



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, and November and December, which are published as single issues. 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

Exalead enhances NEAR command

[Exalead](#) has enhanced its NEAR command by allowing searchers to specify how close they want their search terms to be to one another. By default, NEAR looks for your terms within 16 words of one another in the order specified. You can now specify the maximum number of words that can separate your terms by using NEAR/n.

For example:

climate NEAR/2 change

finds climate followed by change but separated by up to 2 words.

climate NEAR/5 change

finds your terms separated by up to 5 words.

It is interesting that Exalead is resurrecting some of the search options that used to be standard but have been dropped by most of the major search engines. AltaVista used to have a NEAR command but this disappeared soon after it was bought by Yahoo.

April 1st Press Releases

Google maintained its tradition of launching “innovative” services on April 1st by releasing Google Romance (beta) <http://www.google.com/romance/>. Google Romance, they said, is a place where you can post all types of romantic information and, using their Soulmate Search™, get back search results that could, in theory, include the love of your life. They will then send you both on a Contextual Date, which they will pay for while delivering to you relevant ads.

I still think that Pigeon Rank (<http://www.google.com/technology/pigeonrank.html>) is by far their best April 1st product, mainly because the quality of some of the search results that I get can be easily explained by Pigeon Rank!

For me, though, Ask.com's major April 1st press release was by far the best, announcing a **gamma-test** service called RhymeRank:

RhymeRank, an innovative search technology capable of producing related search results that rhyme with a searcher's original query. The new product is located on the right-hand side of the Ask search results page, under the heading, "Rhyme Your Search."

"This will go down as the day the momentum in the search wars shifted to Ask.com," said Jim Lanzone, General Manager of Ask U.S. "When combined with our site's already powerful "Narrow Your Search" and "Expand Your Search" capabilities, "Rhyme Your Search" sets Ask.com apart with the unprecedented ability to suggest phat new ideas for your search."

RhymeRank was developed at a top-secret laboratory near Ask's headquarters in Oakland, California. It is based upon the educational theory that people commit information to memory more effectively when it is phonetically consistent. Understanding this, Ask hired dozens of experts to develop algorithms capable of producing the best and most irrelevant rhymes.

For example, for the query, "Weight Watchers® Rewards", Ask.com's RhymeRank will suggest the following alternative searches:

mongolian hordes
the history of fords
pictures of fjords
maternity wards
create free message boards
names of drug lords
toward or towards
chart of guitar cords
bill cosby awards
roman legions swords

"Web 3.0 is clearly upon us," noted John Battelle, author of *The Search*, and one of the world's leading experts on the search industry. "RhymeRank smartly builds upon the recent relaunch of Ask.com. This is a BIG DEAL and is the kind of innovation that demands Ask's rivals stand up and take notice. Or to sit on the sidelines in the position of the lotus."

"Aspiring rappers and poets are a huge, untapped market," said lead engineer Keith Hogan.

Nice one!

Hakia Search engine Beta

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

"Search For Meaning" says hakia's web site. "hakia is building the Web's first "meaning-based" search engine, one that will bring answers and meaningful results to questions on any topic". And then "hakia deploys fuzzy logic (approximate reasoning) methods to allow flexibility so that the Ontological Semantics solution becomes feasible in a Web search application with stringent constraints." That would normally be enough to make me run a mile and avoid it like the plague, but this new search engine had been recommended to me by Alan Pritchard, a subscriber to TFFTR and fellow Member and Fellow of CILIP (Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals). Alan assured me that it found material he had not seen before and was worth investigating.

My first standard test search on 'gin vodka sales UK' hit the jackpot. Highlighted at the top of the screen and above the list of results it said "Great Question :-)", followed by some figures and a link to the UK Gin and Vodka Association (yes, it really does exist). To be honest, though, any half decent search engine should be able to crack that one. On 'why is grass green' it completely lost the plot, but my first mistyped 'what is grass green' came up with the goods. Very odd. Other test searches such as 'Hubbert peak oil' and 'car ownership UK' performed well, and hakia did indeed come up with some high quality sites in the top 10-20 that were not in the top results of the other mainstream engines.

I have forced myself to use hakia alongside Google, Yahoo, Ask and Exalead for what I call real-life searches. It is a bit erratic at times but at others it comes up with some real gems. I was looking for current headline inflation rates in the UK compared with the underlying inflation rate. Not only did hakia find the official figures for me but it also offered sites explaining the different indices and the background to the changes over the years.

Definitely one to try and to watch for further developments.

