



Interview with Lorenzo Thione. Projecting "Bing", a Microsoft Alternative to Google to Google

Maria Caspani (November 24, 2009)



Interview with Lorenzo Thione, aka Mr Bing, the man in charge of Microsoft's new search engine that is trying to take over Google.



His last name is Thione (not a very Italian one) and once you've heard him talk it's even harder to believe he was born in Mariano Comense, a small village near Lake Como, Italy. I ended up interviewing him in English because he seems to have forgotten how to speak Italian. It's Lorenzo Thione we're talking about, aka Mr Bing, the man in charge of [Microsoft](#) [2]'s new search engine that is trying to take over [Google](#) [3]. Lorenzo is 30 years old and has spent the last seven in the Us, after dropping out of college in Milan to take advantage of a scholarship he earned at Austin's Texas University.

Raised in Milan, at 23 Thione started Powerset, an IT company based in San Francisco that sold to Microsoft in the summer of 2008 for about 100 million dollars.

Lorenzo, do you think leaving Italy was the only thing you could do to realize your projects?

Yes, definitely. The United States, and California in particular, is the place to be if you wanna bring something ambitious to life. Here you can catch opportunities and gain visibility, other than money to finance your project.

What makes you still feel Italian?

My whole family lives in Italy, and most of my friends from college as well. I try to go back at least twice a year, whenever I get the chance. And I'm not ruling out the possibility of moving my business to Europe, or even to my home country. But, at the moment, I still picture my future here.

What was Powerset and how did it become Bing?

First of all, Powerset is not [Bing](#) [4]. Powerset is the technology I started to develop together with two of my business partners. It was created to index-link documents according to their semantic meaning and not just according to the frequency of the words, the method used by Google and Yahoo. Bing was a much bigger project on which the people at Microsoft were already working on. Our idea intrigued them and that's why they bought Powerset: we were the perfect means to start a whole new search engine.

Why is Bing supposed to be better than Google?

I'd say the capacity to comprehend, thanks to a mechanism that is similar to the human brain, the meaning of the sentences contained in the document one wants to look up. Bing catalogues its results according to their semantic relevance and to their meaning, not just according to the frequency of words in a document.

Did you expect such an enthusiastic response from Microsoft?

Well, our goal was to create something able to compete with Google, Microsoft and Yahoo. In 2005 this was considered a pretty ambitious idea. The media started referring to us as the little David who's trying to defeat Goliath. Our investors, on the contrary, decided to finance our project, probably because they smelled something. There was a battle going on in the Silicon Valley, a conflict between the big names in the technology industry and more and more companies were becoming interested in developing an idea like ours.

Now that you're the boss, is there something that is still missing?

I quite miss the excitement and the adrenaline we were experimenting during our first years of work.



We had to find investors and convince them to put their money into our project, and at the same time we were working all night to develop the program, basically getting no sleep, relying on caffeine and a very strong sense of motivation. But getting to work for Microsoft is definitely been a good reward.

Related Links: <http://www.powerset.com> [5]

<http://www.lorenzothione.com> [6]

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