



Tales from the Terminal Room October 2005, Issue No. 65

Editor: Karen Blakeman
Published by: RBA Information Services
ISSN 1467-338X

<http://www.rba.co.uk/tftr/>

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; 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.

Tales from the Terminal Room can be delivered via email as plain text or as a PDF with active links. You can join the distribution list by going to <http://www.rba.co.uk/tftr/> and filling in the form. You will be sent an email asking you to confirm that you want to be added to the list. TFTTR is also available as an RSS feed. The URL for the feed is <http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/tftr.xml>

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Search Tools

Google launches Blogsearch

Google is the first of the major web search tools to launch a dedicated Blog Search. It does not search the full text of the postings, only the RSS and Atom feeds generated by the blog. Older posts that were generated before Blog Search started crawling or are not in a current feed are not included. I have noticed that older postings have started to appear in my blogsearch alerts so I think Google is beginning to catch up and possibly be starting to index the text of the actual postings.

Google says that it covers "every blog that publishes a site feed (either RSS or Atom)." When I ran my test searches, it picked up several pages that are not blogs but do have RSS or Atom feeds. For many of us this is not an issue: I am often looking for feeds on a topic or industry sector and do not care whether they are generated by a blog or by some other means. There may be times, though, when one does want to limit a search to just blogs so one needs to bear this in mind.

The indexing is fast. Blog Search picked up one of my postings just 22 minutes after I had published it. That could have been pure luck or because I use Google's Blogger for my blog! Results can be sorted by date or relevance. The Advanced Search has the usual 'all the words', phrase, 'at least one of the words', and 'without the words'. Additional options include 'words in the post title', 'words in the blog title', 'at this URL', 'blogs and posts written by', limit by date and language. I have found the words in the blog title option extremely useful in tracking down the more informative and quality feeds on industry topics and sectors. You can also set up alerts. Go to the bottom of your results page and you can ask to have 10 or 100 results as an Atom or an RSS feed.

You can access Google Blog Search at <http://www.google.com/blogsearch> for the Google style interface, or at <http://search.blogger.com/> if you prefer the Blogger look.

Google Unsafe Search

<http://strix.org.uk/misc/adult.google/index.php>

This site is by no means the first of its kind, but the search is preconfigured so that you can check if Google is filtering out any of your site's pages as "unsafe" or because they contain adult content. It compares the first 100 results using the safe search filter and the first hundred without it. You can also run a similar check in Yahoo. I know I have strong views on certain issues but Google thinks that the item I wrote in my blog about Google Local is definitely unsafe. It also regards my contact information and feedback form as dodgy! Yahoo, on the other hand, considered the first hundred pages from my site as being entirely innocuous. Not sure whether I should be pleased or disappointed by that.

Exalead One:Desktop

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

Exalead is the latest to join the desktop search club with its preview launch of Exalead one:desktop. This has been tested for several months by a selected group of users (I was one of them), but the non-disclosure agreement forbade us to mention that the software even existed. I can't say that I have tested it exhaustively; I rarely need to use a desktop search program and Exalead's does not yet index Thunderbird email or Star/Open Office documents. Support for these applications is promised for later in the year.

If your documents are mostly Microsoft, Adobe, html or Wordperfect then Exalead one:desktop is worth considering for its unique advanced search options. As well as the standard phrase searching, OR and NOT commands there is a NEAR command which searches for words within 16 words of one another, a phonetic search, approximate spelling and pattern matching. You can also have word stemming switched on by default.

When you install the program, you can specify which directories and areas of your hard disk you want it to index and you can also control when it indexes. The results are displayed with preview thumbnails for some

of the formats, but you can switch this off if you prefer to view the results as text only. On the left hand side of the screen, there are options that enable you to narrow down your search by folder, author, date, size and document type. This will all be very familiar to users of the Exalead's web search. For web search Exalead is the default but you can set up shortcuts to other tools.

Overall, definitely worth a try, especially for the advanced search features.

Exalead revamps web search

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

Exalead has revamped its web search home page and rebranded the service as One Web Search. It has expanded its coverage to just over 2 billion pages but the search features remain essentially the same.

On the home page you can add shortcuts to your favourite sites or search engines and even set up shortcuts that automatically run your Exalead search in those search tools.

