

# Alleged Hacker Now Works for Microsoft

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Alleged Hacker Now Works for Microsoft

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By ALLISON LINN

SEATTLE (AP) – A man accused of hacking into search engine company AltaVista's computer systems about two years ago is now employed by Microsoft Corp., reportedly working on search technology.

Laurent Chavet, 29, was arrested by FBI agents a week ago in Redmond, Wash., acting on a warrant issued in San Francisco.

Federal prosecutors allege that Chavet hacked into AltaVista's computer system to obtain software blueprints called source code and recklessly caused damage to AltaVista's computers.

Microsoft spokeswoman Tami Begasse said Friday that Chavet, who lives in suburban Kirkland, is an employee of Microsoft. She declined further comment on the nature of Chavet's employment or when he started at the company, citing Microsoft policy on not discussing personnel matters.

Generally speaking, Begasse said: "We're confident in our policies and procedures we have in place to protect our code and to ensure that employees do not bring third party code into the work place."

A woman who answered the phone at Chavet's house Friday said he would have no comment.

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, citing anonymous sources, reported that Chavet had been working on Microsoft's MSN Search effort.

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In a research paper on search technology published in IBM Systems Journal, Chavet is listed as a search expert who works at Microsoft and was previously with AltaVista.

In 2003, AltaVista, based in Sunnyvale, Calif., was acquired by search company Overture Services, Inc., which in turn was acquired by Yahoo Inc. (YHOO) later that year. Microsoft's MSN Web site currently uses both Overture's and Yahoo's search technology.

But the Redmond company has begun an aggressive effort to develop its own search technology as it tries to compete with search engine leaders Google Inc. and Yahoo. Microsoft, which has acknowledged it lags in search, hopes to play catch-up with a broad-based search tool that allows users to also scour through e-mails, documents and even big databases.

Court documents say Chavet worked at AltaVista from approximately June 1999 to February 2002. Beginning in late March 2002, the U.S. attorney's office alleges in court documents, Chavet began accessing AltaVista's computers without permission, causing about \$5,000 in damage over a one-year period.

A spokeswoman for Overture declined to comment on Chavet's case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Chris Sonderby, who is in charge of the California unit that is prosecuting the case, told The Associated Press that the allegations against Chavet "do not pertain to Microsoft."

Chavet was released on a \$10,000 bond and is expected to make a court appearance July 20 in San Francisco. Both charges carry a maximum penalty of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.