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Sphere: Bloggers Go Mainstream

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The goal of this new blog-search technology, CEO Tony Conrad said during its launch demo this week, is to make the blogosphere "a little less geek oriented." The service, which is free, allows users to search across both blog and news pages to find information relevant to what they're reading on one of Sphere's partner sites—expanding the blogosphere "conversation," says Conrad, to the readers of mainstream media. (As of this week, Sphere has signed deals with MarketWatch, Time.com, and About.com, as well as some popular tech blogs, including TechCrunch and GigaOM.)

The service works like this: When readers on a member site finish an article about, say, the Democrats taking control of Congress, they'll come across a small "Sphere It" button at the bottom of the page. When they click it, Sphere launches a search that uses the words in the story they just read to find contextually similar articles in the blogosphere. Within a few seconds of clicking on the Sphere button at the bottom of a Time.com story on the subject, for example, a box appears onscreen with links to the commentary of a range of political bloggers' insights—from Joshua Micah Marshall's Talking Points Memo to Glenn Reynolds' Instapundit. This bridge between media sites and the blogosphere may not make bloggers any less geeky, of course, but it could provide a critical link between two fast-growing—but still separate—worlds on the Web.

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