Tales from the Terminal Room
May 2006, Issue No. 70

Editor: Karen Blakeman
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, 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/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 talking search bar

http://www.accoona.com/

Accoona have released a talking toolbar for Internet Explorer. As well searching the web and news sources via the Accoona web site, the toolbar converts any highlighted text on a web page into speech. The voice (Heather) is very life like and has so far coped very well with most things I have thrown at it, including acronyms such as CILIP, Aslib and UKeiG. I aimed it at the UKeiG management committee contact list and it did very well until it read our training coordinator Shaida Dorabjee's details. The toolbar uses artificial intelligence, as does the search engine itself, to try and put words and abbreviations into context. In this case it decided that the SD of 'SD Information Services' stood for South Dakota! Whoops. It also had a few problems with the pronunciation of my address - Caversham, Berkshire - but then many humans get those wrong so I am not going to complain too much about that.

The "talking" part of the toolbar, which is an optional plug-in, was developed in collaboration with The China Daily Information Company (CDIC). CDIC says that it will help Chinese users, particularly students, advance their knowledge of spoken English through the Web but it obviously will help any foreign language students who are learning English and also people with a visual impairment.

The toolbar requires Microsoft Windows NT/ME/2000/XP and Microsoft Internet Explorer 6.0+ . There have been complaints that it is classed as spyware by some privacy tools. I suspect that is because of the way it is capturing text on the screen for conversion to speech. I have a similar problem with my Pawsense program, which stops my cat messing up everything on my computer every time she sits on the keyboard. With Pawsense, it is the keystroke logging function that causes the mis-identification. Pawsense is certainly not a threat and I do not believe the Accoona toolbar is either.

With respect to installation, there have been reports of not being unable to un-install it. That was not a problem for me - in fact I had the opposite experience. The installation repeatedly told me I did not have admin rights, even though I was logged in as the administrator. I eventually solved it by unticking the option to have Accoona as my default search engine.

This is an interesting tool but not one that I am likely to use that often. Although I am a great fan of Accoona News, the toolbar is only available for Internet Explorer and I use Firefox. Nevertheless, I shall be watching this one to see how it develops.

Pilot subject-based cross-repository search tool

I recently received this announcement from Roddy Macleod at Heriot-Watt University.

A Pilot service http://www.engineering.ac.uk providing subject resource discovery across a variety of digital repositories of interest to the engineering learning and research communities has been released by the PerX Project. Although the target repositories included in the Pilot are relevant to engineering, the cross-searching methods and interface used, plus the range of repository types included, should be of interest to many as a demonstrator of one method of resource discovery across multiple digital repositories.

Twenty-eight repositories are currently cross-searched by the Pilot and more will be added to the Pilot as they are identified and configured.

The Pilot's Basic Search interface http://www.engineering.ac.uk/index.html?action=basic and Advanced Search interface http://www.engineering.ac.uk/index.html?action=advanced enable cross-searching of the repositories and filtering by resource type: articles, theses and dissertations, technical reports, books, learning and teaching resources, key websites, industry

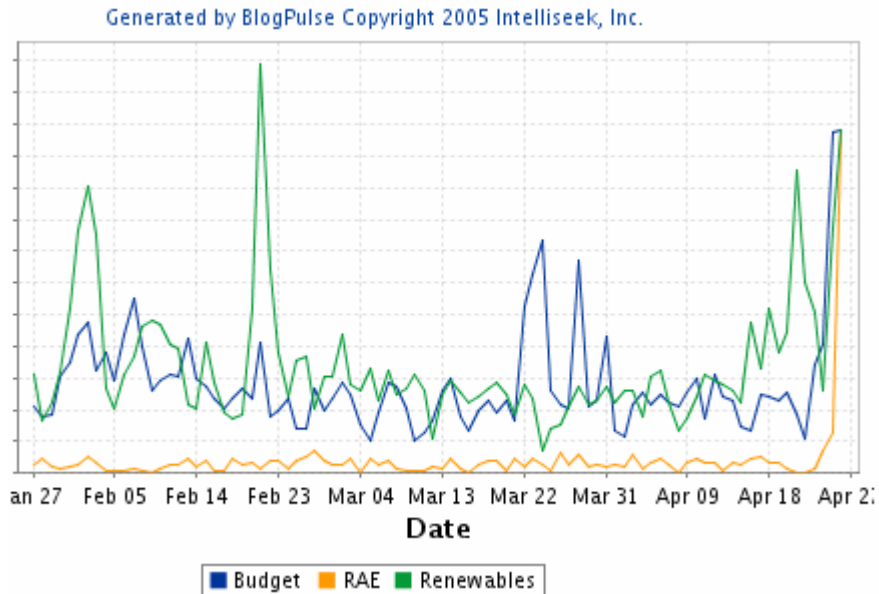news and new job announcements. Overall, more than 1.5 million resources are cross-searched by the Pilot.

