

The Gazette

YellowPages.ca looks much prettier after major facelift

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The **Yellow Pages Group** has for a long time suffered from what you could call, if you're as pompous as me, Microsoft Inertial Asthenia: a condition marked by slowness to react and innovate, usually caused by the sheer size of the patient. The result is that smaller, nimbler opponents emerge with superior products and proceed to eat its lunch.

This is also known by its alternate name, Monopoly-onset Bell Canada Lethargy.

Though YP has a brand inextricable from local search, other players like 411.ca, Canpages and Weblocal took online directories to a more interactive level evolved to the possibilities of the Web. See this blog post from last year comparing the different local search apps.

The new YellowPages.ca unveiled today brings the old phone book company to their level. It's a fair fight now.

Most of the changes were on the back end. This involved a complete reworking of how the database is accessed so the results would be structured by geography rather than by keyword. This will prove especially useful for mobile searches using location-based technology.

Some of the changes in the new version include:

Search by area code, neighborhood, or landmark: You can enter, say, a hotel name and see merchants in the immediate area. The "where?" field now suggests up to 10 possibilities.

Several new filters: These let you refine results by alphabetical order, category, and neighbourhood. Narrowing it down by location was the toughest part, Sieben said.

"We were sitting on massive amount of content. The challenge was presenting it in a geo-relevant way more than a keyword way," he said.

More prominent green merchants: YP improved the visibility for businesses that have the EcoLogo certification by environmental marketing firm TerraChoice. This identifies firms that pass their environmental standards. Of course, these are also businesses that paid TerraChoice for an environmental audit and annual licence fees.

Better search results: Often searches for nearby merchants gave you results as far away as Etobicoke, ON. That's because sponsored listings paid by advertisers came up first. Now sponsored results are more relevant to the user.

"It's a frustration we heard loud and clear," Sieben said. "The new YP is better at

balancing the expectations of advertisers and users."

Better map: YP uses Microsoft's Bing map, which is quite smooth and sleek. Icons of merchants are more clearly marked. You can also, within the map, do new searches, share a merchant, and get driving directions.

These are improvements from the R&D associated with Maps.ca, where YP experimented with different ways of presented data.

All very nice features that make YP.ca a much more satisfying search experience. This adds to other progressive moves by the company, like letting citizens opt out of phone book delivery that would otherwise go straight to the recycle bin.