Tales from the Terminal Room
November 2004, Issue No. 57
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Published by: RBA Information Services
ISSN 1467-338X

http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/

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

Microsoft launches new search engine

Microsoft has unveiled its new search engine (http://beta.search.msn.com/). Intended to steal Google's lead in the search engine stakes, Microsoft has pulled out all the stops as far as publicity is concerned. It is still in "beta" so what we see now is unlikely to be the final launch version. That is just as well because I was very disappointed with it. It has a simple uncluttered default search screen - the current fashion - but I found that results for my test searches were poor when compared with Google and Yahoo.

Advanced search features are under "Build a search" and are limited to the link command, country/region, language, and site/domain. There is no file format command. The "Near to me" option is supposed to find sites and services close to you geographically but is only currently supported for those based in US.

Overall I was very disappointed given the publicity that went out pre-launch. Microsoft is going to have to try a lot harder if it is to beat Google.

Google expands and turns scholar

On the same day that Microsoft announced the arrival of its new search engine Google announced that it had increased its web coverage to over 8 billion pages. That's all very well, but doubling the size of the database is no good whatsoever if it means that the pages you want are towards the bottom of the heap. Even more than ever searchers need to use Google's advanced search options to improve relevance. (See September 2004 Issue No. 56 - http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2004/sep2004.shtml - Yahoo vs. Google)

A trick I learnt from a recent presentation given by Phil Bradley is the "Google sinker": repeat important words in your search strategy up to Google's maximum of 10 and you end up with a different set of results than if you type in the terms just once. For example 'business information europe' gives different results to 'business business business information europe europe europe europe europe europe Actually, it is not just a Google sinker it also works in Yahoo! Google has launched a completely new service called Google Scholar (http://scholar.google.com/). Google Scholar enables you to search for "scholarly literature including peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, pre-prints, abstracts and technical reports from all broad areas of research." A wide range of academic publishers are covered such as professional societies, pre-print repositories and universities, as well as scholarly articles available across the web. My initial test searches picked up services such as PubMed and Ingenta.

There are no advanced search options apart from author search - use 'author:' followed by author name - and given the diversity of resources covered I think there would be serious technical difficulties in getting anything more sophisticated to work effectively. This is where Google Scholar fails when compared with direct access to specialist resources such as Scirus (http://www.scirus.com/) and Ingenta (http://www.ingenta.com/). In Google Scholar's favour, though, is the range of different services that you can search in one go.

The results are listed by relevance, which is a disappointment for those of accustomed to sorting this type of literature search by date, author etc. Google Scholar is still in beta so there is hope that at least a date sort option will be added. The relevance ranking takes into account the full text of each article as well as the article's author, the publication in which the article appeared and how often it has been cited in scholarly literature. Google Scholar also automatically analyses and extracts citations. This means that your results may include citations of older works, books or other off-line publications.

Although you can search and view the Google Scholar results list free of charge, a large proportion of the articles are priced - no surprise to those of us familiar with scholarly literature. There is an FAQ that explains why that is so and as one person has commented "The students don't believe us when we tell them that they have to pay for this stuff. Perhaps they'll believe Google"

Google Desktop Search

Following hot on the heels of Blinkx and Copernic, Google has launched its own desktop search.

Google Desktop Search (GDS) is an application that provides full text search of your "email, computer files, chats, and the web pages you have viewed." Google goes on to say that GDS "puts your information easily within your reach and frees you from having to manually organize your files, emails, and bookmarks." Balderdash!

First off, it is limited in the types of files it covers: Microsoft Office formats, Outlook, Outlook Express, AOL Instant Messenger, TXT and HTML. It does not even include PDF files, which other desktop searches such as Blinkx and Copernic do.

Secondly, it makes assumptions as to where these files are stored. If you deviate from the default your files will not be indexed. Copernic allows you to change the default settings and specify which directories to include in the indexing.

Thirdly, it assumes that you use Internet Explorer as your browser and looks for html files in the appropriate directory. It will not find web pages viewed in Mozilla, Firefox or Opera for example.

The initial index of your hard disk can take as little as an hour or two, or as long as overnight. Thereafter, GDS updates as and when you view or receive files. When you fire up a search you are presented with a Google like screen that gives you a choice between "Search Desktop" and "Search the Web". It is lightning fast but not much use to me as I use Firefox for browsing, Thunderbird for email and Open Office. If you are a Microsoft junkie, though, you will be well served by GDS.

Before you go off and download GDS, there are serious security and privacy issues that you need to be aware of. GDS can send "non-personal" usage data and crash reports back to Google to help "improve the service". If you are concerned about this, make sure you untick the appropriate box under Preferences. Even with this blocked, I have found that GDS still tries to phone home once a day. I assume that it is checking to see if there is a newer version available but

there is no information on this and no way that I can find of stopping it.

GDS also indexes and caches secure https files that you view, online bank statements for example. Again, you need to untick the relevant box under Preferences.

Password protected and encrypted files are indexed and stored in the GDS cache as you open and view them. (This may have already been addressed by GDS in an update).

