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.

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Copernic Desktop

http://www.copernic.com/

Copernic Desktop is a free program that aims to search content both on your local PC and on the web. In the July/August issue of TFTTR we looked at Blinkx, which is a similar type of tool. We were not impressed! Copernic is well known for its search agents that cover multiple search tools and "invisible web" resources, as well as for its web page tracking program. So Copernic Desktop comes from a good stable.

Installation is straightforward but the first time it starts up it can take a while to index the files on your hard disk. You can use it either via the search box on the Windows Deskbar or from the full "console". Copernic Desktop can search PDF, XLS, PPT, DOC, RTF, TXT, WP and HTML files. It also indexes your search history, Internet Explorer favorites, Outlook email and contact lists. This means, of course, that if you use any other email program, browser or office programs, such as Open Office, Copernic Desktop is of limited use. The web, news and picture search uses AlltheWeb (http://www.alltheweb.com/).

To search, type in your terms and select whether you want to search files, the web, pictures, news, email etc. Results appear in a window and you can narrow down your search by file type, date, file, and folder. Boolean AND, OR, NOT and nested searches are supported. Below the results window is a preview window that enables you to see the text of a highlighted result without having to open the document within its associated application. Your search terms are highlighted within the document.

As a web search tool I was disappointed with it. I could not find any way of changing the default search engine but you can at least use the Advanced Search features of AlltheWeb, either at the command line or by going to the Advanced Search screen. As a local file search tool, it was not much use to me because I use Thunderbird for email, Mozilla and Firefox for browsing the web and Open Office. Agent Ransack (see Gizmo of the Month below) is a far better option for me and supports nearly all file types.

Nevertheless, it is worth trying if you use Microsoft applications and find Agent Ransack's comprehensiveness over the top.

BvDEP launches Mint for business intelligence

Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing (BvDEP) has launched a new product called Mint. Mint contains information about UK companies as well as a news service, a directors database and market research covering UK-based industries.

Mint is aimed primarily at end-users with the emphasis on ease of use and simplicity rather than sophisticated search and analysis options. On-screen "wizards" take you through processes such as creating mailing lists or calculating market share figures.

The companies module contains information on 2.5 million UK companies and includes all active companies plus half a million unincorporated businesses. Basic financial information is provided, with detailed financials as a further option. The information comes from a range of companies such as Jordans, D&B Fitch, World'Vest Base, Fininfo and Argus Vickers.

Supplementary information includes contact data, credit scores, brand names and activities, advisors, any recent M&A activity, news and market research relating to the company, plus recent changes in its share ownership. The news module contains articles taken from the Financial Times newspapers, the FT Newswire, Reuters and recent merger and acquisition activity from BvDEP's ZEPHYR. It includes regional and trade press as well as national news so it can be used to research a wide range of topics.

The directors module contains information on both current and previous directors of UK businesses with biographical information for directors of listed companies.

The market research module contains UK industry profiles from Datamonitor. They are presented in a standardised format and include information on the market, its size, companies' market share, the competitive landscape and forecasts for the sector.

Free trials of Mint and further information are available at http://www.mintbusinessinfo.com/

Yahoo vs. Google

Well, Yahoo is certainly giving Google a run for its money. Many people are now finding that it sometimes gives better results than Google. But is it time to give Google its marching orders?

Yahoo has the advantage that it supports all three Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) and parentheses for nested searches. Google only supports OR.

Google limits the number of search terms that you can type in to 10. Yahoo has no limit, or at least it is so high I have not yet managed to reach it.

Google supports the use of the asterisk to stand in for a word within a phrase. For example "phenol * extraction" will find "phenol chloroform extraction" and "phenol water extraction", and "phenol * * extraction" finds "phenol chloroform DNA extraction". There is no asterisk function in Yahoo but the same result can be achieved by using a stop word such as "a" within the phrase, for example "phenol a a extraction".

Google has a link: command that finds pages that link to your specified URL, but it will only find links that match your URL **exactly**. Yahoo has two commands: link: finds pages that links to a specific URL, for example link:http://www.rba.co.uk/search/ (you **must** include the http://), whilst linkdomain: finds pages containing links to any page on the specified domain, for example linkdomain:rba.co.uk (do **not** include the http:// with this command).

