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; 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/tfttr/ 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/tfttr.xml
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Search Tools

Accoona 'loses' news
http://www.accoona.com/ or http://www.accoona.eu/

Accoona is a search engine that I regularly include in my workshops and training sessions, not so much for the web search but for the news section and the SuperTarget options. Yesterday, I was horrified to discover that News is no longer there. Instead of Web, Business and News there is just a single search box. Going through my feeds this morning, I see that Phil Bradley (http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2006/12/accoona_improve.html) has picked up on this as well but has explored a little further than I had. News is still there but you first have to do a search in the box on the home page. When the results page comes up, the three options reappear and you can then limit your search to web, business or news.

Why they have decided to increase the number of clicks I need to make to find the information I want beats me. They won't gain any fans by doing it and will no doubt lose those who already use it for news. One look at the home page and they will assume, as I did, that the news service is no more.

Yet more Google oddities

If Google is driving you mad with its erratic behaviour, take heart in that you are not the only one to suffer at the hands of this temperamental search engine. Greg Notess reports on yet more Google oddities in his blog (Super Clustering Google - http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/blog/2006/12/super_clustering_google.shtml)

Greg ran a search on powells books with his display preferences set to 100 per page. Google displayed only the first four of about 962,000. He then changed the number to be displayed to ten, and Google gave ten results. When he switched back to display 100, the number went up to 18. He then clicked on the message at the bottom of the results screen: "In order to show you the most relevant results, we have omitted some entries very similar to the 18 already displayed. If you like, you can repeat the search with the omitted results included." That gave an estimate of about 2,810,000 total hits and displayed a full 100 on his screen.

I tried the same search on Google UK and got a total number of hits of 2,290,000 but it would only display 319, but a lot more than Greg's 18. Clicking on the display omitted entries option reduced the number of total hits to 1,340,000. I should point out that the total number of hits that Google says it has found is generally a work of fiction. I have never found it to be reliable unless you have refined your search extensively and are getting numbers in the region of 50 or less. Even then, results can disappear and reappear at random.

I repeated the search in Google Canada, Germany and France and got totally different but equally bizarre results. Needless to say the results totally changed when I repeated the experiment 24 hours later!

DVYGUN Desktop Search
http://en.dvygun.com/

DVYGUN is a free desktop search tool that indexes documents, emails, music, videos etc. that are stored on your computer. It is a relatively small download at just over 1.6 MB and **very** quick at indexing and updating. In fact it is so quick and unobtrusive that I initially thought it was not working! Updates can be done on the fly but it uses so little in the way of resources that I never notice it in action.

As with all good desktop search tools, you can specify folders and types of files to index and even include removable storage devices. If you want to be able to index information on other computers on your network then you need to upgrade to the Enterprise edition. There is a charge for the Enterprise version depending on the number of documents to be indexed.

All the usual suspects as far as file formats are covered, as well as Open Document Formats, Thunderbird and The Bat! email. It does not yet support the new Office 2007 formats, for example docx, but then neither do any of the other desktop search tools I am currently retesting. The interface may seem spartan compared to other tools but it does the job and there are a number of advanced search features and sorting options available.

A summary of the main features can be found on the UKeiG wiki at
http://ukeig.xwiki.com/xwiki/bin/view/Main/DVYGUN

Top 10 Search Tips

Another advanced search strategies course successfully completed at Manchester Business School with the usual eclectic mix of participants, and a new top 10 tips and tricks at the end of the day. It is interesting that RSS feeds get a mention this time around, and it does seem that more people are starting to use them for news and alerts.

1. Trovando - http://www.trovando.it/. Enables you to type in your search strategy just once and run it across dozens of search tools one by one. Tools are grouped by type, for example web, blogs, audio/video.

2. Remember that each search engine is different. Each has unique search features, has different coverage and sorts your results in a different way.

3. Seek out evaluated subject listings and specialist tools for subjects or industries that are new to you. For example Intute (http://www.intute.ac.uk/), TechXtra (http://www.techxtra.ac.uk/), Alacrawiki (http://www.alacrawiki.com/).

