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; resources dealing with technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications.

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AlltheWeb dumbs down

Last month it was AltaVista (see Tales From the Terminal Room No. 53), this month AlltheWeb (http://www.alltheweb.com/) is leaching features and functionality. Although still mentioned in the help files the URL Investigator, which found pages that linked to a page and also showed you what the page used to look like via the Wayback Machine, has disappeared.

As for the database behind them, both AlltheWeb and AltaVista now appear to use a subset of the Yahoo database but they differ from Yahoo and each other in the way that the results are sorted. Using the Thumbshots ranking tool (http://ranking.thumbshots.com/), mentioned in the April issue of Tales from the Terminal Room, one can see that there is great deal of similarity between results from AltaVista and Yahoo. So one might as well use the Yahoo web search and forget about AltaVista. AlltheWeb may still be worth using if only because the results appear to be ranked and sorted quite differently.

UK web to be archived

The new UK Web Archiving Consortium (UKWAC) has launched a trial project that will archive about 6000 UK web sites over a period of two years. The consortium is made up of the British Library, Joint Information Systems Committee of the Higher and Further Education Councils (JISC), the National Archives, the National Library of Wales, the National Library of Scotland and the Wellcome Trust.

UKWAC will work, with the permission of the rights holders, on an experimental system for archiving selected key UK web sites. All types of web content will be included, from government documents to blogs. The aim is to "take a snapshot of every year, as a sample of what the web looked like". A limited number of web sites will be archived initially but ultimately the intention is to archive the whole UK web.

One of the problems for the consortium is that under UK copyright law permission will be needed before a site can be archived. The British Library is hoping that the law will be extended to allow them blanket access to all web sites. If you have a web site or a blog, it may be advisable to remember that any off-the-wall comments you make could be preserved for posterity!

An archive of the Internet already exists in the Wayback Machine (http://www.archive.org/) but UKWAC hopes to be able to archive more frequently, in more depth, and to provide meta data so that information can be found more easily.

More information about the project can be found at http://library.wellcome.ac.uk/doc_wtx017032.html

New business information search tool

A new business information search tool has been launched. Find.com (http://find.com/) has been developed by FIND/SVP, Empire Media, and TripleHop Technologies. Find.com combines results from its own index of business web sites with those from some of the major search engines such as Google, Teoma, Alltheweb, Lycos and MSN. It also finds priced reports - "premium research content" - from sources such as The Gallup Organization, Frost & Sullivan, BNET, ChoicePoint, and NetContent.

The Directory search seems to search the relevant business sections of DMOZ and Google's directory (a version of DMOZ).

The default search works well but the Advanced Search is even better. It has features that many of the standard search engines have now abandoned as well as some unique options.

The usual Boolean AND, OR and NOT are supported (they must be in capital letters) but Find.com also supports wildcards (Yippee!). You can use a question mark (?) inside a word to represent a single character, or an asterisk (*) inside or at the end of a word to represent one or more characters.

There is also a proximity option. Place your terms inside double quotes and then a tilde at the end of phrase together with a number. For example: "research development"~5 looks for the terms research and development within five words of each other.

You can boost the relevance of a term in your search by using the caret, "^", symbol with a

boost factor (a number) at the end of the term. For example:

    production^4

The higher the boost factor, the more relevant the term will be and documents with that term will appear closer to the top of the list of results.

You can use the boost option with phrases, for example:

"production statistics"^4

Although the boost factor must be positive it can be less than 1, for example 0.2.

Searches can be further filtered by file format, site, and source.

Results are sorted by relevance but on the left hand side of the screen is an "Organize By" column. This enables you to view your results grouped together by topic, document format (htm, pdf, ppt etc), site and source.

I need to do more detailed testing and comparisons with Killerinfo and Google before I switch to using it as a default business search tool, but I am already hooked and regarding it as an essential search tool.