Access to the full text of items found is available from many of the repositories. In a few cases, the full items consist of details of books, articles, learning objects or websites, and for others the full text may be available to subscribing institutions or by pay-per-view.

An important purpose of the PerX pilot is to help scope a possible future cross-search service. With this in mind, feedback on the Pilot would be much appreciated. A 60 second survey is available at: http://www.engineering.ac.uk/index.html?action=quest and those providing feedback will be entered into a draw to win £100 of Amazon vouchers.

Top search tips

I ran another Advanced Search Strategies workshop on April 26th. This time it was organised and hosted by Manchester Business School. As usual the participants were asked at the end of the day to come up with their own list of top tips and tools. There were no real surprises in the list, although two RSS/Blog tools were mentioned this time around highlighting the increased interest in these technologies. Wikipedia was popular despite some of the bad press it has been receiving, and the new Accoona News SuperTarget makes its first appearance in the list.

1. There are other search tools. Alternative search engines to Google such as Yahoo, Ask, and Exalead sort your results in different ways and have unique search features. Try evaluated subject listings such as BUBL (http://www.bubl.ac.uk/) , EEVL (http://www.eevl.ac.uk/), Alacrawiki (http://www.alacrawiki.com/) for quality information and overviews on industries and subjects.

2. Use the domain/site search options to search for types of sites or to search just one site. For example .gov.au for Australian government sites, .edu for US academic pages, statistics.gov.uk for UK official statistics. Ideal for those massive sites that have dire navigation menus and in-site search, or for tracking down lost documents within a site. Available in Google, Yahoo, Exalead and Ask.

3. Repeat the most important term or terms several times in your search strategy to change the order in which documents are ranked. For example 'beer market share belgium czech' and 'beer market share belgium czech czech czech' give different results. Works in Google, Yahoo and Exalead.

4. Use synonyms in your search. Use the OR command to search for your own alternative terms, the ~ before a term in Google to use Google's synonym search, or see what terms and strategies search engines such as Exalead and Ask suggest.

5. Ask or answer your question in your search strategy. For example "How fast can a hippopotamus run" or "A hippopotamus can run at"

6. If you are new to RSS, try Bloglines (http://www.bloglines.com) for monitoring RSS feeds for current awareness and alerts.

7. Try Blogpulse (http://www.blogpulse.com/) for searching blogs, especially the Trend Search. The free web version allows you to monitor and compare graphically the frequency of up to three search terms or phrases over a period of up to 6 months

Generated by BlogPulse Copyright 2005 Intelliseek, Inc.

8. BBC news (http://news.bbc.co.uk/) for current and archived news

9. Wikipedia (http://www.wikipedia.org/) for a general overview of a topic.

10. Accoona (http://www.accoona.com/) SuperTarget News enables you to further refine your search by date, publisher, relevant company, person, country and state. It will also search free sources of news that provide archives older than 30 days.

11. Use meta search tools to search quickly across several different tools at once:

    http://www.trovando.it/ - to run your search across dozens of tools one by one, and by type of information for example blogs, images, audio/video

    http://www.killerinfo.com/ - generates a single deduplicated list and organises similar results into folders or topics

    http://www.dogpile.com/ - searches Google, Yahoo, Ask and MSN. You can view a single deduplicated list or view two or more of the results lists side by side with the unique results in each highlighted

    http://www.jux2.com/ - generates a single list of results but also gives you the option to display what Google missed, what was unique to Google etc.

If you failed to get a place on the course this time around, the workshop is being re-run at Manchester Business School on September 14th, 2006. Further details are on the Manchester Business School web site at http://www.mbs.ac.uk/programmes/courses-seminars/management-research.htm

Feedreader version 3 available

If you are looking for a PC based program to collate and read RSS feeds, but find some of the packages confusing and overwhelming, try Feedreader (http://www.feedreader.com/). It is fairly basic but the latest version (3.0) has most of the essentials.

It is simple to set up and use and the smart feeds enable you to set up rules so that each time your feeds are updated they are automatically searched for terms or phrases. Copies of the items are then placed in a separate folder. For example I have smart feeds for various companies, products, people and events.

Important: when you install Feedreader go into Tools, Options, General. Under Notifications, make sure 'Display notification' is set to "Do not display notification" and 'If not set in feed then..' is set to "Do not allow feeds to show notification by default". Also untick the 'Play sound' box. Otherwise you will end up with irritating pop-up boxes beeping all over your screen when your feeds update. If you want alerts/notifications for individual feeds or smart folders you can set those up using the Edit feed option.

The great thing about these programs is that if you want to change to something else you can always export your existing list of feeds to an OPML file and then import it into your new program. You can't, though, export your filters or smart feeds. They have to be set up from scratch in your new reader.

