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InfoSociety Monday 13 March 2006

Published: Monday 16 January 2006 | Updated: Wednesday 18 January 2006 | [Print this article](#)
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Media giant about to back European 'Google killer'

In Short:

Bertelsmann's announcement that the German media company is close to signing up as a partner behind the European search engine project Quaero has kindled discussion on Quaero's role in the emerging 'search engine wars'.

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Background:

[Bertelsmann](#), who may, via its [Empolis](#) data processing subsidiary, sign up as soon as 20 January 2006, would join consortium leader [Thomson](#). Other consortium members include [France Télécom](#), [Deutsche Telekom](#) and the engineering group [Bertin Technologies](#). Jean-Louis Beffa, chairman of the glass and ceramics group [Saint-Gobain](#), is the driving force behind France's [Agency for Industrial Innovation](#), which pledged to raise up to 150 million euro in funding, and Heinrich von Pierer, a former [Siemens](#) CEO who is now the chairman of the company's supervisory board, is co-ordinating fund-raising efforts in Germany.

[CNRS](#) (the French national council for scientific research), [RWTH Aachen](#) and [Karlsruhe University](#), the [InterACT](#) Center of which is developing Quaero's speech and language processing technologies, are also among the growing number of consortium members, along with the [INA](#) (Institut National de l'Audiovisuel) and [Studio Hamburg](#). Quaero will be based on the technology of the [Exalead](#) search engine, and France's National Institute for Research in Computer Science and Control ([INRIA](#)), which is another consortium member, is researching technology to index the content of pictures, videos and sound files without relying on metadata tags.

Issues:

Many experts think that multimedia search engines, which make it easier to find content for online delivery, are one of the big business opportunities on the internet. In addition, they are seen as holding key positions in the future internet, which will take over many functions today performed by television. As technologies are converging, media companies like Bertelsmann and TimeWarner, software makers like Microsoft and online companies like Google and AOL are all queueing up to secure their share of this emerging market.

Bertelsmann, one of the two companies sharing the biggest portion of Germany's media market, has also become the world's top music production company since its music subsidiary BMG merged with the music branch of Sony, forming [Sony BMG Music Entertainment](#). The company is in direct competition with [TimeWarner](#), who just signed a 1 billion US dollar deal with [Google](#), under which the search engine company bought five percent of the [AOL](#) online service. In addition, both companies concluded a [strategic alliance](#). Like other big players, AOL is acquiring smaller companies specialising in multimedia search, among them just recently the [Truveo](#) video search engine and back in 2003 [Singingfish](#), a company formerly owned by Quaero leader Thomson. Google has just launched the [Google video](#)

[store](#), with which it is marketing videos and movies over the internet.

Meanwhile, Google is attacking [Microsoft's](#) dominance in desktop environments by launching [Google Pack](#), a set of programmes which bundles software authored by Google itself with replacements for Microsoft's Internet Explorer and MediaPlayer programmes. In return, Microsoft [excluded Google](#) from the range of search engines eligible for easy installation into the version of Internet Explorer to be shipped with the upcoming Windows Vista operating system.

Bertelsmann's likely decision to join the Quaero consortium is an indication that the European search engine will become part of these ongoing global 'search engine wars', in which the engine with the best value to users will win. In order to become this engine, Quaero will have to cater to a global rather than to a continental audience, putting a question mark behind the notion of a 'European' search engine to oppose the dominance of Google and Yahoo.

Positions:

French President **Jacques Chirac** called Quaero one of his policy priorities for 2006, saying: "[Quaero will be] the first truly multimedia search engine, to take up the global challenge posed by the American giants Google and Yahoo. For that, we will launch a European search engine, Quaero. Today the new geography of knowledge and cultures is being drawn. Tomorrow, that which is not available online runs the risk of being invisible to the world."

Alex Waibel, director of the InterACT Centre at Germany's University of Karlsruhe, said: "Probably politically what's behind it is an uncomfortable feeling of having all access to knowledge and information filtered or provided through a search engine that (comes from) abroad. [...] Having said that, there's also a wish to make search, in a way, much richer, and in particular that involves multimedia and multilingual information."

Latest & next steps:

On 12 January 2006, consortium leader Thomson closed the early experimental version of the [Quaero website](#) to the general public and imposed a "news blackout" on the search engine "until a more official press event", which is, according to press reports, to take place before the end of January 2006.

Links

Press articles

- International Herald Tribune: [Europeans weigh plan on Google challenge](#) (17 January 2006)
- Financial Times: [Seek and you may not find](#) (16 January 2006)
- Bloomberg: [Bertelsmann Considers Participation in European Online Project](#) (16 January 2006)
- TechWorld: [Europe's 'Google killer' not ready to wield the knife](#) (13 January 2006)
- Webpronews.com: [Quaero Frightened Off The Web](#) (13 January 2006)
- New York Times: [European Tech Giants Craft Search Engine](#) (11 January 2006)
- Pandia Search Engine News: [The multimedia search engine Quaero, Europe's answer to Google](#) (3 January 2006)

Press Dossiers

- [John Battelle's Searchblog:](#)
- [Search Engine Watch:](#)
- [Internet Search Engine Database:](#)

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