4. AlltheWeb Livesearch - http://livesearch.alltheweb.com/. Starts displaying results as you type in your search so that you can quickly see when you start to go wrong. It also displays related and alternative search strategies that can help you if you are new to the subject area.

5. Wayback Machine - http://www.archive.org/. For tracking down copies of pages or documents that have disappeared from the original web site. Type in the address of the web site or the full URL of the document, if you know it. Note: this is not guaranteed but worth a try for older documents that are unlikely to be in the search engine caches.

6. RSS feeds. More efficient than email for monitoring topics and managing search alerts. IE 7 and Outlook 2007 can both read RSS. If you would prefer to try a web based reader try Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com/), Newsgator (http://www.newsgator.com/) or Google Reader (http://www.google.com/reader)

7. Keep up to date with who is best at which type of search. For example image search, blogs and feeds. Obviously, this can quickly change so use RSS feeds to monitor announcements and blogs that assess and evaluate what the search engines are doing.

8. Make the most of the Advanced Search options to narrow down your search, for example filetype or format, site search (can be used to search individual sites, or types of site such as academic or government sites).

9. Search Engine Showdown - http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/. Excellent site from Greg Notess with summaries of the major search engines, unique features and news on what they are up to.

10. You are not going mad! Pages do disappear without trace and Google does do strange things. Try another search engine or a totally different approach. Above all, trust in your abilities.

Using IE 7 to read RSS

IE 7 is now being rolled out as part of the Windows Update service. It has a built in RSS reader so if you have never tried RSS feeds before, this is your chance to give them a try. It is fairly straightforward to use when you know which buttons to click on but I confess that I had to read the help file before I could work out how to do it. Here are some brief instructions on what to do.

1. When you find a page with a link to an RSS you want to read, click on the link to the feed. The feed will then be displayed but unlike previous versions of IE the text will probably be readable in IE 7. If you want to receive updates, though, along with other feeds you will need to add the link to your list of feeds in favorites.

2. With the feed displayed, click on free plus sign/star icon in the upper left hand area of the browser toolbar. From the pull down menu, select Subscribe to this Feed.
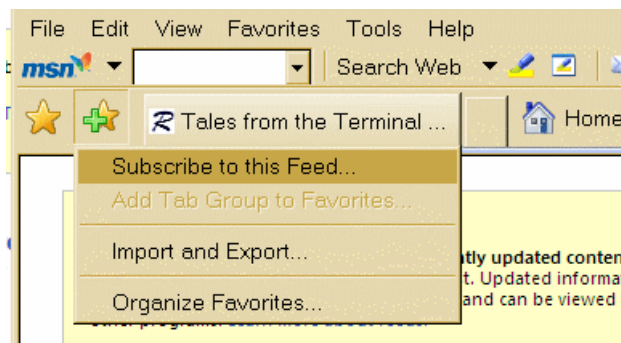

(This menu also gives you an option to Import an existing list of feeds as an OPML file)