Just to tip you over the edge into total paranoia, documents remain in the GDS cache on your PC even after you have deleted the original files. It is possible to unearth those embarrassing emails and online chats that you thought were long gone! More importantly for corporate users, though, is that this could conflict with document retention and management policies so you are unlikely to be allowed to install GDS at work.

If you are still interested Google Desktop Search is available for Windows XP and Windows 2000 Service Pack 3 and above. It requires 500MB of space on your hard disk, a minimum of 128MB RAM and a 400MHz Pentium processor.

Top 10 sites for business information

At the end of each of RBA's business information workshops we ask the delegates to compile a "Top 10 Business Sites" list. The idea is that delegates identify and focus on sites that they think will be of most use to them in their day to day business. The sites can be services that they already know or have just discovered; free or priced services; search engines; or search techniques that they have discovered during the workshop.

However, delegates are regularly getting round the upper limit of 10 by sneakily combining similar types of sites and services under one heading. After the last workshop we ended up with a "Top 12"!

1. FT http://www.ft.com/ - for news, surveys and company information.
2. Usenet via Google Groups http://groups.google.com/ for views and opinions (often extreme!) on companies and products.

http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2004/nov2004.shtml

3. BUSLIB-L
http://listserv.boisestate.edu/archives/buslib-l.html - discussion list for business information.

4. Zapdata http://www.zapdata.com/ - D&B marketing directory of US companies.

5. Biz/ed http://www.bized.ac.uk/ - a "unique service for students, teachers and lecturers of business, economics, accounting, leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism".

6. Find.com http://www.find.com/ - a new search tool focusing on business information.

7. Nationmaster http://www.nationmaster.com/ - a good statistics starting point that repackages information from different sources and generates tables and rankings.

8. BBC http://www.bbc.co.uk/ for news, background information on a story/event, business news and markets, and country profiles

9. Google http://www.google.com/ and Yahoo! http://www.yahoo.co.uk/ - for their excellent web and image databases, and news services plus alerts. Google also has Usenet and Yahoo! a Finance section for information on stock exchange listed companies.

10. Abyz News Links http://www.abyznewslinks.com/ - fast-loading site that lists over 15,600 newspapers and other news sources by country and by region within each country, and RBA Business Information on the Net http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/ for listings of business resources by type..

Information Resources

Eco5.com - a new portal for business and economics

http://www.eco5.com/

Students at the European Business School, International University Schloss Reichartshausen (ebs) assisted by the Fraunhofer Institute have created a free web service aimed at researchers in the areas of finance and economics world-wide. Eco5.com has been developed in co-operation with researchers from leading banks, consulting companies and universities. There are over 5,000 resources,

some of them priced, and organised into eight categories including:

- links to national institutions such as central banks, stock exchanges and government bodies in 85 countries.
- access to the annual reports of companies in the most important stock indices
- major research databases
- links to national and international institutions
- links to the world's leading English language news sources

This service does not attempt to cover everything that is available and that is one of its strength. One is not overwhelmed by too much information and the site is quick and easy to navigate. I especially liked the National Institutions section. Eco5.com is an excellent starting point for business, financial and economic information and has won a place in my own personal Top 10 business sites.

EuroInfoPool expands

http://www.eurinfopool.com/

EuroInfoPool provides a single point of access to company information provided by official national business registries throughout Europe. They provide information on more than 18 million companies. The official business information is supplied by the European Business Register (EBR), a network of official national business registers. EuroInfoPool's new web site covers more countries and allows you to conduct pan-European searches (previously you had to search country by country). An option for downloading annual reports will be available soon. Access to pan-European credit rating reports on 22 million European companies is provided by Eurogate.

Bureau van Dijk enhances product range

Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing (BvDEP) is launching three major new products, a new product module and significant enhancements to four of its existing products at Online 2004 in London. Product launches include its new end-user, UK business intelligence tool MINT, AQUTE (a quantitative analysis of equity research) and INVIEW, a global analysis of equity-holding investment funds.

ORBIS, which currently has information on over 12 million companies around the world, now includes its own search and analysis front end and global standardised reports for international searching.

A risk model has been added to BvD's EIU Dataservices covering global economic statistics and further complementary information has been added to OSIRIS listed companies world-wide. Examples include corporate actions, MSCI indexes and broker performance analysis. The mergers and acquisition service ZEPHYR has also been expanded and it now has five years of US domestic data and two years of global data. 85,000 deals have been added in 2004.

More information on the range of BvD products can be found at http://www.bvdep.com/ .

STN adds LISA

STN has added LISA - Library and Information Science Abstracts - to its collection of databases. It covers a wide variety of subjects from librarianship and information science, including artificial intelligence, computer science applications, information and knowledge management, internet technology, telecommunications, and library management. LISA offers access to more than 264,000 records and is updated twice a month. Citations contain bibliographic information, controlled vocabulary, and an abstract. Titles are available in original language and English translation.

Full text publications can be ordered online, using the STN Full-Text-Solution providing connections to various document delivery services, or through FIZ Karlsruhe's document delivery broker service FIZ AutoDoc.

STN is one of the few services to offer pay-as-you go options to occasional users.

