Tales from the Terminal Room
July/August 2007, Issue No. 80

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

Microsoft Tafiti

Microsoft have released a beta search front-end to its Live Search. Called Tafiti (http://www.tafiti.com/), which means "do research" in Swahili, it is intended to help "people use the Web for research projects that span multiple search queries and sessions by helping visualize, store, and share research results". When you first log in to the site, you are greeted with a clean, Web 2.0-ish minimalist screen. A box tells you that you need to install something called Microsoft Silverlight. Once you have done that, however, the interface changes to what I can only describe as 'library retro'. A grubby, dog-eared catalogue card [oh dear!] with a search box materialises, and a group of icons representing web, books, news, images and feeds start whizzing around in the bottom left hand corner of the screen, but they do eventually settle down.

You type your search terms on the card, which then goes off to the left hand side of the screen, and your results are listed in what looks suspiciously like a drawer from a card catalogue filing cabinet. The library theme continues with options to drag and drop items from your results lists to 'shelves' on the right hand side of the screen. These can be saved for future sessions. You can switch from the default web search to another type of resource by clicking on the icons in the bottom left hand corner. Images worked fine for me, but I found the layout of the feeds results confusing and loathed the attempt at mimicking a newspaper layout for the news items. I was expecting to see a pile of books for the book search but had no results for any of my searches. Tafiti is experimental so it is not surprising that there are some glitches.

Default web results layout:
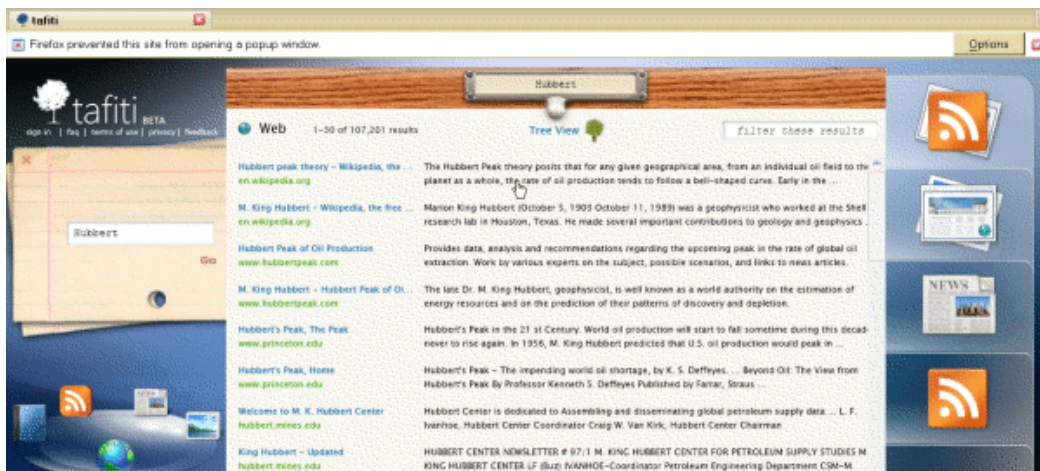
There is an alternative 'tree view' for the web results, which is a complete contrast to the default interface. Several reviewers have commented on its similarity to Kartoo (http://www.kartoo.com/) but at least that does not make me feel sea-sick. A revolving tree with text continually changing size and dropping in and out of focus is the last thing you want if you are feeling even slightly off-colour! There was an opaque area at the bottom of the screen with a line on it and some symbols that I could not identify. I have since discovered from Philipp Lenssen's Blogoscoped posting (http://blogoscoped.com/archive/2007-08-23-n64.html) that it is a slider bar that is supposed to allow you to reduce the number of branches and leaves. Well, it did not work for me but perhaps that is because I am using Firefox rather than IE. Two arrow buttons toggle the rotation direction. Those did work but made me feel even more dizzy and confused.