Information Resources

Directories

US Agriculture Exporters Database
http://www.fas.usda.gov/agexport/exporter.html

(Select "Online Searchable Database" from the links on the left hand side of the screen).

The US Department of Agriculture has launched a free online database of over 3,800 US based agriculture exporters. You can search by product classifications and categories, type of firm (agent, broker, manufacturer, distributor etc.), location (state), and the region to which they export. Alternatively you can carry out a keyword search on company or product name.

Information on each company includes address, contact details, products, regions to which they export, D&B number, annual sales

and number of employees.

National Union of Journalists Freelance Directory
http://www.freelancedirectory.org/

The NUJ Freelance Directory lists 1,500 freelancers in the UK and Ireland by region, skill and specialism. It covers writers, editors, sub-editors, designers, illustrators, cartoonists, photographers, broadcasters, scriptwriters, web designers, translators, trainers and researchers. This is a useful directory if you are looking for someone with specialist writing skills or just trying to track down an individual journalist.

Many thanks to John Coll of the Scottish Business Information Service who alerted me to this directory via the BUSLIB-L discussion list.

Process Industries Supplier Directory
http://www.processregister.com/

This is a supplier directory for process industries and includes news, links, forums and an event calendar. You can browse and search for suppliers of 8000 products by category, product or company name. Some of the product categories seem to be mainly populated by US suppliers but that may depend on the product you search on. A search on air atomizing nozzles only had US companies but catalyst carriers came up with companies in the US, Australia, UK, China and India.

Information on each company includes a "profile", full address, contact name, telephone and fax numbers and a list of products that they produce or supply.

Major Companies of Central & Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, 2004
Editor: C Tapster
Published: Graham & Whiteside March 2004
ISBN: 1-86099-379-6

http://www.dataresources.co.uk/directories.htm

This directory covers 27 countries from Albania to Yugoslavia and gives details on the leading trade organisations, privatised companies, manufacturers, financial institutions and government-related business organisations. It includes more than 9,500 business organizations in Central and

http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2004/jun2004.shtml

Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics.

Information on each organisation includes address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail and web addresses plus activities, parent organisation, subsidiaries and agents, brands, trademarks and financial information for the previous two years.

Price: £655, €979

Company Information

China Company Research Services
http://www.ccrs.info/

China Company Research Services (CCRS) provides detailed information on Chinese companies. The data is locally sourced by Chinese researchers and then edited and assessed by experienced Western company information analysts.

CCRS is able to research and report on any company in China to the depth required, for example from simple Registration Searches (to confirm that a company is legally incorporated) to detailed and in-depth profiles.

Information can include:

- Corporate details, including export licence details
- Business Operations
- History
- Strategic/Political factors
- International connections
- Financial Status
- Reputation
- Rating
- Overall Assessment

There are three standard report formats - Full, Overview, Credit - or you can pick and mix from 25 separate modules. There are sample reports on the web site that give you an idea of the formats and structure.

Prices vary, but for pay as you go there is a minimum charge of £30 per company.

Country Information

Baltic Sea States
Web directory for the Baltic Sea region and Eastern Europe
http://bibl.sh.se/baltic/

This is a directory of over 2000 links to sites about the Baltic Sea region. Countries include Belarus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland. Germany, Latvia, Lithuania. Norway, Poland, Russia, Sweden and Ukraine. Resources are organised into categories such as News and Media, Environment and Business, and Economy.

Information on each site is minimal but includes the name of the site, a one line description, the language or languages of the site and the alphabet used (for example Cyrillic, Latin). A very useful starting point for the region.

EU Value Added Tax
http://www.eurunion.org/legislat/VATweb.htm

This is a useful set of pages that provides links to information about VAT rates, legislation, proposals and refund procedures on VAT in the European Union. There are links to each country's VAT authority where you can find full details of rates and regulations.

If all you need is a brief summary of the rates, Deloitte at http://www.deloitte.com/ have a neat series of tables that do just that. From their Home page select Services, Tax and then Indirect Tax.