3. You can then select the folder in which store the feed or create a new folder.
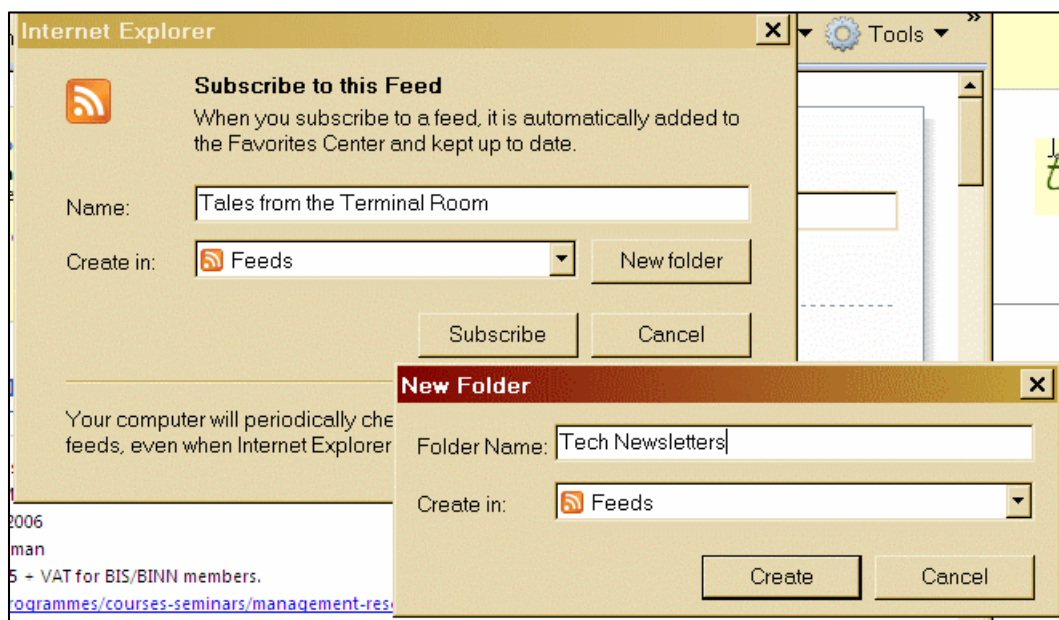
4. You can set up a default frequency of update for all of your feeds under Tools, Internet Options, Content, Feed Settings.

5. To change the properties of an individual feed, display the feed in your browser and click on 'View feed properties' in the upper right hand area of the screen. You can then change the frequency of update and the number of items to be kept in the archive.

6. To view your list of feeds click on the Favorites Center star icon in the upper left hand area of the toolbar and click on Feeds.
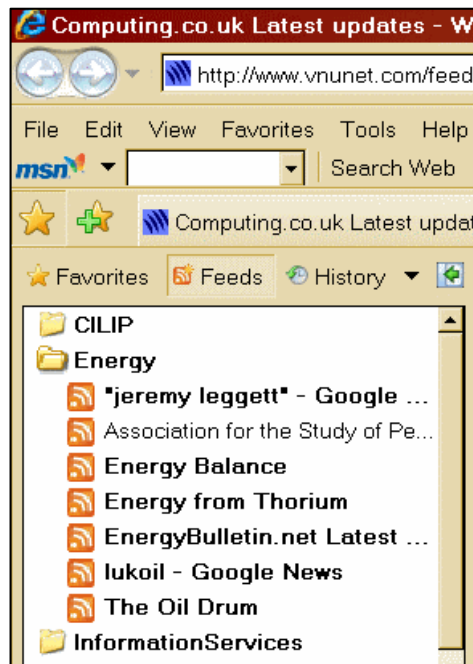
Is it any good?

I give it 5 out of 10, but I think that is being generous. The first issue I have is that you cannot view all of your feeds, or feeds in a selected folder, mixed up together. I view some of my feeds individually, but I like to view some of my folders – for example UK News – all in one go. In IE 7 You have to view each feed separately.

A second failing is that the favicons associated with a feed are not displayed (or perhaps I have missed a setting?). This may seem a minor point, but if you have a large number of feeds the icon next to the feed title makes it much easier to quickly identify individual feeds.

For me, though, the major drawback of IE7 as an RSS reader is that there are no filters or rules that I can apply to all of my feeds so that incoming items are searched for keywords such as people's names, products, companies, places. In Omea, my current PC based reader, I can then specify that the relevant items are highlighted in some way or copied to a folder, and even ask for a desktop alert and/or sound alert. So no cigar for IE 7 on this front.

Finally, I have not been able to find a way of easily selecting individual items from more than one feed for forwarding to a friend or colleague. Again, I may have missed some crucial settings in the set up so please do correct me if I am wrong on this.

There are several other missing features that I have come to regard as essential in an RSS reader, but the four outlined above are more than enough to convince me that Omea (http://www.jetbrains.com/omea/reader/) is still the one for me. For those who are new to RSS, though, IE 7 provides an easy introduction to the technology and is adequate for monitoring a handful of feeds. If after trying it out you decide you **do** need a program with more feed management options you can always export your list of feeds as an OPML file and import it into your next reader.