Tafiti tree view:
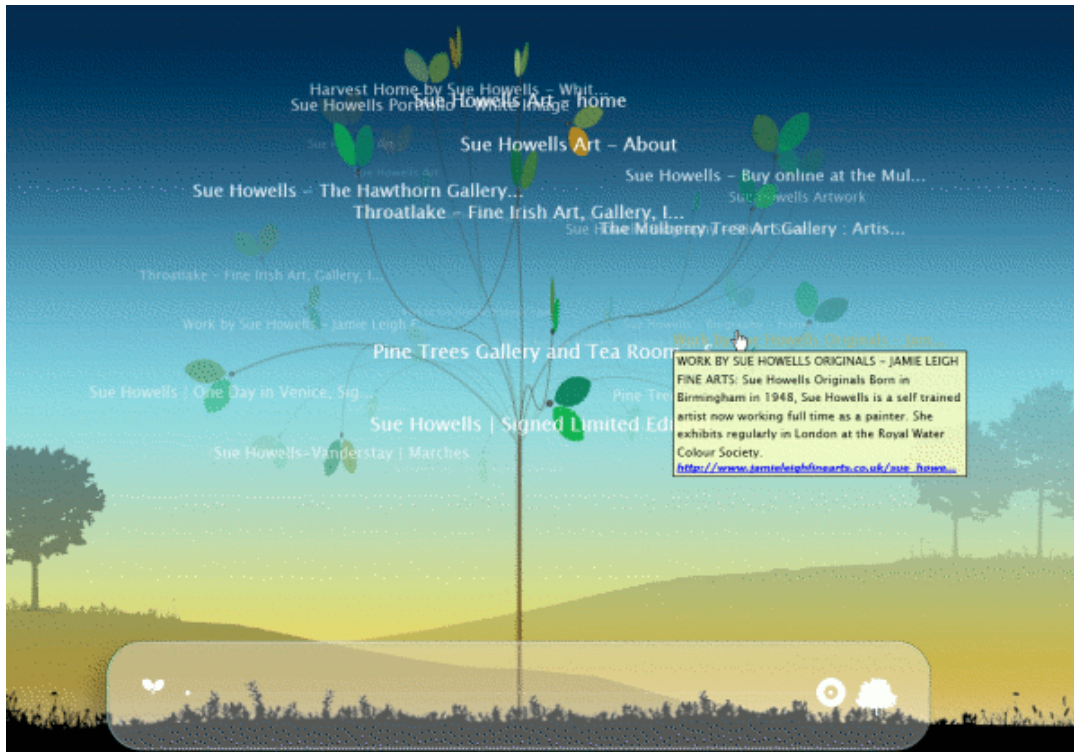
Phil Bradley was not impressed (http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2007/08/tafiti.html), to put it mildly. I am in two minds about it. The idea behind Tafiti of bringing together information of different types is great. The implementation, and especially the library theme, irritated me and more importantly distracted me from the content. Ask (http://www.ask.com/) does a far better job (see my blog posting at http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2007/06/20/ask-rolls-out-new-interface/). I was pleasantly surprised that the Silverlight plug-in worked in Firefox, but seriously annoyed that the right click menu options were disabled as were the browser back button, the F11 key and the scroll on my mouse.

Overall, Tafiti is interesting and I shall be keeping an eye on it to see how it develops. When it comes to day-to-day searching, though, I much prefer the standard Live.com interface.

Crossengine becomes IntelWays

Crossengine.com has now been renamed Intelways.com (http://www.intelways.com/). It is a great way of running your search through many different types of search engines and has been very popular with participants on my search workshops. I do wish, though, they would stop fiddling with the layout and the name. It just confuses people. OK, Intelways is the company name but Crossengine is more indicative of what it does.

Live Search Images adds face search

First Exalead (http://www.exalead.com/) adds an option to limit your image search to faces (http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2007/05/05/exalead-uk-and-new-search-features/), then Google (http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2007/06/01/google-image-search-looks-for-faces/), and now Live Search has joined the gang (http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2007/07/27/three-new-features-in-live-search-images.aspx). In terms of ease of use, it is not as slick as Exalead's but not quite as clunky as Google's. You first run a search in Live Images and then add filter:face or filter:portrait to your search strategy. If you want to look for black and white images you add

filter:bw. At present you have to remember the commands but Live says that it is looking at how to make these features intuitively accessible through a drop-down menu or some other means.

On my image test searches on Live.com I cannot honestly say it was better or worse than Exalead or Google. None of them are perfect. They do remove most of the non-people images but all three also lose relevant faces and 'portraits'.

Yahoo suggests

Yahoo has launched Yahoo search suggestions. This feature is not entirely new as it has been available in the Firefox Yahoo! Toolbar (http://toolbar.yahoo.com/firefox) for a while. Like the Google version it comes up with changing suggestions for search terms as you type. Unlike the Google version, it is only available on its .com interface and it does not give you an estimate of the number of results for each strategy. (See below for screen shots of the two services). Neither is 'suggest' available on the vanilla search screens such as search.yahoo.com.

It annoys me no end when search engines roll out and advertise features that are only available on their .com sites, especially when many of these engines automatically redirect you to your local country version. I hope that Yahoo enables this feature world-wide and soon. At the time of writing this article, there were reports that Yahoo search suggestions is about to be enabled on the Yahoo UK and Ireland but no sign of it on my PCs.

Figure 1: Yahoo! Suggests for gordon brown

Figure 2: Google Suggests for gordon brown

Yahoo includes Flickr in image search

Thomas Hawk has reported on his blog that Yahoo has integrated Flickr photos into its image search (http://thomashawk.com/2007/06/flickr-photos-integrated-into-yahoo.html). It is an obvious move but has been a long time coming - Yahoo bought Flickr in March 2005.

Internet Librarian International 2007

The programme for Internet Librarian International (ILI) 2007 is now out. The event takes place at the Copthorne Tara Hotel in London on October 8th-9th and this year's theme is 'New Realities, Roles and Resources'. There are keynote presentations from Stephen Abram on 'Next Generation Librarians: the 2.0 Phenomenon' and Phil Bradley who will talk about 'Facing the Challenge of Web 2.0 as a Disruptive Technology'. I shall be giving a talk on Tuesday 9th on 'What the Search Engines are up to Now'

As well as the talks and presentations ILI provides participants with an excellent opportunity to network and make new friends. There are also pre-conference Master Classes on Sunday 7th on International Business Information Resources, Repositories and Digital Initiatives, Using Blogs Effectively within Your Organisation, and Communicating, Influencing and Negotiating for Results.

