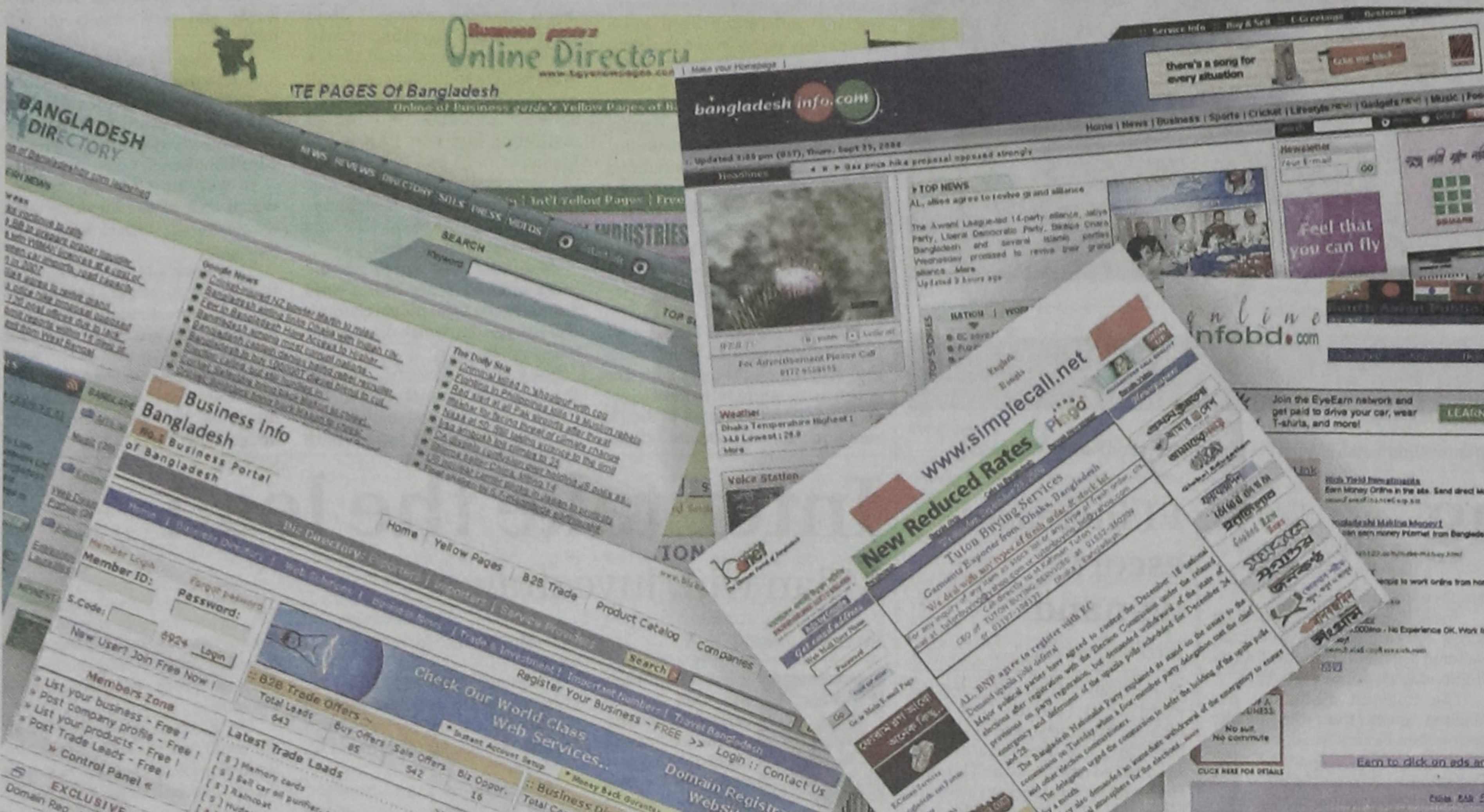


A web portal is a site that provides a single function via a web page or site. Web portals often function as a point of access to information on the World Wide Web. Portals present information from diverse sources in a unified way. Apart from the search engine standard, web portals offer other services such as e-mail, news, stock prices, infotainment, and other features. Portals provide a way for enterprises to provide a consistent look and feel with access control and procedures for multiple applications, which otherwise would have been different entities altogether. An example of a web portal is Yahoo!



