Browsing the invisible Web

Goa Technologies' search engine scans parts of the Web that conventional browsers can't see

Despite the success of Sumithra Jagannath's company Goa Technologies, when you meet the designer of its flagship CloserLook search engine, the first thing that stands out is her good looks. There's no other way of putting it, in a software world of geeks and nerds, she's a knockout.

Of course there's more to Jagannath than just her surface good looks. But there's also a lot more to the Internet, than what conventional search engines like Google and Yahoo can see.

"Typical browsers only scan static html pages like company Web-sites," said Jagannath. "But what we call the "invisible Web," the databases underneath those sites, is at least ten times bigger than the visible Web."

That's where CloserLook comes in. The software, which Goa Technologies released last year, helps companies such as credit agencies, law firms and private investigators verify multiple Web-sites simultaneously, saving hours of time and money.

A typical CloserLook application is a background check. Using simple data like a person's name and address, the software simultaneously searches a variety of public and private domain databases.

These databases are made up of dynamic Web pages generated by user requests. A search of them can reveal a lot about a person, including his real estate holdings, outstanding legal claims, companies he owns and what boards of directors he sits on.

"Software like Google can direct you to a travel Web site, but it cannot search what's inside. The individual user has to do that," Jagannath said. "Our software takes you inside the databases."

Among databases CloserLook scans are such public domain sites as the Registre de Droits Personnels et Réels Mobiliers, the Inspecteur Général des Institutions Financières and the Société Québécoise D'Information Juridique.

Expanded searches can include credit checks using private databases such as

those of Equifax and TransUnion as well as LSSi, which contains data of telecom companies from across North America.

Although Jagannath estimates market for business intelligence services to be in the $5 billion range, she defines the niche that Goa is targeting narrowly.

"We develop intelligent search agents for business information and business intelligence providers," said Jagannath.

In just a short period of time, Goa has managed to sign up several prestigious clients including Dun & Bradstreet, Bélanger Sauvé and Le Réseau Financier de Montréal.

Although the revenues generated by Goa's seven employees are slated to hit a relatively modest $500,000 during 2003, according to the company's business development manager Shankar Ramachandran, internal projections call for 30 per cent growth during the next few years.

According to one customer, Goa's technology holds great promise.
"We have been getting very positive responses in our client tests," said Richard Brossoit.

Brossoit used Goa Technologies software to power a product he designed called FareExplorer, which enables travel agencies to search a multitude of airline and travel sites such as Travelocity and Expedia simultaneously.

"Agents are telling me they are saving 30 minutes with each search. That may not sound like a lot, but if you are doing dozens of searches a week, it adds up," Brossoit said.

Jagannath traveled a long road to get to where she is. An only child, she grew up in Madras India, but quickly distinguished herself with her sharp mind. In 1990 she came to Canada to pursue a graduate degree in computer studies at McGill, before moving on to work at the Centre de Recherche Informatique de Montréal.

In 1996 Jagannath founded Goa technologies, which originally specialized in doing consulting work for large public companies. It was during this time that she started thinking about DHTML (Dynamic Hypertext Markup Language), which enables users to generate Web pages through inquiries into corporate databases.

However although India is famous as a location for North American companies that want to outsource their software development, Jagannath decided stick with Quebec.

"I thought about using Indian programmers," Jagannath admits. "But there are a lot of very talented people in Quebec. The tax credits and incentives are also good."

But there's more to Jagannath's life than just computer software. She is also an accomplished Indian-style dancer, and she recently starred in an independent film called Tell me it isn't True.

The 80-minute, independently financed production, which will be shown at film festivals starting in December, is about an Indian girl who comes to Canada. It deals with her struggles dealing with the problems that her family is going through dealing with religious strife back home in India.

But Jagannath has no intention of moving to Hollywood. "I'm not going into the movie business," Jagannath said with a smile. "I just did the movie for fun. I won't quit my day job."

Photo caption: According to Sumithra Jagannath, president of GOA Technologies, the company's CloserLook software enables clients such as credit recovery services and competitive intelligence firms to access information from parts of the Net which are invisible to traditional search engines.

Sidebar: Getting Ahead

o Sumithra Jagannath came to Canada from Madras, India in 1990 to complete a master's degree in computer science at McGill University.
o After working several years perfecting user interfaces for various computer software packages, Jagannath founded Goa Technologies, a computer consulting firm.
o Jagannath was immediately attracted to the dynamic Internet, which is comprised of corporate databases, that remain invisible to traditional search engines like Google and Yahoo.
o Goa Technologies' CloserLook software, which is licensed to law firms, credit recovery agencies and competitive intelligence firms, searches multiple sites simultaneously on this invisible Web, saving users time and money.
o Goa Technologies is currently targeting sales in the $500,000 range this year, with annual growth slated at 30% in coming years.

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