

Tales from the Terminal Room

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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTR) is a monthly newsletter, with the exception of July and August which are published as a single issue. TFTR includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; updates to the RBA Web site Business Sources and other useful resources; dealing with technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications.

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Search Strategies for the Internet 5th edition

Author: Karen Blakeman

Publisher: RBA Information Services,
February 2004
200 pages

<http://www.rba.co.uk/publications/search.htm>

ISBN 1 904314 05 8 includes ring binder and electronic access £35/€55

ISBN 1 904314 06 6 loose leaf contents, binder **not** included but electronic access is included £22/€35

The fifth edition of Search Strategies for the Internet is now available both in hardcopy and electronically.

"Search Strategies" is divided into five sections: essential search techniques; search tool profiles; strategies for locating specific types of information; a Comparison Table and search engine Fact Sheets; and appendices on URL structures, ISO country codes and toolbars.

As with earlier editions, the full publication and updates are available on the RBA Web site. The Summary Sheets and Comparison Table are freely available but the detailed descriptions and strategies are restricted to purchasers of the hard copy or subscribers to the electronic version.

ChangeDetect - Update

<http://www.changedetect.com/>

In the March 2004 issue of Tales from the Terminal Room I commented that could not really see why I would want to use ChangeDetect in preference to other page monitors. Why pay for a Web based service when there are plenty of free ones around? And if one wanted more sophisticated features than are offered by the freebies there are several good, reasonably priced programs.

Several readers and ChangeDetect themselves have pointed out that many people are working for companies who do not allow users to run such programs on their PCs. In that type of situation, a web based service such as ChangeDetect is the solution.

A valid point and I must confess that it is an objection I have often encountered when discussing page monitors with people. My brain was definitely **not** in gear when I wrote that part of the review☺

ChangeDetect has also sent me additional information on their Enterprise service, which I missed the first time I looked at their site. This offers organisations a hosted solution for dedicated applications, and a licensed server option for implementing the solution behind a firewall on a corporate network to anywhere from 500 to 50,000 seats. More information is available at <http://www.changedetect.com/changedetect/enterprise/index.asp>

Information Resources

Directories

Russia: All 89 Regions Trade & Investment Guide. The Untapped Regional Markets of Russia

Published: CTEC Publishing LLC, 2004
1200 pages

ISBN: 0 9743478 1 7

Price: English book + CD £269, €415
English and Russian version + CD £305, €470

<http://www.dataresources.co.uk/>

Russia: All 89 Regions Trade & Investment Guide is a hefty and impressive tome bringing together economic data for all the regions of Russia. It is published separately in English and Russian and is accompanied by a fully searchable CD-ROM.

If you have been encouraged by Trade and Industry secretary Patricia Hewitt's exhortation to "join the Russian revolution" (<http://www.wired-gov.net/>) this book is an essential resource.

Information about each region includes:

- what they are
- what they produce
- what they can sell
- what they seek to buy
- what investment opportunities they offer

There is also region specific information on

- markets
- sources of supply
- trade opportunities
- operating conditions
- investment projects
- legal and tax environments
- current economic conditions
- risks

Information is collected directly from local administrations and governments, and reviewed and verified through government agencies.

Country Specific Information

EU Enlargement

On 1 May 2004, ten new countries join the EU: Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The Society of Maritime Industries has published a guide to importing from and exporting to these countries at <http://www.maritimeindustries.org/>. Look under their News section. As well as providing information on the main issues there are links to key sites such as Customs & Excise.

KPMG's EU accession web site (<http://www.kpmgtax.com/go/euaccession/>) gives very basic information on VAT, corporation tax and customs. The meatier stuff such as the EU Enlargement Tax News is available only to KPMG clients and tax professionals. Irritatingly, you cannot get to even the basic information unless you use Internet Explorer 5 or above.

As one would expect, the EU web site itself has extensive information on enlargement at <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/enlargement.htm>.

A full list of EU countries and candidate countries can be found at http://europa.eu.int/abc/governments/index_en.htm

Market Research

Snapshots Launches New Global Panorama Series

<http://www.snapdata.com/>

Snapshots' Global Panorama Series is a collection of reports that contain aggregated figures from the single country reports published within the Snapshots Series.