Top Search Tips from Derbyshire

I recently ran an in-house workshop in Derbyshire on advanced search strategies. As usual, the group was asked to come up with a list of Top Tips & Sites. This is it:

1. BUBL <http://bubl.ac.uk/> A good starting point for evaluated sites and portals covering a wide range of subjects and industry sectors.

2. FITA <http://www.fita.org/>. Links to sources of information on trade, export/import, business and companies worldwide.
3. Trovando <http://www.trovando.it/>. Enables you enter your search strategy once and run it in different types of search tools one by one for example web, images, news, blogs, audio, video.
4. Narrow down your search by limiting by filetype for example xls for tables of statistics in spreadsheet format, ppt for presentations on a subject, PDF for official reports or long documents. Available in most of the major search tools.
5. Use <http://ranking.thumbshots.com/> to compare the overlap - or lack of it - in the first 100 results from pairs of search engines.
6. Blogs and blogging are worth exploring both as sources of information and as a means of disseminating information and current awareness.
7. BvD free directory <http://www.bvdep.com/> for a list of companies by sector and/or country or for tracking down the location of a company and its subsidiaries.
8. Make use of the lesser known features of Google: synonym search, define:, numeric range search
9. RSS feeds - a technology to be investigated as a means of keeping up to date with events and for SDI (Selective Dissemination of Information).
10. Official Company Registers for information on SMEs (Small & Medium-sized Enterprises).

Three lists for locating registers on the web:

Company registration around the world <http://www.hrasg.ch/eng/welt-e.htm>

World-wide Registries <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/links/introduction.shtml#reg>

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

Special Cuts

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

Special Cuts is a specialist media monitoring and press cutting service that covers specialist 'e' and print journals in the government, library/information management and academic sectors. Cuttings can be supplied as emailed pdfs or hard copy. Clients include Eduserv, Emerald Group Publishing, JISC, Tribal Technology. For details of the service contact info@specialcuts.co.uk.

Information Resources

Windows Academic Search

<http://academic.live.com/>

Microsoft have launched Windows Live Academic (beta), a potential competitor to Google Scholar. It covers peer reviewed articles on computer science, physics, electrical engineering and related subjects and boasts more than 6 million records from approximately 4300 journals and 2000 conferences. The initial version is limited to computer science, electrical engineering and physics from scholarly societies, but content from other subject areas are promised. Unlike Google, Microsoft does provide a source list at <http://academic.live.com/journals>

This service is very much "beta" and I suspect that Microsoft is putting down their marker to say "Google are not the only ones doing this". Gary Price has published an excellent overview of the service together with comments at <http://www.resourceshelf.com/2006/04/microsoft-launches-academic-search.html>

I like the sort options (relevance, date - newest and oldest, author, journal and conference) but search does not reflect this structure. Unless I have missed something, the only option that I can see is keyword. When I am searching this type of literature I often want limit my search by author. I may also want to limit the search by date. None of these options are currently available. I do like the way the results are presented, though. The left hand side of the screen lists your results. When you move your mouse over one of the results the right hand side of the screen displays title, abstract, author(s) and the bibliographic details.

Although the search results and bibliographic details are free, you must either have a subscription to the journal or pay on a per-article basis to access the full text via the publishers web site.

This is a beta service but there is no feedback option on the search or results pages. It is only on the FAQ page that they give you an email address that you can use for comments- wlasinfo@microsoft.com.

I sincerely hope they don't give up on it half way through as they seem to have done with MSN Search. The feedback I have had from participants of my advanced search workshops, once they've tried it and compared it with the rest of the serious competition, is "Must try harder". It will be interesting to see how this service develops.

Corporate Blogging

As interest in corporate and business blogging increases, the number of listings of these types of blogs also increases. The Fortune 500 Business Blogging Wiki at <http://www.eu.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi> is a good starting point and lists active public blogs by company employees about the company and/or its products. According to the web site authors, Chris Anderson (Wired Magazine) and Ross Mayfield (Socialtext), only 27 (5.4%) of the Fortune 500 are actively blogging. Not surprisingly the majority are in the IT sector but notable exceptions are General Electric, General Motors, and MacDonald's who run a Corporate Responsibility Blog. An alternative listing together with comments on updates and new blogs is at Fortune 500 Blogs (<http://www.fortune500blogs.com/>)

The Fortune 500 covers US companies only but there is a link from the Socialtext bizblogs page to a handful of Global 1000 blogs at http://www.eu.socialtext.net/bizblogs/index.cgi?global_1_000_business_blogging and one to a list of European corporate blogs at <http://www.corporateblogging.info/europe/>. Unfortunately, the latter will no longer be updated after April 2006 but for the time being it is still a useful list.

