be used to help track users because they connect to specific phone masts which can allow a user to be tracked down to within 50 to 100 metres.

Experts in computing and in human rights have warned of the need for tough safeguards to protect personal data. Public authorities, including local councils, have the right to demand information about which

pages individuals have accessed on the internet as well as mobile phone data.

John Scott, the Scottish human rights campaigner, said: "I'm sure that some people would find this software helpful, but whenever there is more information available about us as individuals, we lose control over some aspects of our privacy.

"Many people would be surprised about how much information about us is already held by corporations. Sometimes, this information is even sold on between businesses.

"But the potential of abuse of this kind of private information is constant. What I know about information that is supposed to be kept secure is that there is no such thing. Someone will access it somehow."

Muffy Calder, professor of computing science at Glasgow University, said: "With this kind of technology you could get restaurant and cinema reviews which could be helpful. Some targeted advertising could be very positive.

"What if you got an advertisement from your favourite shop that was advertising a 20% discount? Now that wouldn't help you if you are five miles away, but it would help if





you were 50 yards away. But there could be some negative stuff attached to it too.

"The question then is how and where this information would be stored."

Explaining the concept, Guy Kewney, a writer with technology news service newswireless.net, said: "If you're using your mobile phone, the handset knows pretty much where you are, astonishingly accurately in fact, and they know what you have bought in the past. And the advertiser can link to the handset and can say to a business 'There's a guy coming round the corner, have you got

anything you want to offer him?' And up comes the phone with a beep saying 'you always like a latte this time of day, there's a special deal right this minute'.

"We are talking about a spy in your pocket which Google can talk to and they can hear from and which can whisper in your ear."

In the last few months, both private companies and Government departments have been criticised for their handling of private data. Several companies have received criticism in recent years for losing private customer information.

In December a laptop computer was stolen containing personal details from 14,000 Skipton Financial Services customers. And last February, the Nationwide Building Society was fined £980,000 after an employee's laptop containing vulnerable customer information was stolen.

Last November, 25 million Britons were put at risk of identity theft after personal information contained on two CDs was lost in the post by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

[mmcleod@scotlandonsunday.com](mailto:mmcleod@scotlandonsunday.com)

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