Nominations invited for the Jason Farradane Award

The UKeiG Jason Farradane Award is offered to an individual or a group of people in recognition of outstanding work in the field of information science. The Award is sponsored by Sage Publications. Nominations are now invited for the 2006 Award. Nominations should meet one or more of the following criteria:

raising the profile of the information profession within an organisation or field of endeavour in a way which can or has become an exemplar to others
raising the awareness of the value of information in the workplace
development of a significant new information product or service
development of a product or service that has made a significant impact on the availability and accessibility of information.

Key characteristics that the judges will look for in nominations are innovation, initiative, originality and significance. The Award is open to individuals or groups from anywhere in the world.

Nominations will be judged by a panel of experts, and the award will be presented to the winner during the annual Online Information Meeting in London in late November.

Previous award winners have included:

2005 Michael Koenig, Dean of the College of Information and Computer Science at Long Island University

2004 Julia Chandler, Internet and Intranet Manager at the Department for International Development

2003 London Metropolitan University and the TUC for the web site "The Union Makes us Strong: TUC History Online"

Further details can be found on the UKeiG website at:
http://www.ukeig.org.uk/awards/farradane.html

Nominations should take the form of a short description (no more than 3 sides of A4) of the work in question, together with full contact details of both the nominee and the nominator. Do not forget to include any documentation, references or URLs which may support the nomination. Nominations should be sent to: Christine Baker, The Old Chapel, Walden, West Burton, Leyburn, North Yorkshire, DL8 4LE, Tel & Fax: 01969 663749 E-mail: cabaker@ukeig.org.uk

Market Research Society launches summer school

The UK Market Research Society has launched a new summer school called Research in Action. It will be held on 12-16 June 2006 at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Cambridge, UK.

The intensive, five-day residential course programme is designed to:

- deepen knowledge of research approaches and techniques
- build business awareness
- revitalise research skills
- challenge thinking
- open up new perspectives on the business of research

For more information or to book a place visit http://www.mrs.org.uk/researchinaction/index.htm

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Searching Questions

UK business telephone directories

Question:
I work for a charity whose activities include organising meetings around the country. We try and advertise our events through local churches and libraries. As we don't always have someone "on the ground", we use Yellow Pages (yell.com) to identify these organisations within a town or post code area. I have noticed though that Yell never seems to provide a comprehensive list. What are their inclusion criteria and should I be looking elsewhere?

Answer:

The important point to remember about UK Yellow Pages is that it is an advertising medium and organisations have to **pay** for entries. They types of organisation that you are looking for will not all be able to justify the expenditure or feel that it is necessary. A better approach here may be to look in the standard BT telephone directory under the business section (entries are free) and the free Thomson Local.

I decided to "compare and contrast" Yell.com with two other local directories: the BT phone book on http://www.bt.com/ and Thomson Local on http://www.thomsonlocal.com/ by looking for a list of churches in my area of Caversham (RG4). First, though, I decided to see what Google Local (http://local.google.co.uk) would come up with. Well it could have been worse. Google could have decreed that we were totally godless – it came up with just one church in Caversham, which confirms my doubts about the quality of the lists that Google Local often provides. (Google Local UK, by the way, uses data from Yell.com and its own web database).

Yell.com came up with 7 and there were notable omissions, some of them well established churches that have been here for at least 100-150 years.

For the BT directory, on http://www.bt.com/ go to the bottom left hand area of the screen and click on 'Find a business'. On the following screen I typed in churches and RG4 in the relevant boxes. After you have clicked on search it asks you to select a type of church (C of E, Catholic etc). You will have to click on each in turn because the 'Places of worship -mixed' does not appear to be a combined list. The BT listings came up with 6 of the 7 yell.com churches and an additional 5

Thomson Local (http://www.thomsonlocal.com/) picked up 6 of the 7 Yell.com entries, all of the BT.com listings, and found three more.

I think that, between these three lists, I have picked up all of the churches in Caversham. So it seems you will have to use all three for this type of search.

Gizmo of the Month

HTTrack Web Site Copier

http://www.httrack.com/

I was alerted to this excellent tool by Gary Price. (Have a look at his Resource Shelf for two other similar tools at http://www.resourceshelf.com/2006/04/three-free-tools-to-archive-locally.html).

A free "a standalone project aimed to help web archivists to easily build caches based on websites downloaded by HTTRACK. Can save an entire site with just two or three clicks".

It does what its claims and is ideal for backing up any of your blogs and wikis that may be hosted on third party servers.

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: 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 ferreted away for digital posterity way back in…

Contact Information

Karen Blakeman, RBA Information Services
UK Tel: 0118 947 2256
Int. Tel: +44 118 947 2256

UK Fax: 020 8020 0253
Int. Fax: +44 20 8020 0253

Address: 88 Star Road, Caversham, Berks RG4 5BE, UK

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