Information Resources

LibraryThing Unsuggester

http://www.librarything.com/unsuggester/

Fed up with reading the same type of book or want to try a completely different genre? Then head straight for LibraryThing Unsuggester. I came across this in Tom Roper's Blog (http://tomroper.typepad.com/tr/2006/11/librarything_un.html). According to LibraryThing Unsuggester it "takes 'people who like this also like that' and turns it on its head. It analyzes the seven million books LibraryThing members have recorded as owned or read, and comes back with books least likely to share a library with the book you suggest."

I was very impressed with the unsuggestions for the Seven Pillar's of Wisdom: Confessions of a Shopaholic, Sushi for Beginners, and the Harry Potter paperback boxed set. You can't get much different than that! I was rather disappointed, though, with the first two on the alternative list for The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. That is until I discovered that number one (America: a Citizens Guide to Democracy Inaction) is tagged as humour and the number two (Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood) is classed as chick lit. Ideal for helping you choose the perfect Christmas gift for that oh-so difficult to please relative :-)

Google Launches Patents Search

http://www.google.com/patents

The title of this item really should read "Google launches search of some US patents". Google's service only searches the 7 million patents granted by the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). I am sorry if this sounds tedious and boring to a lot of you, but those of us outside of the US are fed up with Google announcing services that imply they are world-wide when they are not. There is also the issue that the database Google uses for this does NOT, as Gary Price has pointed out (see below), include pre-grant published applications that are published before a US patent is or is not awarded.

Searching patents databases requires a knowledge of the legislation in each country, the terminology used in patents, and the best databases and sources of information (most of them priced, I'm afraid). What is very worrying about Google's patent search is that many budding inventors and entrepreneurs around the world may think that Google is searching and finding everything that is relevant when it isn't.

If you just want to track down a copy of a known US patent, then this is fine - well, actually, I would go direct to the USPTO (http://www.uspto.gov/) rather than use Google. If your search is business-critical and you have to know if anyone, anywhere in the world has already invented, for example, an energy generating machine based on cat-purr power then hire a patent search specialist!

More detailed reviews of Google's patent search are available at the following

Greg Notess - Google Launches Patents Database
http://www.searchengineshowdown.com/blog/2006/12/google_launches_patents_databa_1.shtml

Gary Price's Resource Shelf http://www.resourceshelf.com/2006/12/14/briefs-2-skype-version-30-released-for-windows-new-features-added-to-birds-eye-imagery-from-msn/

Search Engine Land - http://searchengineland.com/061213-200005.php

Gizmo of the Month

Rapid Feeds

http://www.rapidfeeds.com/

I am often asked how to display an RSS feed on a web page. Many news sites and services provide the necessary code, usually in the form of Javascript, that you can insert into your page for example the BBC, Moreover. There are also many third party services that will do the same, one of which is Rapid Feeds. Simply sign up for an account and type in the URL of the feed. You can then change the style and colour, number of items to be displayed, and whether or not to display a description of each item. Rapid Feeds can generate code in PHP, ASP, Javascript and iFrames.

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Advanced Internet Search Strategies
Organiser: Manchester Business School, UK
Venue: Eddie Davies Library, Manchester Business School
Date: Wednesday 25th April 2007, 9.30 – 16.30
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Course fee: BIS/BINN members £215 + VAT; others £250 + VAT
URL: http://www.mbs.ac.uk/programmes/courses-seminars/management-research.htm
Outline: With the major search engines claiming coverage of up to and over 20 billion web pages in their databases, it is becoming increasingly difficult to locate relevant information. Google is not the only search tool and the competition is hotting up. This workshop looks at recent developments at Google and the alternatives, especially the new kids on the block. Delegates will have ample opportunity to test out advanced search techniques and to compare different search engines. There will also be sessions on blogs and RSS feeds, and help on tracking down audio, video and podcasts of news broadcasts and interviews. 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.

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