

The success of an Internet search engine company is discussed.

Narrator: We live in the Information Age, and with the amount of knowledge in the world doubling every ten to fifteen years, how do you keep up? Well, you can use the Internet. But when you log on, how do you find the information you want? One way is to “ask Jeeves.” What is Ask Jeeves? It’s an Internet site that answers requests for information. And Jeeves, a helpful butler, is your guide for finding answers on the Ask Jeeves Web site. Each day, users ask Jeeves all kinds of questions: Who won World Cup soccer in 1992? How do computers work? Where can I buy a DVD player online?

Penny Finnie,
Vice President

of Ideas: Most people, when they get on the Internet, don’t really know where to go. And so they use search engines to find out what sites are out there in their areas of interest. Most search engines, you just go and you type in one word. So if you wanted to buy a car, you would type in *cars*. But what comes back is a long, long, long, long list of all of the car sites out there. With Jeeves, it’s different. Um, if you want to buy a car online, you go and you say, “Where can I buy a car online?” And Jeeves takes you to the sites that answer that question.

Marjorie Stout,

Content Editor: Ask Jeeves is different because it’s really a question-and-answer service. You come to Jeeves and you ask a question. The answers we . . . we return to our users are in the form of another question. And so you pick the question that Jeeves gives you that’s most similar to the one that you asked, and behind that question is your answer.

Narrator: The popularity of the site has grown rapidly. Just a few years ago, Ask Jeeves was answering about five hundred questions a month. Now that number has risen to more than 11 million a month, and it’s still growing. So, how did this Internet company become so successful?

In order for any business to succeed, it has to begin with a good concept. Ask Jeeves was born in Berkeley, California, in 1995. It was the brainchild of computer scientist David Warthen and venture capitalist Garrett Gruener. Their idea was to make Internet use a more human experience. To do this, they wanted a character on their Web site that users could interact with.

Penny Finnie: We wanted to make somebody that was approachable, that was trustworthy, that . . . uh . . . people would feel comfortable asking questions of. We . . . We thought about a librarian. We thought about a wizard. We thought about a professor. But, um, we realized that the butler sort of might be broader and could do more things for you.

Narrator: The result of their efforts was the helpful character of Jeeves the Butler. Jeeves is the namesake of another character made famous in a series of books written by P. G. Wodehouse beginning in the 1920s. For a Web site like Ask Jeeves to be successful, it also has to have good marketing. The character of Jeeves has inspired some unique marketing campaigns. John Perry is senior marketing writer at Ask Jeeves.

John Perry, Senior

Marketing Writer: We have what we call the “Butler Blast.” Um, that’s when we go to a city and hire a group of actors and dress them like Jeeves and send them spontaneously into . . . um . . . a place like Wall Street or Santa Monica along the beach or at the opening of a mall. And we have this group of . . . um . . . interesting, intriguing gentlemen helping people with their shopping, giving them directions, handing out . . . um . . . free things. Very often the “Butler Blast” will attract the attention . . . um . . . of the local news, so we get TV coverage, we’ll get noticed in newspapers and magazines.

. . . .

We've sent Jeeves to participate in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. We were very excited to have him become one of the giant balloons that floats down Broadway. The parade is the largest in America. Millions and millions of people watch it, not just in the U.S., but around the world.

• • •

We arranged with several of the major fruit companies to create fruit labels. Millions of pieces of fruit were sold with stickers on them that asked questions related to the fruits themselves. And then they included Jeeves's face and the Web address . . . um . . . where people could go and get the answer. We were able to track those . . . questions and those Web addresses on the site, and we found it was immensely popular.

Narrator: Clever marketing campaigns will bring people to the site, but to get them to come back again and again, you need to provide the information they're looking for. That's where the Ask Jeeves content editors come in.

Marjorie Stout: The most important issue for us as editors is to stay on top of trends and to make sure that we're really delivering what our users want.

Monte Luke,

Content Editor: First of all, first and foremost is researching the Web for the best answer – meaning the best Web site . . . um . . . to answer whatever the particular question is.

Narrator: Despite the fact that users aren't charged for coming to the site, Ask Jeeves has been financially successful. Let's talk with Steve Roop, director of sales.

Steve Roop,

Director of Sales: One of the things that's important to the success of any business is that business's ability to generate revenue. And Ask Jeeves makes . . . uh . . . revenue, or makes its money, in three different ways.

The first way is on the Ask Jeeves or Ask.com Web site. And the Web site basically charges advertisers money to advertise their products and services right on the Ask.com Web site. So that's way number one.

Number two: Companies pay for placement on the Ask Jeeves site. So if I am a health-services company and I want my . . . content to show up on Ask Jeeves, I can pay Ask Jeeves . . . uh . . . to show that content on the Web site.

A very good example of "pay for placement" is our relationship with Health Central. Health Central provides all sorts of health content to users. So if someone asks the question, "How do I know if my baby has an earache?" then it's going to take them to Health Central's content. So that's way number two.

And way number three is Ask Jeeves licenses its technology and implements its technology on major corporate Web sites, like Nike® – Nike® the footwear maker. So if you go to the Nike® Web site and say, "I want high-performance basketball shoes for under \$85," Ask Jeeves technology will actually go into their product catalog and find just the basketball shoes that match your criteria.

So the three ways in which we make our money is: number one, through advertising revenue; two, through paid placement; and three, by licensing our technology to large corporations.

Narrator: A good concept, a unique search engine, clever marketing ideas, revenue sources to support the organization. It seems Ask Jeeves has all the right answers to running a successful business. Jeeves may also have the answers you're looking for.