

Tales from the Terminal Room

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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is a monthly newsletter, with the exception of July and August which are published as a single issue. TFTTR includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; search tools; resources dealing with technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications.

In this issue:

- Search Engine News
 - Ask Jeeves launches Desktop Search
 - MSN launches Desktop Search
 - Copernic Desktop adds support for Firefox
 - Google Suggests
 - Accona - new kid on the block
 - Information Resources
 - NexisLexis a la carte
 - EBRD Directory of business information sources on central and eastern Europe and the CIS
 - Statistics Insight
 - Marketing Surveys Index
 - CEE MarketWatch
 - Cost of 12 Days of Christmas rises for True Love
 - These things are sent to try us
 - Making Windows XP Search do what it says on the tin - almost
-

Search Engine News

Ask Jeeves launches Desktop Search

<http://sp.ask.com/docs/desktop/>

Ask Jeeves has joined Google and Microsoft (see below) in launching a beta version of a desktop search utility. "Never misplace another important document or email message again!" says the web site. "Just enter a keyword or phrase, and Ask Jeeves Desktop Search will quickly retrieve any file or email on your hard drive".

Any file or email? Surely some mistake. Yet another search tool assumes that everyone is using Microsoft Office, Outlook and Internet Explorer – those are the only file formats it supports. That aside, it is far better than Google's offering but that is not difficult (See Tales from the Terminal Room, November 2004).

When you install it you have two options. You can go for Quick Start, which indexes the desktop, My Documents and email, or custom which has individual options for email, "all files on your computer" and Fast index. Fast index will index all of your files in one go but does warn you that it may affect your PC's performance while it does. The alternative is a "gradual" index which works at it little by little and when you are not using your PC. It does take a while, though, for it to realise when activity has increased and there is no quick and easy way of forcing it to cease and desist apart from shutting it down altogether. A Copernic type pause option or snooze button à la MSN Desktop needs to be added.

Other files that it currently supports include images, MP3 music, video files. It also searches titles and metadata from Adobe PDF files but not the text. It does not index inside ZIP archive, Outlook attachments, contacts and one odd omission is that it does not index the content of Excel files. This a beta release, though, so I expect that additional functionality will be added later.

Once installed a search box is added to the top of various Windows dialog boxes such as the open or save file options. I found this irritating at first but I have started to find it useful when trying to track down files that have gone AWOL, especially when I want to email them as attachments. The search results include a preview panel so that you can get an idea of the what the document

contains without having to open the file within its application.

Not quite on a par with MSN's desktop search and way below Copernic, but getting there.

Requirements:

Windows 2000, Windows XP
P3 400MHz and 128 MB RAM minimum
(1 GHz and 256 MB RAM recommended)
Supported Applications Microsoft Office,
Outlook 2000, XP and 2003.

MSN launches Desktop Search

<http://beta.search.msn.com/>

The long awaited MSN Desktop Search is part of the MSN Toolbar Suite Beta and installs as a browser toolbar and optionally in the Windows taskbar. MSN Desktop indexes Office documents, Outlook and Outlook Express email, as well as photos, music and email attachments. You can specify exactly what you want it to index: email and My Documents, email and all of your hard disc, or individual directories. It spots when you are active on your PC and suspends indexing quite quickly, but there is also a "snooze" button you can use to stop it immediately.

Results can be sorted by title, author, type, size, date or folder.

For me, MSN's desktop search is much better in terms of results, indexing and privacy than Google's and the results better than Ask Jeeves. Copernic is still in front, though, because of its support for Mozilla, Firefox and Netscape and you can tell it to treat specific types of files as text and index them accordingly.

Requirements:

Microsoft Windows XP operating system or Windows 2000 SP4 or above
Minimum 128MB of RAM (256MB recommended) 500MB of hard disk space recommended.
Microsoft Outlook 2000+ or Microsoft Outlook Express 6.0+
Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.01 or later must be installed, though it does not need to be your default browser
Pentium 233MHz processor or better (500MHz recommended)

Copernic Desktop adds support for Firefox

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

Support for Mozilla, Firefox and Netscape browsers has been added to the latest version of Copernic's Desktop Search. This enables Copernic to search their bookmarks and history. I have also just discovered that in the Advanced Options you can specify additional files to be searched as text files. This means that if you use an email program other than Outlook, and the messages are stored as text, you can add the file extension to the list. Unfortunately, Thunderbird - my email program - stores messages in files without any extension :-(. Nevertheless, for me, Copernic is still streets ahead of the competition.