1. Run a search as normal in, say, Google and copy the full URL of the search that appears in the address box of your browser.
2. Go to the Exalead home page and click on 'add a shortcut'.
3. Give the shortcut a name, for example Google.
4. Paste the copied URL in the address box and replace your query with \$Q.

In Google your query will look something like:
<http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&q=peak+oil&btnG=Google+Search&meta=>

The Exalead shortcut is:

[http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&q=\\$Q&btnG=Google+Search&meta=](http://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&q=$Q&btnG=Google+Search&meta=)

For Yahoo:

<http://uk.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=fp-tab-web-t-1&ei=ISO-8859-1&p=peak+oil&meta=vc%3D>

becomes:

[http://uk.search.yahoo.com/search?Fr=fp-tab-web-t-1&ei=ISO-8859-1&p=\\$Q&meta=VC%3D](http://uk.search.yahoo.com/search?Fr=fp-tab-web-t-1&ei=ISO-8859-1&p=$Q&meta=VC%3D)

For Ask Jeeves:

<http://webt.uk.ask.com/web?q=peak+oil&page=1&o=0&qsrc=1&dm=all>

becomes:

[http://webt.uk.ask.com/web?q=\\$Q&page=1&o=0&qsrc=1&dm=all](http://webt.uk.ask.com/web?q=$Q&page=1&o=0&qsrc=1&dm=all)

Top Search Tips

At the end of the UKeiG advanced search workshop, Google and Beyond, the participants come up with a collective top search tips. These can be search tools, specific web sites or search techniques. This is what the group who attended the workshop on October 14th, 2005 came up with:

1. Use three or four different search engines for a comprehensive search, spend time getting to know how they work and discover their unique features.
2. Use file format options to narrow down your search. For example limit to ppt for presentations/conference papers, xls for tables of data, doc or pdf for industry or market reports. (Use the pull down menus in the Advanced Search screens of most search tools).
3. Use the synonym option in Google. Precede your terms with a tilde (~) and Google will look for synonyms of your terms.
4. Use <http://ranking.thumbshots.com/> to compare the first hundred results of two search engines (for example Yahoo vs Google, Teoma vs MSN). This will show the degree of overlap, or lack of it. Very useful when trying to convince a colleague or student that they should use more than one search tool.
5. Dogpile <http://www.dogpile.com/> – recently revamped meta search tool (runs your query in several search tools at once) that covers MSN, Yahoo, Google and Ask Jeeves. It also has a feature that enables you to display the results from the individual search engines side by side and highlights the unique results.

6. Try out Exalead <http://www.exalead.com/> for its phonetic and approximate spelling search (Advanced Search screen).
7. Increase the number of results displayed on your results page from the default to 100. (In most search tools, usually found under the preferences link.)
8. Increase the weighting of your most important search term by repeating it several times. For example 'beer market share France Belgium Czech' and 'beer market share France Belgium Czech Czech Czech' give different results. Works in Google, Yahoo and Exalead.
9. Check out the Advanced Search of your favourite search engine and find out how to use each of the features more effectively.
10. Trovando <http://www.trovando.it/> – an interface to dozens of search tools organized by type, for example web, images, news, blogs, reference. Type in your search just once and then click on the link to each search tool in turn. Quick way of running your search in several different types of engines.
11. Try “reference” tools such as Wikipedia, Answers.com, FindArticles, Scirus, Google Print. Use the Reference tab in Trovando <http://www.trovando.it/> for a list of resources.
12. Blogs aren't always nerdish! There are some good applications and there are good authoritative blogs and RSS feeds on a wide range of subjects. Search by using the RSS/XML file type option in the Advanced Search of Yahoo, the 'words in blog title' Advanced Search option in <http://www.google.com/blogsearch> , or look for the blogroll on a relevant blog that you already know and trust.

Top 10 Business Information Sites

At the end of each of our Business Information on the Internet workshops we ask the delegates to compile a "Top 10 Business Sites" list. The most recent course was held on October 6th in London and had a mix of people from commercial, academic and government information units.

Yet again we failed to narrow the list down to just 10 sites so we ended up with a round dozen, but three of them (lists of official company registries) were grouped under one entry.