There are two types of reports: the Overview and the Panorama, and the reports are available for Global or Regional coverage. The Overview can be segmented by country or continent. The Panorama includes additional charts giving market shares for the top countries within each region.

The first Global Panorama Series will include 25 industries. Coverage will be expanded in response to client demand for report titles.

There are three payment options available:

- Pay-as-you-go
- Modular Options by Region, Country or Industry
- Pre-Paid Units

Government

DirectGov launched

The UK Government's new online service DirectGov (<http://www.direct.gov.uk/>) has been launched, replacing UK Online. According to the Cabinet press release the new service has been "designed around the needs of the user" and "will feature information from across many Government sectors and sources, thus eliminating the need for multiple site searches." I would have thought that the former goes without saying, and the latter is certainly not new as it was a feature of both its predecessors (UK Online and Open.gov).

The press release continues: "Users will be able to find out about such topics as 'having a baby' or 'looking for a job'". I must confess that I groaned and wondered if I would be able to find anything as simple as a local council. I was pleasantly surprised to find that DirectGov was a definite improvement on UK Online. Yes, there were the life event/experience driven sections on the

home page but slap bang in the middle - Joy, oh Joy - was a Directories and Reference Section including an A-Z of central government and A-Z of local councils.

But where was the search box? Certainly not on the home page. I found it accidentally by clicking on Quick Find scrolling down to the bottom of the page. I later realised that the top "frame" of the home page had been truncated in my default browser (Mozilla) and the site logo and search box had been "chopped off".

So as far as content is concerned DirectGov looks promising, but perhaps they should test the site in a few more browsers?

Keeping up to date

BAD News <http://www.cobwebinfo.com/>

This intriguingly named newsletter (BAD stands for **B**usiness **AD**viser) was mentioned in TFFTTR a couple of years ago as part of Cobweb Information's services. It merits a mention on its own, though, and has now been added to the RBA list of Further Reading and Keeping up to date (<http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/uptodate.htm>) BAD News is a free weekly bulletin for business advisers with summaries and links to topical news stories of relevance to small businesses. It often picks up news on sites that are missed by other current awareness services, for example the first two resources mentioned above on EU enlargement.

Woody's Watch

<http://woodyswatch.com/>

A series of free newsletters that offer "Advice, tips and news from author, guru, curmudgeon, and Microsoft software victim Woody Leonhard, and friends". Not so much news and tips on information, but invaluable help on making the software behave itself when you are trying to locate, retrieve and manage the information.

There are six newsletters altogether including Woody's Office Watch (WOW), Woody's Office Watch for Mere Mortals (WOW-MM) and Woody's Email Essentials (WEE). If nothing else, you'll be reassured that you are not going mad and it is not just you who is having problems with Service Pack 3 for Office XP!

Searching Questions

Largest cities and demographics

Question

I have been asked to find information about the largest 10 cities along or near China's coastline: the names of the cities, population and average household income. The client does not want to pay for the information.

Answer

Whenever I see the phrase "largest cities" I head straight for The World Gazetteer at <http://www.world-gazetteer.com/>. This provides information about the current population of countries, their administrative divisions, cities and towns. For China it gives the top 20 cities and there is a map so you can work out which of those cities are along or near the coastline.

For the demographic and income related data, the most obvious place to start is the official Chinese government statistics office. Official Statistics on the Web at <http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/stats/offstats/OFFSTATSmain.htm> and my own pages at <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/stats.htm> list official and other statistics sources by country.

The National Bureau of Statistics of China at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/> is the official source but is a difficult site to navigate and search.

China Statistical Data at <http://www.china.org.cn/e-company/> repackages the NBS data and has easy to find up to date information on "Basic Conditions of Urban Households by 36 cities". This includes average number of persons per household, per capita monthly disposable income, monthly living expenditure.

These things are sent to try us!

You don't have IE 5.5 or above...

... and we're not going to let you into our web site. So yah boo sucks to you!