TECH FOCUS

Wired to web portals



NAHID AKHTER

THE internet has come a long way from static web pages which only provided the information with no chance for the user to interact. Today web portals have changed the ever-curious user's experience.

Web portals have always been sought after ever since the emergence of web browsers. This is due to the fact that for many users, it is the starting point of their web browser. Portals are often the first page the web browser loads when users get connected to the web.

The reason they are so popular is that they offer a well-trained concierge who knows where to search and find; a well-assorted newspaper kiosk that keeps the latest market information about the surfer's personal stocks ready; free communication possibilities like email or discussion boards, and many other features to personalise the user's web-browsing experience.

A number of web developers have understood this need for Bangladesh too and have therefore attempted to create portals and information directories for the Bangladeshi surfer. A few have been listed below:

www.bangladesh.net
www.bangladeshinfo.com

www.bangla.com
www.bgyellowpages.com
www.bangladeshdir.com
www.bizbangladesh.com

These portals do precisely what the word 'portal' suggests, that is, they provide a portal a door or a window into Bangladesh. This could benefit both, a Bangladeshi and a foreigner who would like to know more about Bangladesh.

Bangladesh.net, which claims itself to be 'The Ultimate Portal of Bangladesh' provides users with a huge list of links to both English and Bangla newspapers and job sites of Bangladesh, in addition to running their own selected tibbits-of-the-day news.

It also categorises links according to the kind and interest of the user, like links for Kids, businessmen, stock market news, Entertainment, etc. Users are offered an option to sign up for a free email address and provide web-hosting facilities. The website provides an overwhelming amount of links and information, which is just too many to mention or list here.

However, it could do with some modifications and improvements. As soon as the page opens, it is as if the user is just bombarded with links and information. With animated advertisements distributed throughout the page, the user

tends to get into a dilemma as to what he should look at first.

The links could also be more organised in presentation. Instead of combining all the channels into a whole list, they could be separated categorically. The site could in fact do better with an opening page containing a few links and then broadening the user's choices from there.

With Bangladesh.net becoming the Ultimate Portal, Bangladeshinfo.com says that they are the Leading Portal of Bangladesh. Wonder where they get their surveys done from before labelling themselves as Ultimate or Leading.

Anyway, Bangladeshinfo.com has a much more organised interface with the day's news headlines scrolling across, and other information presented in a pleasant and organised fashion. Among all the portals, I found this one to have the most visually pleasing homepage.

But from the looks of the website, it seems as though it has concentrated mostly on serious issues like the news and business, and put a tiny little space for entertainment and sports, since these have not been highlighted much in the main page.

In contrast, Bangla.com's homepage seems to concen-

trate more on entertainment than serious business. The page has links to a variety of joke, games, matrimonial and other websites. But what sets it apart is its collection of YouTube videos related to Bangladesh and Bangladeshis. This is something that I haven't found in any other Bangladeshi portal.

Bangladeshdir.com is another right-on-the-face website that just starts off with too much information. Besides, they provide a search engine and reviews of websites relevant to Bangladesh. They provide a list of commonly searched for items through the Top Search link. All in all, it's a simple site with not too many options to choose from.

Both bizbangladesh.com and bgyellowpages.com are primarily business portals. Bizbangladesh.com allows the user to post their company profiles, list their products and post trade leads. They also allow companies to host their website through the portal. The site basically contains everything that a Bangladeshi businessman would need, including stock market news, a business directory and even a currency converter.

Bgyellowpages.com is a spin-off of the actual Bangla-

desh Yellow Pages book. Being computerised, it basically extends the services of the main book, by allowing you to quicken your yellow page or white page search by just a click of a button, rather than having to skim through the book and strain your eyes. The website is filled with advertisements from a variety of companies, but the advertisements change dynamically so fast that it's difficult to keep pace sometimes. Other links featured are banks, a Bangladesh tour, export-import policies, etc.

According to the analyst and consulting company Ovum--as described in their study "Enterprise Portals: New Strategies for Information Delivery", 2000--the ideal portal is based on eight functionality areas: search and navigation, information integration, personalisation, notification, task management and workflow, collaboration and groupware, integration of applications and business intelligence, and infrastructure functionality.

Although all portals listed above don't completely match these criteria, there is always room for growth and evolution.

TECH NEWS

In-flight Entertainment Systems Improving like never before...

