

# The New York Times

Expect the World®

## Business

Search All NYTimes.com

Go



WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY SCIENCE HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE

AUTOS

Search Business

News, Stocks, Funds, Companies

Go

Financial Tools

Select a Financial Tool

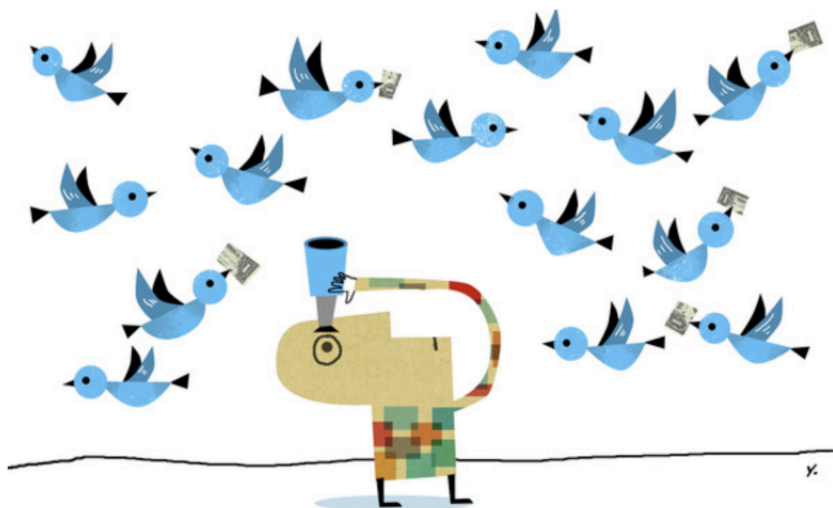
More in Business »

Global Business Markets Economy DealBook Media & Advertising Small Business Your Money Energy & Environment

**NOTE:**  
Please read the important information underlined in RED on Page 2.

PING

### How High Will Real-Time Search Fly?



James Yang

By MIGUEL HELFT  
Published: October 24, 2009

WHEN a [US Airways](#) plane landed in the Hudson River in January, the first [picture appeared on Twitter](#). In June, Twitter users were mourning Michael Jackson before major news outlets reported his death. And, this month, as much of the nation was riveted by images of a balloon believed to be carrying a 6-year-old boy, every twist and turn was tweeted and retweeted instantaneously, drowning out just about everything else on the site.

As major events unfold, Twitter, [Facebook](#) and other similar services are increasingly becoming the nation's virtual water coolers. They spread information quickly, sometimes before the mass media do, and their ricocheting bursts of text and links become an instant record of Americans' collective preoccupations.

#### Related

Times Topics: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#)

#### Add to Portfolio

[Google Inc](#)

[Go to your Portfolio »](#)

It's no wonder, then, that pundits and investors are salivating over the prospect of an

More Articles in Business »

#### Latest Business Headlines

What's This?

FROM NYTIMES.COM

- [Power for U.S. From Russia's Old Nuclear Weapons](#)
- [Dow Hits High for Year as Dollar Weakens](#)
- [Cold Response to Kraft's Cadbury Bid](#)
- [Burberry Looks Online for Ways to Gain Customers](#)
- [Justices Hear Patent Case On Protecting The Abstract](#)

Powered by [LinkedIn](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

#### [Omniture SearchCenter 3.0](#)

Learn why SearchCenter should be your SEM management tool.

[www.omniture.com](#)

#### [AJC Print Ads](#)

Expand Your Local Business By Advertising In The AJC Newspaper

[www.YourAudienceDelivered.com/](#)

#### [Market Track, LLC](#)

The leader in retail ad tracking, analysis and digital ad archives

[www.markettrack.com](#)

#### [Northeastern University](#)

Earn a Master of Science in Finance Online at Northeastern University.

[OnlineMSF.NEU.Edu](#)

#### [Internet Adv Intelligence](#)

Niche Industry/Local Online and Mobile Advertising Research

[www.themediatruster.com](#)

#### [Online Ads](#)

Advertise free classified listings Your ads will reach 100,000s!

[Atlanta.Kijiji.com/Free-Classifieds](#)

[Advertise on NYTimes.com](#)

SIGN IN TO RECOMMEND

TWITTER

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY



#### Personal Tech E-Mail

Sign up for David Pogue's exclusive column, sent every Thursday.

Sign Up

[See Sample](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

#### MOST POPULAR - BUSINESS

E-MAILED BLOGGED

effective way to search this information. Twitter, of course, has its own search engine. But others with names like OneRiot, Collecta and Topsy are also vying to become the [Google](#) of real-time search.

Not to be outdone, Google and [Microsoft](#) reached separate agreements last week to bring Twitter posts to their search engines.

For all the buzz, however, one question remains unanswered: How easily can real-time search turn into real cash?

No one doubts that helping users find fresh, up-to-the-minute content on the Web is valuable. But plenty of other valuable Web services — including content sites, free Web e-mail and social networks — have struggled to find effective business models.

Analysts say Twitter may well find ways other than search to make money from the huge amounts of data that flow through its system.

But Twitter's chief executive, Evan Williams, said revenue was "not the focus" of its agreements with Google and Microsoft.

What's more, neither of those companies has immediate plans to put ads on its searches of Twitter, though they may do so later. And Facebook said last week that it received no money from a separate agreement to make some of its users' updates available in real time to Microsoft.

"We have no idea how much you can make off of real-time search," said Danny Sullivan, a veteran search industry analyst and editor of Search Engine Land, an industry blog.

Traditional Web search is a business that practically mints money, and for two reasons. First, without Google, Yahoo, Bing or Ask, the Web would be an inscrutable jumble of bits. These services are so vital that they are used more than 450 million times a day in the United States alone, according to [comScore](#).