There is an Early Bird discount if you register before September 14th and there are special rates for CILIP members. Further details of the programme and a booking form are on the ILI web site at http://www.internet-librarian.com/

Information Resources

Chinese company information from BvD

Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing (BvDEP) has added Chinese company information to its range of products. QIN contains information on over 300,000 public and private companies in mainland China and provides three years' financial history. The information is provided by SinoRating, a division of Sinosure, a credit insurer and expert on Chinese business. Additional information is from World'Vest Base, a provider of information on listed companies worldwide. As well as financial data QIN also offers textual information on companies' activities and will incorporate detailed ownership and corporate structure information as provided on BvDEP's other products. Free trials can be pre-ordered via local account managers or by contacting info@bvdep.com.

XRefer becomes Credo Reference

Thanks to Peter Scott for picking this up in his Library Blog (http://xrefer.blogspot.com/2007/06/xrefer-changes-its-name-to-credo.html).

xRefer has changed its name to Credo Reference. The reason for the change? The press release says:

> "While the former name spoke to one of the many benefits of our functionality, cross-linking across content from hundreds of quality titles from dozens of the best reference publishers," commented John Dove, **Credo Reference** CEO, "it was far from memorable to those who might hear it for the first time. This made it hard to pass along via word-of-mouth. Our new name speaks to one of the main challenges for online reference publishing, namely how to stand out from the confusing jumble of information and misinformation that today's online information seeker encounters."

I agree that we will no longer have to explain to users what xRefer 'means' or how to pronounce it, but I am not sure that many will appreciate the roots of 'Credo' (Latin for 'I believe'). "Credo? Who's he - one of the hobbits?" Or imagine what a dis-satisfied user might call it by changing the first vowel to one later in the alphabet!

The new URL for the service is http://www.credoreference.com/

AlacraSearch launched for industry sector searching

Alacra has launched a new search tool for industry and market sector information called AlacraSearch (http://www.alacra.com/alacrasearch/). It uses the Google Custom Search Engines and has approximately 12,000 Alacra chosen sites in eight categories:

- Business & Trade Publications
- Law Firms
- Commercial & Investment Banks
- Consulting and Accounting Firms
- Educational Institutions
- Market Research Firms
- Trade Associations
- Venture Capital & Private Equity Firms

The service is free and supported by advertising.

On the main search screen you type in your key words and select a category. On the results page you can easily switch categories. For example, having run a search on 'beer UK market share' in the Business and Trade Publications category I could switch to Trade Associations or Market Research Firms. Depending on which category you choose to search, you can further refine your results by industry or geography. Having carried out my initial 'beer' search in Business & Trade, I can narrow down the publications further by selecting Food & Beverage.

Alacra already has an industry research tool on Alacrawiki (http://www.alacrawiki.com/) called Alacra Industry Spotlights and which has a page for each industry describing the key resources for that sector. The Spotlights are ideal if you are new to a sector and need to get up to speed on the main publications. AlacraSearch complements Alacra Spotlights by enabling you to search these and other sources by keywords. I now regularly use both and find that they are an excellent way of quickly focusing on quality business sites.

Highly recommended if you are looking for a business information search tool.

Exalead to provide access to scientific articles

Exalead has announced on its blog (http://blog.exalead.com/2007/07/fresh-access-to.html) that it has reached an agreement with the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information (INIST). It will allow Exalead to offer its public search engine users access to INIST's database (http://articlesciences.inist.fr/) of 13 million English, French, Spanish and Italian-language scientific articles. According to the press release "Exa-searchers will soon be able to explore this rich resource using Exalead's practical search refinement tools, like dynamically generated lists of related terms and concepts".

As a regular user of scientific databases myself, anything that highlights good quality, reliable and consistent resources is great news. I am becoming increasingly tired of explaining to people why I have problems with Google Scholar. I will delay my final verdict on the Exalead-INIST offering, though, until I have seen it in action.

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Untangling Your Web: effective website management
Organiser: Manchester Business School
Venue: Eddie Davies Library, Manchester Business School
Date: Tuesday, 25th September 2007
Presenter: Karen Blakeman.
Course fee: Price for BIS/BINN members/Manchester Momentum £215 + VAT; others £250 **+VAT**
URL: http://www.mbs.ac.uk/bis-training
Outline: Whether you already have a web site or are in the process of setting one up, keeping it in pristine condition and ensuring that your organisation benefits to the full can drive you to distraction. Once it is operational it is all to easy too easy to forget about it; but out of date pages and inaccurate information are bad news! This course looks at how to painlessly manage the process of keeping your web site up to date, how to identify key areas that can drive your business forward, and how to encourage visitors to come back for more.

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