

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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ChangeDetect

Free service for monitoring web pages

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

ChangeDetect is yet another web based service that monitors web page content for changes and sends an automatic email whenever your web pages are updated. The free service allows you to monitor a maximum of 5 pages a week and marks web page text for you with color-coded highlights of what has changed. You can receive web page change notifications via your email, pager, ICQ or text messaging.

The subscription services allow you to monitor more pages and password protected pages.

ChangeDetect Personal costs US \$1.95 a month and monitors 10 web pages.

ChangeDetect Plus costs US \$14.95 a month for 100 web pages and allows you to set up keyword and phrase notification triggers.

ChangeDetect Professional costs \$39.95 a month for 500 web pages with content checked twice-daily.

I am not really sure why I would want to use ChangeDetect in preference to other page monitors. Watchthatpage (<http://www.watchthatpage.com/>) and Wisdomchange (<http://www.wisdomchange.com/>) let you monitor an unlimited number of pages free of charge and have many of the same features. If you want more sophisticated options, programs such as Copernic Tracker (<http://www.copernic.com/>) and Website Watcher (<http://aignes.com/>) are more flexible and better value for money.

There is a summary of a selection of page monitors at <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/monitor.htm>

Information Resources

Directories

EBRD Directory

Published: February 2004, Effective Technology Marketing Ltd

Editor: Alison Nunn

ISBN: 187412826X

Price: £145, €220, \$280

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

Looking for information on the telecoms industry in Armenia? Need to find out about doing business in Croatia? Then the new EBRD Directory is one of the best places to start. Now in its 6th edition, it covers business information sources on central and eastern Europe and the CIS. In the course of its work the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) identifies, evaluates and acquires a large volume of business information relevant to the region. Many of these sources are included in this directory.

As well as hard copy, the directory is now published in full on the Internet and is continuously updated. New entries are added, current entries updated and outdated entries are removed at regular intervals. Directory purchasers have Internet access for 12 months.

You can keyword search by title, description and contact details, and there are pull down menus for the country, region and subject/industry indexes. You can also search by type of resource, for example newspapers, books, CD-ROMs, online databases. Both free and priced services are included.

For each resource there is a title, description, organization contact details (telephone, fax, email), URL and a date telling you when the entry was last updated.

The directory costs £145 but, if you regularly research central and eastern Europe and the CIS, it is well worth the investment as it gives quick and easy access to quality evaluated sites.

The Ultimate Directory

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

The Ultimate Directory brings several services together to create a search tool for finding people and businesses in the United Kingdom.

The business finder searches a database of over 2 million UK based businesses, charities, government departments and organisations. You can search by company name, type of business or service, or location within the UK. Alternatively, you can browse by region, town and categories. In addition to contact details and address, there are links to maps and suggested driving routes to locations.

The Residential Phone Book contains data from BT and allows you to search for any listed phone number in the UK by name and town.

The Web Search option is a meta search tool that runs your search on up to ten search engines and directories including Google, AltaVista, Overture, Fast, Mirago, Teoma, WebFinder, Espotting and DMOZ.

There are several other sites that offer similar types of combined service but, unlike some, the Ultimate Directory is currently free of charge and you do not have to register to use it.

News

Yahoo News upgraded

Yahoo have totally revamped their News service with what looks like an attempt to compete directly with Google News. The service claims to cover around 7,500 sources as opposed to Google's 4,500 but there are no source lists available to enable one to compare the services. Both provide access to the last 30 days of news, and Yahoo has copied several of Google's Advanced Search features: limit by publication, location and time period. Yahoo has even introduced a free Alerts service similar to Google's.

So how does Yahoo News fare when compared with Google News? The first problem is that the revamped service is only available via the main <http://www.yahoo.com/> site. Country versions of Yahoo such as UK and Ireland still have the old limited news

<http://www.rba.co.uk/tftr/archives/2004/mar2004.shtml>

service. Google, on the other hand, offers variations of its news service tailored to different national audiences, for example UK, Australia, Germany.