MAHDIN MAHBOOB

TODAY, it will be hard to find anyone whom you can convince that in 1965 all the world's airlines voted to outlaw movies on airplanes as an unnecessary and costly frill! Presently, an economy passenger on Singapore Airlines' new Airbus A380 has access to 100 movies, 180 television shows, and 700 audio CDs. With Boeing and Airbus backlogged with orders for more than 7000 new airplanes, more and more passengers will have an opportunity to be wowed by an in-flight entertainment system soon.

A few years ago, such a selection would be available only to business or first class passengers, but the airlines have started moving formerly premium IFE (In-flight Entertainment Systems) services to the main cabin passengers, who are actually more likely to use them.

"In economy class, airlines want to provide a distraction and sense of space that allows you to focus and not be concerned that you might feel constricted in your seat," says Neil James, the director of corporate sales and marketing for Panasonic Avionics Corp., of California, USA, a major provider of in-flight entertainment systems.

Singapore Airlines, who flies the longest distance flights (10,371 statute miles) and the longest duration flights (over 18 and a half hours), considers

for longer flights, an IFE system can provide the sense of control for the passenger in an otherwise powerless situation. "Airlines tell you when you have to come to the airport, when you can board, when the aircraft is going to leave, how long it's going to be aloft, when you can get out of your seats, and that creates an

system, which is easier said than done.

Increased modularity requires modern IFE systems to rely more heavily on software than hardware. For example, when the Boeing 777 was developed, the avionics package required 2.6 million lines of code, and the IFE system had only 250,000 lines.



Airlines have started expanding in-flight entertainment systems from first-class cabins, like this one aboard Emirates, to include those passengers packed more tightly in the rear of the plane.

enormous amount of stress for passengers," he adds.

Studies indicate that better-designed IFE systems provide passengers with a greater perception of control. This means that airlines have to create systems that appeal to everyone, from those who like to socialize with their fellow passengers to those who would rather be left alone with their IFE system for the entire trip. But developing an IFE system is not as simple as ringing up an IFE supplier and saying, "I'll take 20 of your latest IFE

Compare that with the Boeing 787, which has more than 6.5 million lines of code in the avionics package, and almost as many in its IFE system, according to Panasonic.

Software is generally easier to change than hardware, but it also has a second advantage: it's weightless. IFE system manufacturers and seat suppliers have always looked for ways to reduce the weight, but there is more urgency with today's increasing fuel prices.

In the near future, in-flight Internet connectivity may finally be arriving. In USA, American Airlines launched Wi-Fi service for flights on its Boeing 767-200 aircraft between New York and Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Miami. Five other U.S. airlines—Jet Blue, Alaska, Delta, Continental, and Southwest have plans to roll out access in six months to a year. Air France, Lufthansa, and Qantas are looking to follow suit shortly.

Another thing to watch for is more passenger/IFE system personalisation. Passengers may find that when they get to their seats, the system greets them by name, notes their destination, and asks if they need a restaurant recommendation or reservation. It may also let them know that an acquaintance from LinkedIn or Facebook is also on the flight or in the destination city!

Information & Image Source: IEEE and other Websites



Virgin America's Red system is based on Panasonic's latest IFE technology and is available on flights to seven major destinations.

IFE systems to be psychological necessities for their passengers.

"For many carriers, IFE systems are a nice add-on or a nice frill; they're absolutely essential for us," says James Boyd, a spokesperson for Singapore Airlines. Especially

systems sitting on the shelf over there, and could you please deliver them by next Tuesday?"

In reality, it is anything but that! The airlines, seating company and the IFE provider all have to work together to produce a perfectly working



LET'S NOTE

Water is pored onto the keyboard of Japan's electronics giant Matsushita Electric Industrial new lightweight and water resistant notebook computer called "Let's note F8", in Tokyo on September 25. The new notebook PC, designed with an integrated handle for portability is equipped with Intel's Core2Duo processor on its CPU and a 14-inch LCD display, combined with long battery life and which will go on sale next month.

PHOTO:AFP

TECH NEWS

Google phone unveiled

APP, New York

INTERNET search leader Google took a giant leap into the mobile phone market on Tuesday, unveiling a handset developed with telecom carrier T-Mobile to compete with Apple's hot-selling iPhone.

