

## **On Advertising: BBC creeping toward commercialism**

LONDON: The BBC Trust, which oversees the British Broadcasting Corporation, recently deferred a decision on whether to allow the BBC's popular news Web site to carry advertising outside Britain. But with an agreement to post clips of its programming on YouTube, the online video-sharing service owned by Google, the BBC appears to be taking a tiptoed step in a commercial direction.

Though BBC-branded magazines and Web sites like "Top Gear," a car enthusiasts' publication, and BBC television channels outside Britain have long carried ads, commercials are a touchy subject at home for the august public broadcaster.

Some BBC employees and members of Parliament have opposed the proposal to allow the international BBC news site to sell ads, arguing that commercials would taint its coverage. Rival Web publishers object that allowing the BBC to support its news operations with advertising is unfair, given that the BBC is subsidized with more than £3 billion, or about \$5.8 billion, a year in funding from license fees imposed on British television viewers.

Under the agreement with YouTube, which was announced Friday, the BBC is making material available for three branded "channels" on YouTube. One, which has already begun, features clips from new BBC shows and promotional material for series like "Doctor Who." This channel, like the BBC's domestic television channels, will not accept ads.

Two other channels on YouTube will accept advertising. One of them, showing news clips, will be available only outside Britain when it becomes available in a few weeks, the BBC said. But the other, featuring clips of entertainment from BBC Worldwide, the broadcaster's commercial arm, will be available in Britain, too, marking a change of sorts.

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YouTube is a key gateway through which to engage new audiences in the U.K. and abroad," said Mark Thompson, director general of the broadcaster, in a statement.

"It's essential that the BBC embraces new ways of reaching wider audiences with nonexclusive partnerships such as these."

Though analysts described the move as a modest step for the BBC, given that only clips, and not full shows, will be available on YouTube, they said it could alter perceptions of the BBC, which recently won a renewal of its charter — though with significantly less public funding than it had sought.

The agreement "adds weight to the argument that the BBC is moving away from its position as a publicly funded broadcaster and becoming a more commercially focused organization," said Chris Khouri, an analyst at Datamonitor, a market research company based in Britain.

The partnership could be an effective branding and advertising vehicle for the BBC itself, Khouri said. Many video clips from the BBC and other broadcasters already end up on YouTube and other video sites anyway; the new arrangement allows the BBC to benefit by creating a branded space on the site, where viewers can click through to sites linked to BBC shows.

"We hope to open up an entirely new audience for their content, while deepening their relationship with their existing viewers," said Chad Hurley, chief executive of YouTube.

Google and the BBC declined to disclose financial details of the arrangement, other than to say that they planned to share revenue from advertising sold for the YouTube channels.

Editorial control over the channels will rest purely with the BBC. Google will be responsible for selling advertising on the BBC-branded channels.

Analysts say advertising on YouTube has been relatively slow to take off. But Google described the BBC deal as a coup, calling it the first agreement between a major international broadcaster and YouTube. In the United States, YouTube's relations with some big content owners are tense; Viacom, for instance, has demanded that it take down more than 100,000 clips from Viacom- owned services like MTV.

Viacom has instead reached an agreement with Joost, an online "television" platform being developed by Niklas Zennstrom and Janus Friis, the brains behind the Internet telephone service Skype and the peer-to-peer service Kazaa.

Joost and other similar new ventures hope to support their services purely through advertising. License fees and subscriptions, it seems, are so "old media."

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