The new Alacrawiki site came straight in at number one with agreement from all delegates that this is an excellent starting point for industry specific information. Europages and Kompass made yet another appearance and have been joined by Kellysearch in the directories category. Search tool Trovando is also a new entrant and was very popular with the workshop participants. Trovando was mentioned in the July/August issue of Tales from the Terminal Room: it enables you to quickly run your search in several web, blog, image and reference search tools one by one.

The full list is as follows:

1. Alacrawiki Spotlights- <http://www.alacrawiki.com/> - excellent evaluated, industry sector lists of free and priced quality sites.
2. Trovando - <http://www.trovando.it/> - enables you to quickly run your search in several web, blog, image and reference search tools one by one.
3. Lists of links to Official Company Registers. Three were covered: <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/registers.htm> , <http://www.hrasg.ch/eng/welt-e.htm> , and <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/links/introduction.shtml#reg>

4. Trade Association Forum - <http://www.taforum.org/> - good starting point for tracking down UK trade associations.
5. Europages - <http://www.europages.com/> - free directory of over 600,000 companies in 35 countries
6. Kompass - <http://www.kompass.com/> - database of 1.9m companies in 70 countries with excellent options for searching by sector and product.
7. Kellysearch - <http://www.kellysearch.com/> - searches 2 million companies from the UK, US, Europe, Australasia, Africa.
8. Fita - International Trade Leads, Import Export Information - <http://www.fita.org/> - good listings of business sources by country and industry under Really Useful Links.
9. Yahoo Finance and News - <http://www.yahoo.co.uk/> - with the web database now being so heavily publicised, the excellent Finance sector covering the major stock markets around the world and the News section are often forgotten. The Finance section also has a link to a service that can supply Annual Reports as PDFs or hard copy free of charge.
10. RBA Business Information on the Net <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/> annotated list of business resources by type.

Information Resources

Business Week Top 100 Global Brands Scoreboards

<http://bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2005/>
Business Week have released their 2005 league table of top 100 global brands. The table ranks 100 global brands that have a value greater than \$1 billion. The brands are

<http://www.rba.co.uk/tftr/archives/2005/oct2005.shtml>

selected according to two criteria: they have to be global in nature, deriving 20% or more of sales from outside their home country, and there also has to be publicly available marketing and financial data on which to base the valuation. The table also gives rankings for the years 2001 to 2004.

There is no change in the top 5: Coca-Cola, Microsoft, IBM, GE and Intel. Google makes a first appearance at number 38 sandwiched between Goldman Sachs and Kellogg's, and Yahoo is up two places at 58. Apple has also gone up two places to number 41. Amazon has gone down slightly from last year's 66 to 68 this year while eBay has risen 5 places to number 55.

Alacrawiki

<http://www.alacrawiki.com>

Alacra has launched Alacrawiki, a guide to business information companies, publishers and databases. The Alacra Industry Spotlights in particular are extremely useful in providing reviews and commentary on industry specific web sites and the Types of Content section lists resources under headings such as mergers and acquisitions, news, people and corporate governance.

There is also information on content aggregators, databases and the best business information blogs. Anyone can contribute and edit the pages apart from the Industry Spotlights, which are locked, but you have to create an account in order to do so. If you want to keep up with what's new at Alacra they also have a blog and news feed.

HM Revenue & Customs uktradeinfo: information on UK and International Trade

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

The very useful uktradeinfo site has had a makeover. First of all, it is no longer a HM Customs & Excise but is part of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC), which was formed by the merger of the UK Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise. The other major change is that all the information on the site is now free of charge although you do have to register to access some areas.

There is free trade data down to the eight

digit commodity code level. You can use the Interactive Data Tables and build up your own report or view the static tables, for example: Top 20 Products Monthly by SIC - Imports and Exports, Top 25 Trading Partners - Monthly - Imports and Exports, Top 30 Products Quarterly - Imports and Exports - Value and Net Mass. If you choose to use the interactive data tables, I strongly recommend that you download and view the Powerpoint demo first.

The Importers' Details section is a database giving details of UK based importers of products from outside of the EU. You can search on company name, product (text or commodity code numeric), county, postcode and year of transaction. There are also EU country profiles and historical exchange rate data for the UK by month going back to September 1999.

