Stanford eCorner

The Future of Box Computing

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Video URL: http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2283/The-Future-of-Box-Computing

Described as not just a function of search, but a "vision for our future", the CEO of Baidu, Robin Li, talks about the continuing emergence of the "magic" search box as the primary tool for browserless, consolidated information gathering. He also discusses at length how search terms have evolved - no longer just subject queries, but users hunting for everything from weather and movie time information, arithmetic solutions, and even dating help. From his stance, the empty box awaiting information is the simplest, easiest-to-learn computing platform, operating independently of location, operating system, or application.

Transcript

Going forward, we think the search box will become something different. We call it Box Computing. It's our vision for the future of computing. Why? This is a search box that every Chinese is familiar with, but when you look at people's needs, people are typing all kinds of queries in this box. For example... "A great MP3", "Where can I find a girlfriend in Beijing?" "How do I fix my hacked PC?" "What time is it?" "What kind of college is a good match for a frail, introverted guy like myself?" So you can tell that people have very high expectations about Baidu or about a search engine. They type in all kinds of things, all kinds of needs. Originally, we thought it's information needs only; we just need to find a web page that contains the query word, but it's actually not. Average consumers have very, very high expectations about search engines. Then I look at all the other non-search applications on the Internet.

A Yahoo! Finance page, you see a search box or a box on the very prominent position. Facebook, there are boxes. Twitter, a search box is in the most prominent position. And Amazon. Everything is about search, but every search box is kind of different. The function is different. For Amazon, you are in a shopping mall, and for Twitter there's a box that you can type up to 140 characters to publish your status. There are all kinds of different boxes or the purpose for those boxes are different. Then I started to think, "Is there any way that we can save the consumers' effort and integrate everything, every function, every application, every information needs that a user wishes into one box?" This is also the classification of user's needs in our search box. It could be information-oriented, it could be a dialogue, it could be some kind of tools, a request function or dictionary or computing request.

If we integrate all these kinds of requests or this kind of consumer needs into one box, that should be a magic box. That is called Box Computing. So when a request is entered into this box, we do all kinds of semantic analysis, behavioral analysis, intelligent interaction with the user than massive computing and figure out what the user really wants. Once that's clear, we will send it to the necessary application, be it a search engine or anti-virus software, or a stock search, or shopping, or FriendFinder - anything that can be plugged into this kind of platform. So now we have implemented a number of the applications. If you ask what is today's lunar date, we will come up with a calendar of it. So, lunar dates. If you're looking for a piece of software by Duhai --it's an instant messenger software we delivered-- we will show that to you. If you're looking for a beautiful girl, this is one that not only shows you the pictures but it's got a Flash application that you can browse through as

well. It also automatically rotate.

Train schedule, you will be prompted by the newer boxes from where to where. We understand this kind of user intents. Then, there's a lot of computation going on to figure out what's the right answer. We had a lot of submissions from the third-party application. This is the movie showing schedule from a third party. This is the stock quotes. This is an anti-virus software. It doesn't need to show you the search result. It just asks you, "Do you want to run the anti-virus software?" So we group all kinds of information into one box. You can find that Box Computing efficiently connects enormous user request with the application providers.

So in the future, when you power up a terminal, a laptop, a PC, a netbook, or a cellphone, immediately, instantly, you see a box. You don't wait two minutes for Windows to put up. You don't need to launch a browser and type in a URL address. You will only see this and immediately see this. Whatever you want to do; check your email, publish tweets, go shopping or whatever, it can be solved by this one box. So everyone you know, it takes time to learn how to use Windows. It takes time to learn how to use Mac. But nobody needs to teach you how to use the search. It's so easy. It's so instant.

That's why I think the future should be like this.