Google often automatically stems words and looks for variations. You can stop it doing this by preceding a term or phrase with a plus sign but there is no way of asking Google to stem a particular term. In Yahoo you can use the stem: command, for example stem:directory will look for directory or directories. In Google you can also use the tilde before a word to search for synonyms, for example ~aspartame will find aspartame, Nutrasweet, Canderel.

Google indexes the first 100 KB of a page: Yahoo indexes up to 500 KB.

As well as the usual PDF and Microsoft Office file formats Yahoo allows you to

restrict your search to RSS/XML formats, which is perfect if you are searching for news feeds on a specific subject.

Google has a unique number range search. Specify two numbers separated by two full stops with no spaces, and include a unit of measure or some other indicator of what the number range represents. For example DVD player £50..150, or toblerone 1..5 kg. Number ranges can be years, weights, prices, temperature, concentrations etc.

There are Google and Yahoo Toolbars for Internet Explorer, Mozilla and Firefox, so no difference there.

Is it time to send Google packing? I don't think so. Both Google and Yahoo have unique features and they seem to be adding features all the time. If you are having problems finding relevant pages with one, then try the other. And if you need to be as comprehensive as possible with your search use both.

Google: http://www.google.com/
Yahoo: http://www.yahoo.com/
Google Toolbar for Mozilla and Firefox: http://googlebar.mozdev.org/
Yahoo Companion Toolbar for Mozilla and Firefox: http://companion.mozdev.org/

Yahoo News vs. Google News

When I reviewed the Yahoo News service in the March 2004 issue of Tales from the Terminal Room, I was not very impressed. Several key sources were missing and it was only available on the .com site. I had not tested the Alerts feature at the time, but I later found that it did not work.

That has all changed. Coverage has improved, there is a good range of UK regional papers and trade publications, the service is now available on yahoo.co.uk and alerts are working. In some instances Yahoo News comes up with better results than Google News. For example, a search on "Peter's Food Service" on Google News came up with only three articles and did not include a known recent FT article. Yahoo on the other hand came up with 29.

As well as additional trade publications the results included articles from the subscription

areas of newspapers such as the FT, which Google often removes. Whilst Google's approach does not raise false hopes regarding access to the articles it is sometimes useful to know of articles that have appeared in a priced publication. On some other searches, though, Google came out on top.

So, as with their web search options, the message is use both if you want to be sure of catching everything.

Information Resources

NewsTrove

http://www.newstrove.com/

NewsTrove's claim that it searches "zillions of major news sites at once!" is definitely over the top, but it does cover a **lot** of resources. The news sources are English-language publications primarily from the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and India, plus English editions of publications from the Middle East, Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America. The publications include web sites of traditional print and television news organizations, government web sites, political organization web sites, political commentary and opinion web sites, and the "higher quality weblogs".

There are free pre-packaged searches on countries, some of the larger companies and a range of hot topics. You can also set up your own RSS newsfeed. The Basic Newsfeed is free, covers 100 news sources, and lets you set up 3 feeds. The Professional Newsfeed costs US$ 5 a month, covers 10,000 sources, offers advanced filtering and up to 5 topics. The top of the range is the Premium Newsfeed "for the news aficionado, webmaster, or corporate user". That costs US$ 20 a month, covers 200,000 major news sources, advanced filtering and up to 20 topics.

Bots Blogs and News Aggregators

http://virtualprivatelibrary.blogspot.com/BotsBlogs.pdf

A very useful free research white paper from Marcus Zillman listing sites that offer bots, blogs, and aggregators.

1837Online - Births, Marriages and Deaths

http://www.1837online.com

This site enables you to search Birth, Marriage and Deaths indexes for England and Wales from 1837 to 2002, as well as British nationals overseas from 1761 to 1994. 1837online.com is based in London and part of an independently-owned business that provides genealogical services to professional and non-professional researchers. You have to register to use the site and searching is divided into 1837-1983, 1984-Present, and Overseas.