Searching Questions

Free market and industry data by country

Question

We are often asked to identify the major industry sectors and markets for a country. We do not need names of companies or products, just the key sectors and their value. Sometimes Google works and sometimes it doesn't. Ideally, free sources please!

Answer

As you do not need company or product market share, I would start with the country's official statistics sources first. The best starting point for these is Official Statistics on the Web at http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/lbr/stats/off stats/OFFSTATSmain.htm This lists official sources for each country, such as the government statistical offices, the central or national bank, and government departments and ministries. At least one or more of these sources usually have basic statistics on industry/market sectors.

Governments sometimes provide country market and industry reports that are aimed at their own exporting companies.

The US Government Export Portal (http://www.export.gov/) provides access to market research reports and the well known Country Commercial Guides. Most of these can be accessed via the Commercial Service page at http://www.export.gov/comm_svc/ . There is a link to the searchable Market Research Library at the bottom of the page.

BISNIS - Business Information Service for the Newly Independent States - (http://www.bisnis.doc.gov/) is the US Government's "one stop shop" for Russia and the new independent states. It provides some good background material on doing business in these countries with reports on selected industry sectors.

CEEBIC - Central and Eastern Europe Business Information Center - (http://www.mac.doc.gov/ceebic/) has some useful sources of information on the economic and political climate in Central and Eastern Europe, how to do business, and

market research reports for selected industries and countries.

UK Trade & Investment (http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk/) is aimed at both UK companies trading internationally and overseas enterprises seeking to locate in the UK. For the market and sector reports select Trade and then Sector & Market Reports. Reports can be browsed by sector and country.

A slightly different approach is to look at export and import trade statistics. The International Trade Center (http://www.intracen.org/) provides free access to summary data by country.

And finally, it is worth giving the new find.com a go (reviewed earlier in this newsletter).

Gizmo of the Month

AM-DeadLink

http://aignes.com/products.htm

If you are fed up with bookmarks and favorites giving 404 error messages or you discover that you have repeatedly bookmarked the same site, you need AM-DeadLink.

AM-DeadLink is a neat little program for your PC that detects dead links and duplicates in your browser bookmarks. It checks favorites, hotlists and bookmarks from Internet Explorer, Opera, Mozilla and Netscape.

Free. Not much else one needs to say about it!

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Key Business Sources on the Net
Organiser: Manchester Business School
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: MBS, Manchester
Date: Wednesday, 22nd September 2004
Course fee: £215 + VAT - BIS/BINN members. Others £250 + VAT.
URL:
http://www.mbs.ac.uk/corporate/bis/training.htm
This course compares what is available for free with pay-as-you-go and subscription services and examines quality of content, coverage and functionality. There are practical sessions throughout the day

Workshop: Searching the Internet: Beyond Google
Organiser: UKOLUG
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: Netskills Training Suite, Newcastle Upon Tyne
Date: Wednesday, 29th September 2004
Course fee: UKOLUG members £130 + VAT. Others £160 + VAT.
URL: http://www.ukolug.org.uk/
Google is not the only search engine and all too often we would be better off taking a completely different approach. The aim of this workshop is to provide delegates with an essential toolkit to help them search more effectively. A significant part of the day will be taken up with practical sessions: exercises will be provided but delegates are free to try out searches of their own.

Workshop: Business Information on the Internet: Free vs. Fee
Organiser: TFPL
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: TFPL, London
Date: Thursday, 7th October 2004
Course fee: £295 + VAT
URL: http://www.tfpl.com/

Workshop: Advanced Internet Search Strategies
Organiser: Manchester Business School
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: MBS, Manchester
Date: Wednesday, 27th October 2004
Course fee: £215 + VAT - BIS/BINN members. Others £250 + VAT.
URL:
http://www.mbs.ac.uk/corporate/bis/training.htm

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