If you need to keep up to date with various issues relating to trade there is a free cross-government department email alert service, but no RSS feed. Just select from the list the departments that you want included in your alert.

Official Company Registers

<http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/registers.htm>

A new section on official company registers has been added to my Business Information on the Internet listings. I have listed official company registers that have web sites by continent and then country, and tried to give information on how much data is provided free of charge. This took several weeks to pull together and I would not be at all surprised if I missed sources or if some of my descriptions are now out of date or wrong. If you see any errors of commission or omission, please do let me know.

Enterprise Quest - Ideas and know-how for small business

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

Although this site is new to me, it has been around for about two years. This is the home of a free weekly bulletin called EnterQuest, published by Cobweb Information and aimed at UK small businesses. As well as tips and

ideas on running a small business EnterQuest also keeps you up to date with legal issues, offers IT tips (for example keyboard shortcuts for Windows and Word), and reviews web sites of interest to SMEs. You can read the bulletin on the web site or have it delivered to your email box. A pity there is no RSS feed at present.

Searching Questions

Looking for conference presentations

Question:

I am often asked to find meeting and conference presentations on a particular topic. I have moderate success using search terms such as conference, proceedings, presentation combined with keywords describing the subject but wondered if there was a quicker way of tracking them down?

Answer:

One way to narrow down your search is to use the filetype option that is supported by most of the major search engines. Use the Advanced Search screens, type in your search terms and from the file format list select the ppt or Powerpoint option. In some cases you can add the command filetype:ppt to the end of your search strategy.

Some presentations may be provided as pps (Powerpoint show) files. In Google, the advanced search menu only supports .ppt but you can use filetype:pps in your strategy. In MSN, incorporate filetype:ppt into your search and it automatically picks up pps as well as ppt files. The ppt option on the Yahoo advanced search screen also finds both .pps and .ppt files.

You should bear in mind that some presentations may be converted to PDF files so do not forget to repeat your searches and limit by that file type as well. And of course, many speakers now convert their Powerpoint slides to html before making them available.

These things are sent to try us!

The wrong kind of lines

I'm all for trying out alternatives to face-to-face meetings. Travelling for two hours to meet up with five or six people for an hour's discussion followed by a return journey of another two hours just does not make sense to me. Fortunately much of my work is with like-minded people and we conduct most of our business via email and telephone, and have started using telephone conferencing for group discussions. One such telephone conference was prearranged for a Tuesday afternoon starting at 2 pm.

At 1.35 pm I noticed that my Internet connection had seized up and the telephone light on the router had gone out. As this was a new piece of kit, I thought it was the hardware playing up. I went through the usual procedures: checked all the connections; unplugged the router, waited for 20 seconds, plugged the router back in; rebooted everything - twice. Then I thought I had better check the telephone line itself. Picked up the phone - no dial tone :-)

Then hubby, who was working downstairs and has his own line, shouted up to me "We haven't any lines".

"I know we haven't" I replied. "No dial tone and no Internet connection"

"No - we haven't any lines. Look outside the window at our junction box."

I did, and there they were - gone!! Then I spotted that none of my neighbours had any telephone lines either. Looking towards the end of the street I could see a large van parked next to the main telegraph pole and several BT engineers milling around. BT had taken down all the lines in our street. It was now 1.50 pm. I ran out of the house and asked the engineers what they were doing. OK - I demanded to know what the [expletive deleted] they thought they were [expletive deleted] doing and thanks for not bothering to warn us.

They explained that they were replacing the cabling and that we had been given notice.

Off we went into panto mode:

"Oh no we haven't"

"Oh yes you have"

"Oh no we haven't"

etc.

It was now 2.10 pm and the telephone conference would have started. Using my mobile in our area is out of the question because the signal is extremely erratic. I had to find some place where I could use it. Aha, I thought, the Travellers Rest at the top of the hill. It is usually quiet in the afternoon so perhaps I could settle down in a corner with a drink and join the conference. I should be so lucky. The signal there was not erratic, it was non-existent.

It was now 2.33 pm. I could at least use the pub's pay phone: out of order. I spoke nicely to the barman - "Could I use their telephone for just a minute to notify my colleagues of my predicament?". No. Some workmen had hacked through the cables and nothing was working.