Google Suggests

Google has introduced Google Suggests on its Google Labs page (<http://labs.google.com/>). Simply start typing in your search and Google comes up with a list of suggestions for completing your strategy together with the number of results each will give. My search on gin and tonic (well, it is Christmas) came up with gin and tonic recipe, gin and the devil, and gin and tonic perfume!

Accoona - new kid on the block

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

Partly owned by Eckhard Pfeiffer, former CEO of Compaq Computer, and China Daily Information Services Accoona claims that "it will revolutionize how people find information on the Web". Its main selling points are that it uses "Accoona Artificial Intelligence Technology" that "understands the meaning of words to get you more results" and SuperTargeting. The latter adds a box next to each of your search terms on the results page and you check the boxes next to the most important word or words. Other features include full Boolean support (AND, OR, NOT) and standard advanced commands such as link:, site:, url: and title:.

Accoona also has a global database of 32 million companies, including 5 million in China. The idea is that you click on "Info" next to an entry in the results list and a box pops up with address, contact information,

sales, and number of employees for that company. The trouble is that it picks up divisions, holding companies, subsidiaries etc so you really need to know your way around the structure of the company to make any sense of the information. It also comes up with some totally bizarre results. For example, I searched on Reed Elsevier and clicked on the Info box next to "Lexis-Nexis a division of Reed Elsevier". It told me that LexisNexis has between 20 and 49 employees. I am impressed that LexisNexis manages to do so much with so few people!

Overall, I found the results for my test searches far less relevant than the good old standbys Yahoo and Google. The artificial intelligence does not appear to improve relevance and probably makes it worse.

Information Resources

LexisNexis a la carte

<http://www.lexisnexis.com/alacartenow>

LexisNexis has launched a new pay-as-you-go service aimed at small to medium-sized businesses and independent professionals. Called LexisNexis AlaCarte the service provides access to a subset of the full LexisNexis collection including company information, newspapers and magazines, and US government information.

You have to register to use the service but searches using the simple or advanced search are free. You only pay for documents that you wish to purchase. Users are charged a one-time fee for accessing the chosen documents, which remain accessible for 90 days. Document fees currently range between \$1 and \$10 with an average cost of \$3. Payment is by credit card.

The launch is aimed primarily at the US market - although information coverage is world wide - and that shows on the registration screen. Entering a state is marked as mandatory, but I had no problems completing the form without selecting one and was immediately accepted as a user.

The sections include News, Business Research, Legal, and US Business Public Records. The News is in two parts. The default is to search 6000 sources over the past two years and documents cost US\$ 3 each. If you know the title of the publication and want to go back further, the "Search Additional Sources" option covers more than

20,000 with some going back to 1968. These documents cost between US\$ 1 and 10 each.

The Advanced search for News enables you to focus your strategy. In addition to the usual "all of your terms", "exact phrase", "at least one of your terms", "without terms" you can build complex Boolean searches and search by date, company name, industry, news about the country, person, author, title and publication.

The Business Research section includes annual reports, company profiles and financials from sources such as ICC, IAC, Extel, Worldscope and Datamonitor.

Legal is not up and running yet and is expected to be launched in the second quarter of 2005. Other features being considered for the next phase are an alerts service and additional sorting options. Results are currently sorted by relevance.

EBRD Directory of business information sources on central and eastern Europe and the CIS

February 2005, Effective Technology Marketing Ltd
Editor: Alison Nunn
ISBN: 1874128 27 8 Price: £165, €250, US\$320

The new 2005 EBRD Directory (7th edition) has substantially increased its coverage compared with previous editions. It lists the information sources used daily by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Business Information Centre and provides details of over 3,500 sources of business information gathered from publishers, banks, commercial and investment agencies.

The printed edition will be available from February 2005 and comes with an Internet password to a regularly updated electronic version. Further details at <http://www.dataresources.co.uk/etm2a.htm>

Statistics Insight

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

Statistics Insight is a new service from Business Insight, a business information service based at Birmingham Central Library. The library holds one of the largest collection of statistics and market research in the West Midlands and the web site is built around this.

The Statistics Database is a free searchable database of sources containing data of interest to business. Sources include trade journals, official sources and market research.

There are three options for searching: A-Z, basic word search and advanced search. The advanced search has options for searching by publication, year, publisher, region, keyword and topic. The search results do not take you directly to the data but there is enough information to enable you to track down the statistics within your own resources. Alternatively you can purchase it directly from Business Insight.