You have to pay to view the results and there are six pricing plans. The minimum charge is £ 5 which gives you 50 units (equivalent to 10 pence per image page). The units become cheaper if you pre-pay with larger amounts.

Searching Questions

Top 10 UK Insurance Companies

Question:

How can I find a ranking of the top insurance companies in the UK? I can only find the top 10 most **visited web sites** of insurance companies via Google or Yahoo.

Answer:

For rankings of companies in a sector, try the relevant trade association or professional body. For the UK, use the Trade Association Forum (http://www.taforum.org/) to locate the relevant body. In this case it is the Association of British Insurers (http://www.abi.org.uk/). They have a section on their web site covering the UK insurance industry and spreadsheets ranking the top 20 companies based on total net premiums and by class, for example motor insurance, health, life, pensions.

These things are sent to try us

The case of the disappearing fax driver

According to a recent poll on VNUnet (http://www.vnunet.com/news/) 65.4% of its readers have already downloaded Windows XP Service Pack 2, and according to one report (http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/09/02/sp2_glitches_study/) one in ten of those can expect difficulties during and after the upgrade. Microsoft have admitted that there can be problems, either because of the increased security of SP 2 or because of software incompatibilities, and have produced a list of known issues (http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=842242).

When I upgraded my laptop I was pleasantly surprised when successfully installed SP2 from the CD sent by those very nice people at Microsoft. So "yah boo sucks" to all the scare mongers! It took 45 minutes form start to finish and it even recognised that I already had firewall and anti-virus software installed. There was a minor glitch in that it recognised that my default browser was Mozilla, so it very kindly removed the Internet Explorer icon from my desktop. Thanks guys, but I would prefer to be the one who decides what stays and what goes.

Even more surprising was that my more important programs - all non Microsoft and many open source - seemed to be working as normal.

Everything was fine - until I tried to send a fax from my word processor using the built in Microsoft fax driver. The whole thing sat there for about 10 minutes before deciding that it was not going to come out and play. "Microsoft shared fax driver not installed" it told me. Whatever means I tried to use to send the fax, it was adamant that the driver was not there. "Yah boo sucks" to me :-(

I tried re-installing from my original XP CD but it aborted because it said that fax services were already installed. I tried un-installing and then re-installing but it wasn't fooled by that ploy.

The Microsoft web site was no help. A web and Usenet search revealed nothing connected with SP2 but did come up with a file name for the driver. A search on my

computer using Agent Ransack found the file: the new version in the appropriate directories and the old version in the restore point directory. After three hours and feeling desperate I copied the old version of the file over the new SP2 versions. My computer fax is working again. In the meantime I had sent the letter using the traditional standalone machine that was sitting in the corner covered in dust.

Compared with some of the disasters that have befallen people, I got off lightly. Nevertheless, before I update the rest of our machines I am going to apply the same backup procedures I used with the laptop: a backup of all documents; a full image of programs and data on a separate removable hard disk; and a back up of the registry. All of which may seem rather like wearing a belt, braces and two pairs of trousers but I know what it feels like to be suddenly faced with the prospect of losing everything on one's hard disc (see "These things are sent to try us" , December 2001, Issue No. 7, http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/archives/2001/dec2001.shtml)

Gizmo of the month

Agent Ransack

http://www.mythicsoft.com/agentransack/

Agent Ransack is a free tool for finding files and information on your hard drive. It does what Windows Search **should** do but doesn't! I have never been able to work out what Windows Search actually looks at, and even when I ask it to search the whole C drive it ignores about 90 per cent of the files

With Agent Ransack you can search by file name or look for text inside files on any area of your hard drive. It supports "regular expressions" that allow complex rule based searches. Agent Ransack "does not consider any file too small or insignificant to examine" says the blurb and it is true. In fact, it sometimes goes overboard with the "containing text" option and picks up temporary files such as cookies and cached copies of web pages.

Agent Ransack displays the file names and the text it finds, and you can read or preview text documents. Agent Ransack is the

freeware 'lite' version of FileLocator Pro which costs US$ 24.95. FileLocator Pro's additional features include built in viewers for files such as PDF, HTML etc.

Requires: Win 9x/ME/NT/2000/XP/SP2/2003.

Meetings and Workshops

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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