OK, the site in question didn't quite put it like that when I attempted to view their home page in Mozilla, but it is the sort of attitude that is still far too common amongst web designers. There really is no excuse for it. In most cases there is nothing special about the pages, but when one cons the page into loading in Opera by telling Opera to report itself as IE6 the reason for adopting this strategy becomes clear. The layout goes squiffy, the text overlaps and the pretty events calendar doesn't work. The designers could not be bothered to design and test for browsers other than Internet Explorer.

I have had four "incidents" this month with my main browser Mozilla. The first was the KPMG EU Accession site which told me that I needed "An Internet Explorer 5.0 or higher web browser".

The second was less serious. The DirectGov site let me in with Mozilla but the top navigation area was truncated. The site logo was chopped in half horizontally and the search box disappeared altogether.

The third was the Thumbshots Ranking Tool (see Gizmo of the month below). No problem getting in but the graphic that is an essential part of the tool did not display.

The fourth involved the Royal Bank of Scotland's Internet Banking service. Rather than waste your time, and theirs, in signing up to a service that you cannot access they have a neat little gizmo that "tests" your machine. Mine failed!

"Sorry. It appears that this computer does not have the right configuration for Digital Banking. Please see our minimum requirements for more details"

I could sense that my little laptop was beginning to feel inadequate - I certainly was - so I checked the requirements:

"An account with The Royal Bank of Scotland plc" - got that.

"Internet Connected Computer" - got that

"PC with Microsoft® Windows 95/98/ME/NT4/2000 or XP" - got XP

"Internet Browser Internet Explorer 4.01 and up, Netscape Navigator 4.08 and up, Mozilla 1.5 and up" - got Mozilla 1.6b

A few emails to and from RBS plus a little local investigation revealed that the "test" could not get past my firewall so it defaulted to failure. I am pleased to report that I am now online with no problems - apart from wishing that my bank balance had a few more zeroes on the end of it with the decimal point moved 2 or 3 places to the right.

Gizmo of the Month

Thumbshots Ranking Tool

<http://ranking.thumbshots.com/>

The Thumbshots Ranking Tool is primarily intended as a means of comparing how a site is ranked by different search engines for specific search terms, but can also be used to compare page overlap of search tools.

It fetches the top 100 results for a query from AlltheWeb, AltaVista, Google, MSN, Teoma, Wisenut or Yahoo. You can compare the same search strategy on two search engines, or two different strategies on the same engine. You can also enter a specific web site to see if and where the site appears in the top 100 for a particular search.

Pages are represented by small blue circles and the circles are connected by a line if the page appears in both engines. If you have chosen to highlight a specific site, that appears as a red or pink circle.

It is an interesting tool to play with and shows how little overlap there is in the first 100 results of the major search tools. I find it a quick and useful way of demonstrating the importance of using more than one search tool on training courses.

One minor problem with the service: the pretty diagram showing the circles and overlap does not display in Mozilla ☹

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Market Research on the Web.

Organiser: Manchester Business School

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: MBS, Manchester

Date: Wednesday, 26th May 2004

Course fee: GBP 215 + VAT - BIS/BINN members. Others GBP 250 + VAT.

URL:

<http://www.mbs.ac.uk/corporate/bis/training.htm>

This one day workshop offers practical guidance on how to find and evaluate Web based statistical, market research and industry information. Both free and fee based services are covered. Throughout the day, there will be practical sessions during which delegates can work through the guided exercises or try out their own research.

Meeting: I'm an Information Professional - get me out of here!

Organiser: UKOLUG

Speakers: Karen Blakeman, Phil Bradley, Clare Cowling

Venue: CILIP, London

Date: Tuesday, 8th June 2004

Course fee: GBP 135 + VAT for UKOLUG members. Others GBP 160 + VAT.

URL: <http://www.ukolug.org.uk/>

This meeting will focus on three key areas that are main contributors to information overload: email management, personal e-document management, and strategies for effective web information management and monitoring.

Workshop: Business Information on the Internet: Free vs. Fee

Organiser: TFPL

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: TFPL, London

Date: Wednesday, 23rd June 2004

Course fee: GBP 295 + VAT (Total GBP346.63)

URL: <http://www.tfpl.com/>

This one day course compares what is available for free with pay-as-you-go and subscription services and will examine quality of content, coverage, functionality and price. There will be practical sessions throughout the day and delegates will receive comprehensive notes

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