It was 2.53 pm and the conference would be almost over. As I trundled back down the hill, something about all of this was bothering me. I went up to one of the engineers and pointed out that the lines had already been replaced a few months earlier on Easter Monday. Why were they doing it all over again?

His reply: they had used the wrong kind of cabling the first time around.

As one of my colleagues later commented, you just couldn't make it up.

P.S. BT's advance notice arrived three days after the event.

Gizmo of the Month

ScrapBook extension for Firefox

<https://addons.mozilla.org/extensions/moreinfo.php?id=427>

This extension for a Firefox is a must-have if you are a regular offline browser or if you want to keep copies of pages that you have used in researching a project. ScrapBook helps you save Web pages and manage your collection. You can save a single web page, a snippet of the page, or "save web site". You can add comments and edit the saved page, organise the collection in the same way as a Bookmarks tree, and search and filter the collection.

If I am going on a long train journey and know that Internet access is going to be erratic, I save pages and articles using Scrapbook so that I can browse them off line. If there is a printer friendly version of the page I save that: if not I use the Nuke Anything extension to remove any annoying elements. If I forget, there is always Scrapbook's DOM eraser that removes the clicked object from the page.

And finally....

I could not resist finishing this issue of TFFTTR with the following correspondence, with a few modifications, sent to me by a TFFTTR reader who is also a supplier of market research reports and forecasts.

From: Everest Hopeful
To: Whizzo Reports
Re: Football Forecasts Report

Dear sir

I am in need of football forecasts for drawn matches in the new season. I need any system on this football pools business. Or can I get the key system from the four main firms littlewoods, vernons, zettlers and Brittens? I will be grateful if you can assist me with one book, on how to forecast draw matches whether zero draw or score draw.

From: Whizzo Reports
To: Everest Hopeful
Re: Football Forecasts Report

Dear Mr Hopeful

I am sorry to say that the Keynote report on Football Clubs does not contain any details of how to forecast match draws. The section entitled "Forecasts" is concerned only with forecasting the future value of the market for football club financing. I can assure you that if this report did contain what you are looking for, then I would be writing this from my yacht in the Mediterranean.

Kind regards

Whizzo Reports

Well, as the saying goes, if you don't ask you don't get. And you never know. Perhaps one day...?

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Market Research on the Web

Organiser: Manchester Business School

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: MBS, Manchester

Date: Wednesday, 23rd November 2005

Course fee: £215 + VAT - BIS/BINN members. Others £250 + VAT.

URL: <http://www.mbs.ac.uk/bis-training>

Outline: 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. There will also be sessions on how to pull together information from a variety of resources to build up a picture of an industry sector.

Meeting: FOI: How are we doing?
Implications for e-information and the information professional.

Organiser: UKeIG

Presenters: Steve Wood, Tim Turner, Guy Daines

Venue: The John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester

Date: Wednesday, 23rd November

Course fee: UKeIG members: £130 + VAT (£152.75); others: £160 + VAT (£188)

URL:

<http://www.ukeig.org.uk/content/public/activities/meetings/23nov05foi.html>

Outline: Case studies and examples that illustrate in a practical way the progress that had been made during 2005 will be presented, followed by two sessions dealing with the e-information itself. How FOI impacts on the methods by which information and especially e-information is handled, and new opportunities for exploiting e-information will be described. Finally, the meeting will cover the role of the information professional. Where do information professionals, in whatever guise, fit in? Are those not formally trained information management now running FOI activities? Does it matter?

Presentation: Comparison of desktop tools (part of the Online Information 2005 Conference)

Organiser: Online Information 2005

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: Olympia, London

Date: Tuesday, 29th November, 13.45

Course fee: Part of the Online Information conference

URL:<http://www.online-information.co.uk/ol05/day1.html>

Presentation: Information Masterclass - Hints and tips from a search expert

Organiser: Online Information 2005

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: Olympia Grand Hall, London

Date: Tuesday, 29th November, 11.45

Course fee: Free seminar

URL:<http://www.online-information.co.uk/ol05/seminars.html>

Presentation: Information Masterclass - Web search tools you might have missed

Organiser: Online Information 2005

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: Olympia Grand Hall, London

Date: Thursday, 1st December, 11.00

Course fee: Free seminar

URL:<http://www.online-information.co.uk/ol05/seminars.html>

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