Does the Next Google Come From Italy? The Volunia Case

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Italian computer scientist Massimo Marchiori challenges US technology giants like Google, launching a new search engine and social network that he claims will change the users' perspective on internet browsing.

If we asked our readers who Massimo Marchiori is, they'd probably turn to Google to search his name. They'd find out that Marchiori, 41, is an Italian computer scientist and professor at Padua University, and one of those people whose inventions inspired the way Google itself works today.

Marchiori created the HyperSearch [2] algorithm in the 1990s, which was later cited by Google's Larry Page [3] and Sergei Brin when they introduced PageRank [4], the algorithm actually used by

the world's most popular search engine. In 2004, Marchiori was awarded the TR100 prize by Technology Review [5], magazine of the Massachusets Institute of Technology (MIT [6]), where he used to teach.

Yesterday, Marchiori challenged Google with Volunia, a new search engine and social media network, launched during a webconference at 12:00 GMT+1 from Padua University.

According to Marchiori, Volunia aims to fuse the Web 1.0 and 2.0, information and people, freeing the latter from their virtual cages, being those the contemporary social networks. Surfing the web through Volunia will allow people to socialize with others navigating on the same pages, integrating chat qualities throughout the web. "Seek and Meet" is the motto of the company.

The user experience on the search engine will be different, as the Volunia sidebar will always be visible after the search results are loaded, allowing a map-visualization of the content, whose hierarchies and graphics can be reorganized or selectively searched as for multimedia content.

The project is fully Italian: the supercomputers come from Scandiano, the servers are located in Sardinia and the engineers, all former students of Marchiori's, are all based in Padua. Marchiori spent four years working on Volunia after turning down job offers from Google and giving up on a more high-profile career in the US.

Even if his salary in Italy is 2,000 euros ($2600) a month, Marchiori is very proud of "having done everything in Italy, demonstrating that here we still have good ideas and the infrastructure to develop them."

Volunia is available 12 languages, including Arabic, Russian and Japanese. Starting today, users can register on Volunia.com [7] and 100,000 of them will be selecter as "beta-testers," or "Power Users," as they are referred to on Volunia's website.

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[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyper_Search
[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Pag
[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PageRank
[5] http://www.technologyreview.com/
[6] http://web.mit.edu
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