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A Search For the Highest Bidder

by [Polly Sprenger](#)

5:15 p.m. 13.Apr.99.PDT

The popular search engine, AltaVista, is preparing to auction the search results for the most-requested search terms to the highest bidder.

Search terms like "football," "sex," and "cars" that return more than 100,000 hits are being sold by auction through [Doubleclick](#), an Internet advertising company.

The first auction of the search terms began on 7 April and runs through Wednesday, 14 April. The minimum bid is 25 cents per keyword search. In the first auction, AltaVista will only sell off the first search result on the site, but the company may later change even more results to a paid position.

These are not banner ads, however. The paid positions look identical to all other search results, and are indistinguishable to visitors.

Other search engines are less than impressed with AltaVista's move, and say they don't intend to follow suit.

"We don't want to speculate on what AltaVista is or is not doing," said Melissa Walia, spokeswoman for Excite. "But we don't sell placements and results and have no intention to. We think it's important to be clear with the consumer about what is a search result and have that be objective."

Doubleclick and AltaVista declined to comment, saying that final terms for the program hadn't been established. Doubleclick's West Coast marketing manager confirmed however, that all the terms enumerated in its letter to customers were accurate.

Editor's note: This story has been corrected. Comments attributed to Doubleclick suggesting that AltaVista wished to downplay its strategy could not be independently confirmed and have been removed. Wired News regrets the error.



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