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How do you envision the future of the company?

RVP: We will launch free applications, grow awareness of this technology, learn from these launches and from discussions like this one, identify the best commercial applications, and go for them.

ATG: Given your work with Vivisimo and your experience in Web search and discovery systems, we would be remiss if we didn’t ask you how you see search and discovery evolving. What can we expect in the near term? How about in the long term?

RVP: I’ll let companies in the space talk about what’s next. I can talk about what’s needed. Users approach information retrieval systems with a variety of questions they want answers to. They then need to fit their need to the narrow channel of expressing a search query and getting back a list of results, with some navigation extras, perhaps. To address their need, users then need to do lots of extra manual and intellectual work.

Here’s an example: Users often want to know what are the emerging topics in an area, i.e., what are emerging (or submerging) trends. You can do a query, but then you have to figure out yourself what the implicit trends are. Andre Lessa and I worked on that at Vivisimo, supported by a National Science Foundation grant, “Embedding Trend Discovery Within Search Engines,” and got very promising results. As a user, I’d like search engines to offer to solve a variety of common information retrieval and analysis needs, not just search.

How about in the long term?

ATG: That sounds like a goal that we in libraries are trying to address. Instead of providing search results only, how do we provide possible meaningful solutions/pathways?

RVP Identify the common and valuable questions that users want answers to, and design algorithms and heuristics that will do it; it’s a research endeavor. A further challenge is that you don’t want yet another entry page that is separate from the search page. For our trend discovery work at Vivisimo, we added a separate Emerge button placed next to the Search button. A user typed a query and then pressed either Search or Emerge. Of course, you can’t have too many such buttons, but you can have a few more. IBM now owns the prototype we developed. We’d love for them to bring it to market.

ATG: Everyone needs a little down time. What leisure activities do you enjoy? If we were to take a quick peek, what books would we see downloaded on to your tablet or smartphone?

RVP: I don’t have a tablet or a smartphone, because I don’t spend insufficient time in front of computer screens. For leisure, I prefer people contact involving friends, family, and travel, or books that help me see the world in ways that I’m not seeing now.

ATG: Raul, Thank you so much for a thoughtful interview! We really appreciate it.

RVP: You’re very welcome.