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## Start a Search Engine Company

This duo stands apart from the big guys with its people search technology.

By Amanda C. Kooser | Entrepreneur Magazine - October 2008

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Some entrepreneurs may look at an online search market dominated by Google and Yahoo and then look elsewhere on the internet for a startup idea. But other entrepreneurs see opportunity. [Spock.com](#) co-founders Jaideep Singh, 40, and Jay Bhatti, 35, are taking on search by intentionally not taking on Google. Their Redwood City, California, startup focuses solely on people search and capturing a share of what eMarketer estimates is an \$11 billion market for search advertising in 2008. "The opportunity to develop a compelling experience is there if you focus on the right verticals and create a differentiated enough experience from Google," says Bhatti.

The first hurdle a search startup needs to clear is finding the right niche. The general search market may be cornered by some big players, but there's still room for innovative ideas. "We're not trying to build a fad," says Bhatti. "We're trying to build a real technology with a business model behind it. This has the potential to change the way users look for content on the web." He points to search engines [Kayak.com](#) (travel search) and [TheFind.com](#) (product search) as examples of other search businesses finding success in specific niches.

Despite being located near Silicon Valley and its savvy Web 2.0 techies, Bhatti never loses sight of Spock.com's target customers. "You have to make sure you build it for the right audience--and that's the mass consumer audience--and not for the tech crowd," he says. That effort shows in Spock.com's simple user interface and cleanly laid out search results. New search entrepreneurs will have to spend a considerable amount of time and effort on the framework of their search technology, at the same time figuring out the best way to present it to potential users.

Content Continues Below

Spock.com has invested a lot more of its \$7 million in round A funding into engineers, search technology and user interface than it has into marketing. Currently working on round B funding, the company hopes to scale the business up and eventually crack the top five of search engines. "One of the biggest things that you have to understand as an entrepreneur is that anything is possible," says Bhatti. "Market conditions can change very

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quickly, [as can] market leaders." That need for nimbleness in the search market is a good sign for small startups in this space.

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