Second, and equally important, search advertising is probably the most effective form of marketing ever invented. Because search queries telegraph a user's intent with precision, they make it possible to match people with the right ads at the right moment. As a result, advertisers are willing to pay handsomely to peddle their wares in front of someone who types "iPhone deals" or "Maui hotels" into Google.

For all the billions spent on technologies that track users on the Web so marketers can pinpoint their interests, no other form of online advertising — or offline advertising, for that matter — has come close to matching the effectiveness of search ads.

If real-time search is ever to achieve the same kind of magic, it needs a large volume of queries and the same ability to match users' intent with ads. Mr. Sullivan said he expected real-time queries to be fewer and more specialized than generic searches.

More specialized, and perhaps not as easily converted into cash. Real-time search is still new, and information about it is hard to come by. But recent checks suggest that only a small fraction of real-time conversations are clearly commercial. On a recent morning, for instance, only two of the top 10 topics on Twitter — Halloween and MacBook — were commercial.

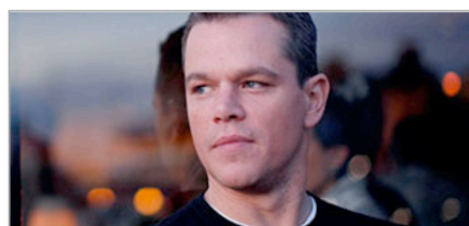
Real-time search entrepreneurs dispute this.

Gerry Campbell, the chief executive of Collecta, said that as much as 20 percent of queries flowing through its system could easily be turned into sources of revenue. This month, for instance, Collecta had a surge in queries for Viper, a new iPhone application that can start a car remotely.

Others say examples abound of queries that could be matched with ads: a search for tweets about snow conditions may be an advertising opportunity for ski resorts; one

1. Confusion on Where Money Lent via Kiva Goes
2. You're the Boss: 100 Things Restaurant Staffers Should Never Do (Part 2)
3. You're the Boss: 100 Things Restaurant Staffers Should Never Do (Part 1)
4. Novelties: Far From a Lab? Turn a Cellphone Into a Microscope
5. The Media Equation: News Erupts, and So Does a Web Debut
6. At Ruby Tuesday, Casual Dining Dons a Blazer
7. Burberry Looks Online for Ways to Gain Customers
8. A Movie's Budget Pops From the Screen
9. Your Money: Money Issues That Can Test Even a Rock-Solid Marriage
10. Unboxed: Watch the Walk and Prevent a Fall

[Go to Complete List »](#)



## A-list character actor

ALSO IN MOVIES »

[Breakout performances](#)

[New releases for the holiday season](#)

[nytimes.com](#)

MOVIES

### ADVERTISEMENTS

MetLife® Life Insurance - as Low as \$12/mo for \$250K of Coverage



Ads by Google

what's this?

#### [AJC Print Ads](#)

Expand Your Local Business By Advertising In The AJC Newspaper  
[www.YourAudienceDelivered.com/](#)

#### [Market Track, LLC](#)

The leader in retail ad tracking, analysis and digital ad archives  
[www.markettrack.com](#)

#### [Free Ads](#)

Advertise free classified listings Your ads will reach 100,000s!  
Atlanta.Kijiji.com

about poor cellphone coverage could attract ads from a rival network; one about restaurants could be matched with ads showing up-to-the-minute seating availability at the local deli.

“It is clear that users are exposing their intent, and you have an opportunity to match it,” Mr. Campbell said.

Sean Suchter, a general manager for search technology at Microsoft, said that he expected real-time search would eventually become lucrative. But he added that for now, “The goal is definitely to drive user value.”

SIMILARLY, Google said that real-time search is valuable, though not necessarily because the queries will generate as much cash as regular searches.

“We don’t know enough about what kinds of queries people would issue against real-time data to know how monetizable it is,” said Marissa Mayer, Google’s vice president of search products and user experience.

Google wants the Twitter data primarily because its mission is to be comprehensive: Google wants to organize all of the world’s information, including the Web’s fleeting real-time conversations.

“We do know that comprehensiveness has a commercial benefit for our business,” she said. In other words, comprehensiveness keeps people searching on Google.

[Sign in to Recommend](#)

A version of this article appeared in print on October 25, 2009, on page BU3 of the New York edition.

[More Articles in Business »](#)

SIGN IN TO  
E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS



**Follow the Seven Habits of Highly Effective Business People:**  
Get home delivery of *The Times* every day.

Ads by Google

what's this?

**[AJC Print Ads](#)**

Expand Your Local Business By Advertising In The AJC Newspaper  
[www.YourAudienceDelivered.com/](http://www.YourAudienceDelivered.com/)

**[Want Ad](#)**

Advertise free classified listings Your ads will reach 100,000s!  
[Atlanta.Kijiji.com](http://Atlanta.Kijiji.com)

**[Market Track, LLC](#)**

The leader in retail ad tracking, analysis and digital ad archives  
[www.markettrack.com](http://www.markettrack.com)

**Past Coverage**

- [2 Deals Hint at Revenue for Twitter](#) (October 22, 2009)
- [Forecast for Microsoft: Partly Cloudy](#) (October 18, 2009)
- [Training to Climb an Everest of Digital Data](#) (October 12, 2009)
- [ADVERTISING; Bug by Bug, Google Fixes A New Idea](#) (October 5, 2009)

**Related Searches**

- [Computers and the Internet](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Search Engines](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Online Advertising](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)
- [Social Networking \(Internet\)](#) [Get E-Mail Alerts](#)