When it comes to searching, one would expect to find more articles on Yahoo than on Google given the number of sources but all of my test searches came up with fewer results on Yahoo. For example a search on wind farms and limited to UK sources over the last week came up with only 2 in Yahoo News compared with 15 in Google News. Furthermore, Yahoo seems to be missing some of the major quality UK papers including the Guardian, Independent and the Telegraph, as well as the local and regional press that Google has.

The problem could be that my searches are UK/Europe focused and Yahoo may be concentrating more on US sources. This seemed to be confirmed when I tried searches on Australian and Japanese companies, but even when searching on US hot topics Yahoo came a poor second. For the present, I shall be sticking with Google.

Statistics

Market Access Database

<http://mkaccdb.eu.int/>

Produced by DG Trade, European Commission this site has a very useful collection of information on trade between the EU and non-EU countries.

The Sectoral and Trade Barriers section has information on export and investment conditions in non-EU countries and identifies trade barriers affecting your area of activity in the individual countries. There is also data on duties and taxes and a guide to import procedures and documents required for the import of a particular product.

The Statistical Database gives an overview of trade flows between the EU and non-EU countries. You first select a country and then an HS (Harmonized Commodity Description) section from a list, or an HS chapter, or type in an HS code. Information goes back to 1996 and shows the value of imports and exports of the commodity to and from the EU in Euros.

Ramon - Eurostat Classification Server

<http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/ramon/>

If you don't know your NACE from your HS6, this site has many of the coding systems in use around the world including the Harmonized Commodity Description used in trade statistics services. Codes can be viewed online or downloaded in various formats.

ITC - International Trade Statistics

<http://www.intracen.org/tradstat/>

The data on this site is based on the COMTRADE database of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and provides International trade statistics from 1998 to 2002. You can view export and import statistics by product group and country or by country and product group. Product groups use the 3 digits group of the Standard International Trade Classification (SITC, Rev.3)

The data is presented in US dollars and you have to view import and export figures separately. You can also view trade performances of individual countries including national export performances and import profiles.

United Nations Statistics Division - Commodity Trade Statistics Database (COMTRADE)

<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/comtrade/>

The COMTRADE database of the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) covers over 110 reporting countries with time series starting from 1962 (SITC1), 1977 (SITC2) or 1988 (SITC3 correlated to HS codes).

You can search for imports or exports of a commodity (keyword, HS or SITC code) between individual countries or a country and the rest of the world. Figures are given as the trade value in US dollars and net weight (kg) and can be viewed as tables and graphs.

The free service allows you to browse 1000 records but you do not have access to the download options. Full access to the database and download facilities is by annual subscription starting at US \$100 and varies depending on the number of users and records accessed.

UK Trade Information On-line

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

This site uses HM Customs and Excise data on UK imports and exports. Information is taken directly from returns and reports required with every export and import consignment.

The free services include a section on EU enlargement with country profiles and the top 10 UK imports and exports by value in GBP. Similar data on the existing EU countries is also available. The free quarterly UK Trade Trends focuses on trade-in-goods statistics between the UK and the rest of the World. Content includes time series data tables and articles on trade related subjects such as bi-lateral trade and statistical policy. UK Trade Trends is published in hard copy and as downloadable PDFs.

The Intrastat database is a subscription service and provides UK overseas trade data at 8 digit commodity code level showing UK imports and exports worldwide from 1997 to date. Data is available by trading partner country and is updated monthly.

Prices are as follows:

- Annual subscription: £1000 plus VAT
- Quarterly subscription: £350 plus VAT
- Monthly subscription: £120 plus VAT

Searching Questions

Statistics on renewable energy in the UK

Question: I am looking for statistics on renewable energy in the UK over the last five years, and in particular for figures on the amount of energy generated by wind power. I did a Google search but ended up with lots of news articles and a few government figures. There must be a quicker way of finding the data rather than ploughing through reams of text?

