

Yahoo Is Joining an Alliance That Has Google as Leader

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Yahoo said Tuesday that it would be joining an alliance to be led by Google, its principal rival, that will try to make it easier for programmers to write software that can run on the pages of many social networks and other Web sites.

Google announced on Tuesday that it would give up control of the alliance and turn it over to a nonprofit foundation. Google, Yahoo and MySpace, another member of the group, will be among founding members of the group, the OpenSocial Foundation.

The addition of Yahoo broadens the potential reach of the foundation. The group is working on standards that will let developers create programs that can run on any social network or Web site that embraces them. Such programs might, for example, allow users to let friends know the music or movies they enjoy.

The creation of the OpenSocial alliance last fall was widely seen as a response by Google and others to the growing power of Facebook, which has persuaded thousands of outside developers to build applications for its site. Those applications have helped bolster Facebook's popularity.

The creators of many of the most popular Facebook applications have since said they plan to adapt their programs to be compatible with OpenSocial.

Although Google is not a major force in social networking, its rivalry with Facebook appears to be intensifying. Facebook, for instance, has signed an advertising partnership with Microsoft and has recruited several prominent programmers and executives from Google, including Sheryl Sandberg, who became Facebook's chief operating officer.

A Facebook spokeswoman, Brandee Barker, said it would not be part of OpenSocial. "Facebook is not joining this foundation, but the company remains focused on advancing Facebook Platform to benefit the developer community and help users communicate and share information more efficiently," Ms. Barker said.

Yahoo considered joining the alliance for months, according to a person with direct knowledge of its plans. But Yahoo executives worried that Google might exert too much control over the evolution of the alliance and over any intellectual property it created, that person said.

In a conference call with reporters, Google and Yahoo executives dismissed the idea that the decision to put OpenSocial in the hands of a foundation was a response to Yahoo's concerns.

Joe Kraus, director of product management at Google, said the foundation represented "more an evolution of where OpenSocial is heading" than a response to concerns raised by any one member. And Wade Chambers, vice president for platforms at Yahoo, praised Google's stewardship of the standard so far.

The foundation, to be created within 90 days, will "ensure the neutrality and longevity of OpenSocial as an open, community-governed specification for building social applications across the Web," the companies said.

Yahoo gave no details on when or how it would adopt the OpenSocial standards. So far, only MySpace and Orkut, Google's social network, have introduced OpenSocial, Mr. Kraus said.

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