Another excellent starting point for corporate blogging is the NewPR Wiki at <http://www.thenewpr.com/wiki/pmwiki.php>, which has lists of CEO blogs by country, corporate blogs, product blogs and and business podcasts. There are also sections on blogging policies, legal challenges and articles on business blogging.

Alacra Store Upgrades <http://www.alacrastore.com/>

Alacra has upgraded its Alacra Store interface with AJAX. So what is AJAX? The acronym stands for **A**synchronous **J**avaScript **A**nd **X**ML and it is a technique for creating interactive web applications. According to Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AJAX>):

"The intent is to make web pages feel more responsive by exchanging small amounts of data with the server behind the scenes, so that the entire Web page does not have to be reloaded each time the user makes a change. This is meant to increase the Web page's interactivity, speed, and usability."

For me, the new Alacra interface is faster and slicker, and a significant improvement. Alacra Store has also been adding resources, previously only available via its annual subscription service, and all search results now display the keyword in context (KWIC). The KWIC feature allows users to see the frequency and context in which search terms appear in the relevant documents.

Free information is listed at the top of the results screen, but you may find that some of the links take you to a screen that lists subscription services. Nevertheless, for public companies the free snapshots provide excellent summaries.

For those of you who have not yet tried Alacra Store, this is a pay-as-you-go version of Alacra's business information subscription service. A list of publishers and information providers is at available on the site at <http://tinyurl.com/qt6gl>. I initially reviewed Alacra Store in the July/August 2005 Tales from the Terminal Room (<http://www.rba.co.uk/tftr/archives/2005/jul2005.shtml>). I am pleased to see that more resources are continually being added but still feel that the news articles are overpriced (now USD 10 an article). I also see that Bun & Bradstreet reports are now available, but at USD 288 they are grossly overpriced if you are looking at private companies. This is not the fault of Alacra: I have seen the same reports at the same price offered via other services, but in my experience they do not offer any information that is not available from other providers at a lower and more reasonable price.

If you are exploring industry sectors, try out the links at the bottom of the web pages to the public and private company indexes. These are sorted by industry sector and are a quick and easy way of identifying the major companies that are active in a particular sector. There is, though, a problem with the way that they are indexed. I was initially surprised that I could not find the Russian company Gazprom, especially as a keyword search found numerous documents. I then realised that the full name of the company is OAO Gazprom and that it is listed under O and not G. A little more work on the company index is needed, I think, to take into account that many end users will not always know the full legal name of a company.

Overall, highly recommended for anyone requiring pay as you go access to business information.

Search tools for cheap flights

Following my blog posting on low cost flight engine Dohop (<http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/2006/01/dohop-low-cost-flight-search-engine.html>) I received a comment suggesting I also look at <http://www.skyscanner.net/> and <http://www.momondo.com/>. I was disappointed with Skyscanner as it did not cover Heathrow when I did a search for return flights from London to Prague and did not cover the full range of airline. Momondo was much better. As the poster says, it does not have a lot of fancy functions but it does seem to search the lowest fares between European cities. For my own flight requirements, Dohop (<http://www.dohop.com/>) is still the best of the three, but I always double check the options available by going direct to the airline's own web site.

Exportis 2006 Importers Directories

<http://www.exportis.freeuk.com/>

Exportis have announced the publication of their 2006 directories. The International Directory of Importers lists major importers and distributors in 160 countries and contains over 150,000 entries for importing firms in Europe, Asia/Pacific, North America, South/Central America, Middle East and Africa. Detailed company information includes telephone and fax numbers, e-mail and web address, contact person, year established and number of employees. The Importers Directory is in nine volumes and each of the six geographical areas can be purchased separately.

The International Directory of Agents, Distributors & Wholesalers is organized by country, company and product. The information includes company name and address; telephone/fax numbers; email and web address; contact person; company type; number of employees; year the business was established; bank reference; list of products handled.

Searching Questions

Lists of UK companies by location and turnover

Question:

I work for a head hunting agency and am trying to identify companies in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Basingstoke with a turnover of £50 million or more. I have spent ages trying to find sites that can provide me with a list of companies that meet my criteria and basic contact information on those companies in that region. Can you suggest where I should be looking or where I can purchase this sort of information at a reasonable cost? Ideally I would like to contact the person responsible for Human Resources in these companies.

Answer:

The best sources for this type of information are databases aimed at direct marketing. I have a list of them on my web site at <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/marketing.htm>. I generally use the one at the top of the list Marketing File (<http://www.marketingfile.com/>) because it has the widest selection of database/lists and if you use more than one list you can deduplicate your results against previous purchases. There are also options to save your searches. All of the the lists that I have used on this site allow you to select companies based on geographic location (postcode, town, county) and the majority on size or turnover. I would try out searches on a few likely lists before actually buying any data and compare the number of results that you get from each. Those with the largest number of results are not necessarily the best bet if you just want a list of companies as they will probably have several entries for one company (Marketing Director, Sales, HR etc). Marketing File does have a list of UK company Human Resources contacts.