Further information is available at http://stnweb.fiz-karlsruhe.de/

CILIP provides members with direct access to LISA

http://www.cilip.org.uk/

If you are interested in access to LISA and a CILIP member (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals), CILIP now provides direct access to the database as a membership benefit. You have to register and authenticate your details on the CILIP web site under the "My Profile" option, but once completed you're away.

Searching Questions

Number of ATMs by country

Question:

I am looking for the number of automated teller machines (ATMs) across the world broken down by country and population, for example per 100, 1000 etc. Needless to say the enquirer expects the information to be free.

Answer:

For this type of enquiry I would first of all try and find a relevant trade or professional association as these sometimes give statistics on their industry sector. Market Research on the Web (http://www.marketresearchontheweb.com/) is a good starting point as it allows you to search a database of organisations by type, for example trade association or market research publishers, country or region, industry sector and keywords. As well as the name and URL each record tells you whether or not the site has market data or statistics. It is a subscription service - rates start at £ 150 for an academic subscription - but provides a neat short cut to statistics and industry overviews.

One of the sites it lists, the Association for Payment Clearing Services (http://www.apacs.org.uk/), has data for the UK but I was not able to track down information for other countries via this route.

Reverting to the usual search engines I applied the principle of "What do you want to see in your perfect document" and constructed a strategy including the phrase

http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2004/nov2004.shtml

"number of ATMs" and some country names (UK Netherlands Belgium France Germany Italy Spain). Google (http://www.google.com/) came back with about 100 results and Yahoo (http://www.yahoo.com/) with 15. There were several interesting PDF, DOC and XLS files which contain bits of the information you require.

Changing the list of countries in my strategy come up with additional documents so I would recommend that you try several combinations of countries with the phrase "number of ATMs". Do remember, though, that Google only searches on the first 10 terms of your search strategy so do not go overboard with your lists of countries!

This approach is time consuming and you should also bear in mind that different sources and researchers will have collected and analysed the data in different ways. You are therefore, not necessarily comparing like with like.

Gizmo of the month

WinPatrol
http://www.winpatrol.com/

This gizmo was recommended by TFTTR reader Paul Tucker of Midnight Croquet Ltd.

WinPatrol is an excellent free utility for controlling startup menus and dodgy tasks that have managed to infiltrate your PC. "Scotty the Windows Watch Dog sniffs out malicious 'mysteryware', web attacks and parasites that may assault your computer. WinPatrol puts you back in control of your computer so you'll know what programs are and should be running at all times."

WinPatrol claims to:

- increase your speed & system performance
- defeat the JPEG exploit and vulnerability
- detect & neutralize spyware
- detect & neutralize ADware
- detect & neutralize viral infections
- detect & neutralize unwanted IE add-ons
- filter unwanted cookies
- avoid Start Page hijacking
- stop programs that repeatedly add themselves to your Startup List

I run a tight ship here as far as my computers are concerned. I am always testing out new programs and utilities but generally do not allow them to "load at startup" as they so often suggest I should. There have been and are a few exceptions but when a program is of no further interest I diligently check that it has been removed from startup. When I tested WinPatrol on my laptop, therefore, I did not expect to find anything unusual.

It found about 30 items in the startups and scheduled tasks lists. There were remnants of WebWasher and AdMuncher, which I had "removed" long ago, and 5 Copernic scheduled page tracking tasks that I thought I had dumped. So the standard uninstall and remove functions do not always do the job properly.

In addition to those, there were various bits and bobs that I thought had to be there for my laptop to function. Although the free version of WinPatrol gives you a general description of what each one is, it does not give any clues as to whether or not you ought to leave well alone. For that you need to access the WinPatrol Plus database, which costs a one-off US $ 19.95. It is worth it, especially when it comes to cleaning up "services" and "active tasks".

WinPatrol also keeps a lookout for anything that tries to sneak into your startups or subvert your existing setup.

I now have a mere 4 programs that load at startup and 3 scheduled tasks. As a result my laptop fires up noticeably more quickly.

WinPatrol is primarily designed for Windows 98 through to Windows XP. There are special instructions for Win95 users.
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Meetings, workshops and presentations

Presentation: What's new in search tools?
Event: Free masterclass at Online Information 2004
Organiser: VNU Exhibitions
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: Olympia Grand Hall, London
Date: Tuesday, 30th November 2004, 14.45 -15.15
Course fee: Free
URL: http://www.online-information.co.uk/

Presentation: Finance and business resources: who, what and how much?
Event: Free masterclass at Online Information 2004
Organiser: VNU Exhibitions
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: Olympia Grand Hall, London
Date: Thursday, 2nd December 2004, 12.45 - 13.15
Course fee: Free
URL: http://www.online-information.co.uk/

Presentation: Key Business and Company Information, Part I - Free Resources
Event: Investing in Eastern Europe: Focus on EU New & Aspiring Members. 5th International Conference on Business Information Gathering & Analysis.
Organiser: EBRD and Effective Technology Marketing
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Venue: Strand Palace Hotel, London
Date: Friday, 3rd December 2004
Course fee: £ 225
URL: http://www.dataresources.co.uk/

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