Answer: Yes there is. For any question that involves statistics, my favourite starting point is Official Statistics on the Web
<http://www.auckland.ac.nz/lbr/stats/offstats/OFFSTATSmain.htm>

This site lists sources organised by topic or country that offer "free and easily accessible" data. The topics list is comprised of links to the statistics pages of international organizations and associations, and a few commercial sites. There are several under Energy including the excellent Statistical Review of World Energy produced annually by BP (<http://www.bp.com/>). This covers all types of energy including renewables and you can download a PDF for wind power that includes figures for the UK and other countries going back to 1997.

You may want to cross-check the figures with other sources. A search on renewable energy statistics UK in Google (<http://www.google.com/>) or Killerinfo (<http://www.killerinfo.com/>) comes up with several good sites. Killerinfo has the advantage of sorting your results into topics so you could, if you wished, look only at the sites in the wind power folder. Google, on the other hand has advanced search options that enable you to limit your search to types of sites, for example UK government.

The Renewable Energy Statistics Database for the United Kingdom (<http://www.restats.org.uk/>) has some good information, but the best source is the DTI Energy Site (<http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/>), which includes renewables. The statistics section has data in Excel format going back to 1996.

And don't forget UK National Statistics Online (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>), which has a wealth of reports and data on renewables, including links to DTI Energy. National Statistics offices are often forgotten as sources of information; if you don't where to find them, use the country option in the Official Statistics on the Web mentioned earlier.

Gizmo of the Month

Furl

<http://www.furl.net/>

This month's gizmo was recommended to me by fellow consultant Phil Bradley. When he first told me about it I thought it was nothing more than a glorified bookmark/favorites manager. But having dabbled for just a few hours I am now completely hooked.

This site lets you archive web pages that you encounter on the net, including images and any animations, and add comments and excerpts to the record. If, as so often happens, you later find that you have completely forgotten where you found that perfect recipe for Death by Chocolate the search function helps you find it again. Even if the site or page has disappeared you can still access the copy stored on Furl.

You first set up an account and then drag the **Furl It** bookmark into your toolbar or favorites. There are instructions on how to do this for most browsers including Opera, Safari and Firebird. When you come across a page that you want to "furl", you simply click the "Furl It" link in your toolbar. A pop-up form appears pre-filled with title and URL. You then give it a rating, allocate it to a topic - you can create your own - add comments, keywords, and an extract or clipping from the page. The pop-up could be a problem with some pop-up blockers so you may have to white-list the site with your blocking program.

By default, your furl'd list of sites is public and can be viewed by other users of the service. If you want to keep them secret then make sure you click the Private box.

I have found Furl It especially useful when doing lengthy research. Yes, I could bookmark sites I find useful and I suppose I can always go through my browser history if I forget which sites I've visited. But Furl It lets me add comments and keywords to remind me why I thought the site worthwhile, and I sometimes want to go back to a page long after it has expired from my history file. Another big plus is that you can syndicate your links using RSS or JavaScript on your web site.

Two issues worry me about the service, though. The first is copyright: Furl It stores a copy of the page so that you can still access it even if the original has disappeared from the web, and this may breach terms and conditions, and copyright of a web site. The second is the danger of become too dependent on it. The service does not have any clear business model and could cease at any time. Luckily there are options for exporting your data in XML format or as a bookmark file, and I would recommend you use one of these to regularly back up your data.

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: How to assess, select and manage electronic resources.

Organiser: Manchester Business School

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: MBS, Manchester

Date: Wednesday, 28th April 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 seminar provides a step-by-step guide to setting up a resource management strategy. Topics covered include: identifying resources already in use within the organisation; organisational IT issues and policies affecting information use; identifying and assessing both free and fee-based services; monitoring usage and maintaining resources

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.

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