When you are doing your search, run the one on the town (Basingstoke) separately. If you include it in the same search as the counties, Marketing File will combine them using AND rather than OR and you will get 0 results.

It might be worth "testing" the data if you get a large number of results by just buying the first 50 or 100. When you have decided to purchase the data and you arrive at the first pricing screen, **all** the data items will be ticked. If you just want a mailing list you will not want all of them so untick the unnecessary ones and click on the Update Price button.

Meetings and Workshops

Meeting: Electronic Information Risk Management

Organiser: UKeiG

Presenter: Dr Rita Esen

Venue: CILIP, 7 Ridgmount Street, London, WC1E 7AE

Date: Tuesday 16th May 2006, 10.00 – 16.30

Course fee: UKeiG members £130 + VAT (£152.75); others £160 + VAT (£188.00).

URL: http://www.ukeig.org.uk/training/may06/einfo_riskman.html

Outline: Today's networked economy has changed the way organisations operate as they are now faced with the challenges of using electronic information to fulfil their business goals. Electronic Information Risk Management consists of the use of best practice to collect, organise, use, store, share, provide access to and dispose of electronic information. Every organisation is now required to ensure that the use of electronic information and e-systems comply with legal, regulatory and best practice requirements. This training course will provide a sound understanding of electronic information risks and how to manage them. It will be a combination of presentations, group tasks, discussions of best practice and practical problem solving sessions. A practical case study will be used to highlight typical areas of e-information risks.

Workshop: Making Websites Accessible

Organiser: UKeiG

Presenter: Nigel Ford, Peter Holdridge

Venue: Department of Information Studies, University of Sheffield

Date: Wednesday, 24th May 2006, 9.45 - 16.30

Course fee: UKeiG members £150 + VAT (£176.25); others £180 + VAT (£211.50)

URL: http://www.ukeig.org.uk/training/2006_05_24_accessiblesites.html

Outline: It is now a legal requirement to ensure that Websites are designed in such a way as to make them accessible to people with a range of disabilities. In the UK, the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), stipulates that websites must be accessible to blind and disabled users. This is a one-day "hands on" practical course designed to teach you how to create Web pages and Websites that are accessible to people with a range of disabilities. You will learn how to validate pages that you create in relation to acknowledged international standards, and how to kite mark your Web pages according to A, AA or AAA international accessibility standards. You will become familiar with techniques and software that provides automatic checking of your Web pages for accessibility, and will learn how to keep up to date with future accessibility developments.

Workshop: Mysteries of RSS and Blogs Explained

Organiser: Manchester Business School

Presenter: Karen Blakeman

Venue: Eddie Davies Library, Manchester Business School

Date: Wednesday, 7th June 2006, 10.00 – 17.00

Course fee: £250; £215 for BIS/BINN members

URL: <http://www.mbs.ac.uk/programmes/courses-seminars/management-research.htm>

Outline: RSS and blogs are the latest "buzz" technologies, but can they be of real benefit in managing information or is it just hype? Whether you plan to use these new technologies purely as information sources, or intend using them as part of your information delivery strategy, this workshop will guide you through the jargon and demonstrate why you should seriously consider using them. It will look at how they can be used to manage projects, provide users with current awareness, generate newsletters, and promote your expertise to colleagues, users and clients. There will also be a session on wikis. During the practical exercises you will be able to experiment with setting up your own personal alerts service using RSS, start a blog, and learn how to contribute to a wiki. The techniques and approaches described in this workshop can be applied to all subject areas.

Meeting: Desktop Tools - managing the flight deck

Organiser: UKeiG

Venue: Bloomsbury Suite, Brunei Gallery, School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG

Date: Wednesday 14th June 2006, 9.15– 16.30

Course fee: UKeiG members £80 + VAT (£94.00); others £100 + VAT (£117.50)

URL: http://www.ukeig.org.uk/training/june06/desktop_search.html

Outline: Numerous desktop search solutions tease us with the promise that they can help to organise and find information on the desktop PC as well as across the corporate network. This meeting will look at some developments in desktop searching and some of the tools that are available and will give you the opportunity to share your experience of such tools. It will be a practical and informative day that will help improve your personal information management skills and enable you to lay your hands, quickly and efficiently, on that long lost file that you ferretted away for digital posterity way back in...

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