

Google to match ads with viewing habits

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Google is to start targeting its internet advertisements according to what people look at on the web, a controversial technique that privacy groups fear will give the search engine group even greater access to personal information.

The internet company will monitor the web pages that people visit and the YouTube videos they watch to create a profile of each user.

The company will then use the information to show display adverts to viewers based on those interests whenever they browse the web.

Google hopes advertisers will pay more for these targeted adverts, an important move at a time when the growth of online advertising is slowing down. A small group of advertisers will start using the system next month.

Mark Howe, country manager for the UK, said: "The Holy Grail for advertisers is getting more relevant ads. This is an opportunity for advertisers to reach a better audience.

"I would hope that it would drive revenue for publishers and ourselves."

Behavioural targeting of this kind, which is already used by rivals such as Yahoo and AOL, has raised concerns among privacy groups.

Google hopes to allay such fears by providing controls that let users see, change and delete the information that has been compiled about them, and to even switch off the monitoring permanently.

The monitoring system might fail to satisfy some privacy advocates because it relies on users opting out if they want the monitoring switched off, rather than asking if they want to opt in before tracking begins.

Web pages with sensitive information – such as those related to politics, religion, health, sexual orientation, certain financial transactions and pornography – will not be tracked.

Simon Davies, of Privacy International, said: "The privacy threat from Google is growing by the day. It is now time for parliaments and regulators to launch a full investigation of the company."

Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the world wide web, added: " There will be a huge commercial pressure to use it for things it was not originally intended for."

Google shares were 3.16 per cent higher at \$317.91 by the close in New York on Wednesday.

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