The Virtual Statistics Library provides links to useful statistical web sites, most of them free, including sources of UK and International trade statistics.

Statistics Insight is a very useful starting point for tracking down statistics on a wide range of topics.

Marketing Surveys Index

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

Marketing Surveys Index is aimed at information services and academic libraries. It provides executive summaries and table of contents information from a database of business, economic and marketing reports. The reports on the database provide figures for overall market size and market trend insights for business sectors internationally. You can test out the service on a 2% sample database.

The Index contains details of 65,000 reports from over 1,200 publishers, including the URLs of free statistics and reports. There are also a large number of non-English language reports featured in the database and the coverage has been expanded to cover conference proceedings.

There are options for searching by keyword, sector, publisher, data and region/country. The keyword option is slightly unusual in that your terms - a maximum of three - must be separated by commas.

You can view bibliographic details, the executive summary and table of contents. Full reports have to be ordered by telephone or fax. If you are likely to want to purchase reports online on a regular basis, this can be done via the sister site <http://www.worldmarketresearch.com/>. Note

that there are no automatic download facilities on either site at present.

Annual subscriptions to the database are £495 + VAT for libraries and £995 + VAT for the Intranet version. The latter allows unlimited numbers of users to access the database.

CEE MarketWatch

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

CEE MarketWatch is an analytical network covering the region of Central and Eastern Europe. It offers analytical services, macroeconomic and political research, intraday updates on macroeconomic and political events, daily press reviews and interviews with policy makers and analysts.

Contributors are locally based specialists who have spent at least five years in the country they commentate on. This is a subscription service but the country profiles and some of the news items are free. There is also a useful free daily snapshot of news headlines that is delivered by email.

Cost of 12 Days of Christmas rises for True Love

<http://www.pncbank.com/12days>

Since 1984 PNC Advisors has provided an annual economic analysis of the cost of goods and services purchased by the True Love of 'The Twelve Days of Christmas'. As well as an itemised account there are comparisons with prices for 1984 and the previous year, and a video presentation.

In 1984 the cost of The Twelve Days of Christmas was US\$12,623. This year it topped US\$17,297, a 1.6 percent annualised increase over 20 year. The 2.4 percent year-over-year increase in the index closely mirrors that of the US governments Consumer Price Index. "Not only is the high cost of fuel reflected in the cost to deliver a pear tree, but this years index also underscores the trend to outsource labor. Skilled labor mentioned in the song, such as wages for the dancing ladies have increased 5.5 percent annualized over 20 years versus the maids-a-milking, which have only seen a 2.2 percent annualized pay raise."

The price of partridges and swans are roughly the same as last year but French hens and geese saw significant increases.

Not all prices have gone up, though. The 29.4 percent decrease in the price of the five gold rings is attributed to a drop in consumer demand for plain gold rings thus forcing retailers to lower their prices, and Turtle doves saw a 31 percent decline in price.

The price tag for all 364 items this year - most of the items are given by the True Love on more than one day - reached a whopping \$66,334. Time for True Love to increase their credit card limit!

These things are sent to try us

Making Windows XP Search do what it says on the tin - almost

The reason so many of us resort to utilities such as Agent Ransack (<http://www.mythicsoft.com/agentransack/>) and the new desktop search programs in order to track down files on our PCs is because the default Windows XP Search is so abysmal. If you are searching for documents that contain a specific word or phrase it ignores anything without a file extension and files that it does not recognise as containing text. Neither does it, by default, search hidden folders and files, system folders or subfolders of your starting point.

The first thing you need to do to is make sure that you have the Advanced options for Search System Folders, Search Hidden Files and Folders, and Search Subfolders ticked.

You then need to tell Windows to index files with unknown extensions. The following instructions may vary depending on which service packs and layout you have on your system.

1. Click Start, Search, For Files or Folders
2. Click Indexing Service and then Advanced.
3. On the toolbar of the window that has just opened, click the icon for Show/Hide Console Tree.
4. In the left pane, right-click Indexing Service on Local Machine, and then click Properties.
5. On the Generation tab, click to select the Index files with unknown extensions check box, and then click OK.

Obvious - NOT!

That does not get round the problem altogether, though.

Windows Search still does not search inside files that Windows does not recognise as being associated with text applications. Agent Ransack does and you can tell Copernic Desktop to treat such files as text. And Windows Search **still** does not search files without an extension, but then neither does Agent Ransack nor any of the new Desktop Search programs.

The hunt for the perfect PC search program continues.

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