The T-Mobile G1, the first mobile device powered by Google's open-source Android software, will be available in stores in the United States on October 22 and will cost 179 dollars.

Cole Brodman, T-Mobile chief technology and innovation officer, called the G1, built by the Taiwanese firm HTC, a "game-changing" device which will "power a new mobile Internet of the future."

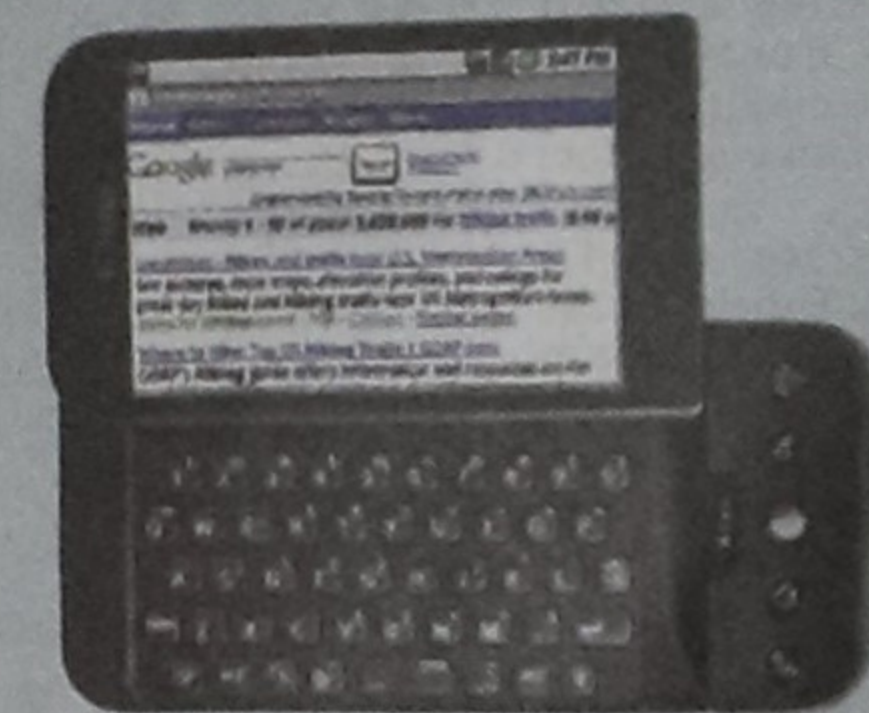
The G1, which is a bit thicker but slightly narrower than an iPhone, will go on sale in Britain in early November and in other European countries served by T-Mobile, a subsidiary of Germany's Deutsche Telekom AG, in early 2009.

The G1 offers many of the features of the iPhone and Research In Motion's popular BlackBerry including a touch screen similar to that of the iPhone, a trackball for navigation, high-speed Internet browsing, Wi-Fi, e-mail, instant messaging and SMS texting.

It has a 3.0-megapixel camera with photo-sharing capability and a slide-out QWERTY keyboard, a feature lacking on the iPhone.

Internet retail giant Amazon.com announced shortly before the G1 release, in a direct challenge to Apple's iTunes, that the entire catalog of the Amazon MP3 music store would be available on the new phone.

The new phone has, unsurprisingly, been closely integrated with Google applications such as Google Maps and G-Mail



and can display videos from YouTube, the video-sharing site purchased by Google in 2006.

"Google's strategy is all about broad reach for their services," said Charles Golvin, an analyst at Forrester Research. "It's just the first step in a long strategic voyage for Google."

Carolina Milanesi, research director at

Gartner Consulting, agreed. "Google is moving into the mobile devices market not to become yet another mobile phone manufacturer but to enable a large addressable market for its services and applications," she said.

"The G1 is the first of a series of devices that will come to market and will be optimized to offer consumers a superior experience when using Google services and applications."

Google hopes the open-source Android software powering the G1 will eventually become the dominant operating system for mobile phones and make handsets compatible with the networks of multiple carriers.

"A developer will be able to use it as a platform," said Andy Rubin, senior director of mobile platforms for Google. "A developer will be able to modify the platform and make it better."

"It's very exciting for me as a computer geek to have a phone that I can play with and modify," said Google co-founder Sergey Brin, who made a surprise appearance at the launch event.

The phone, Google's first foray into the highly competitive mobile phone market, also will allow users to access the Android Market, where they can download software applications from developers around the world.