



Tales from the Terminal Room May 2008, Issue No. 83

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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is an electronic newsletter that includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; useful tools for managing information; technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications. Many of the items and articles will have already appeared on Karen Blakeman's Blog at <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/>

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

Academic Live and Live Books axed

I did a double take when I first spotted this story in my RSS feeds. Live Search have discontinued [Academic Live and Live Books Search](http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2008/05/23/book-search-winding-down.aspx) (<http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2008/05/23/book-search-winding-down.aspx>). Surely a late report of an April Fool, I thought. Unfortunately it was a genuine posting on Live Search's official blog. Both sites have now been taken down and they are winding down their digitization initiatives, including their library scanning and their in-copyright book programs.

I have tried to support Live.com and promote it to those who attend my workshops as a viable alternative to Google. In my experience, it seems to have the most up to date database, often finds pages and documents that the other search engines miss, and has a great command for locating RSS feeds on a web site. But it keeps shooting itself in the foot. The site recently had a makeover, but the presentation of the advanced search is still awful and the only reliable way of using the options is via the command line. Live News has improved greatly and now has an RSS alert option, but only in the US version of Live. And it had by far the best link and linkdomain commands but disabled those because of mass automated data mining.

Both Live Books and Academic Live were superior to Google's offerings. They had different coverage but the advanced search options, for example date and author search, actually worked in Live, and Academic Live had options for exporting records to RefWorks and EndNote, albeit one by one. Live goes on to say in its announcement that books and scholarly publications "will continue to be integrated into our Search results, but not through separate indexes." Sorry, but not good enough. That will work fine if you know exactly what you are looking for and it is a very narrowly focussed search, for example I can easily find my husband's papers on ESR studies of zeolites, but it is impossible to limit a search to books or peer reviewed papers on a more general topic.

It seems that this part of the market does not make enough money for Live and it says that it will now "focus on verticals with high commercial intent, such as travel, and offer users cash back on their purchases from our advertisers." Bribery appears to be part of the new company policy: another headline in the same feed update read "[Office 2007 plus petrol: Microsoft Australia is trying to lure Aussies to buy Office 2007 with petrol](http://news.office-watch.com/t/n.aspx?articleid=619&zoneid=9)" (<http://news.office-watch.com/t/n.aspx?articleid=619&zoneid=9>)!

Forget about self-inflicted metatarsal wounds, I am beginning to suspect that Live has a serious death wish. I wonder what will be the next part of Live to go?

Business Information Top Web Resources

The UKeiG Business Information on the Internet workshop was run on April 2nd and April 8th, 2008. At the end of each day the participants were asked to come up with a list of top sites and search tips. This is the combined list in alphabetical order:

1. **Advanced Search.** Click on the Advanced Search option for any of the tools that you encounter, be it Google et al or a web site's own search option. They offer great ways of focussing your search by date, file format, site, etc.
2. **Alacrasearch** <http://www.alacra.com/alacrasearch>. A Google custom search engine that focuses on business sites that have been selected by Alacra.

3. **Blogpulse** <http://www.blogpulse.com/>. One of several blog search engines, but this was singled out for its Trends graphs. These show how often your search terms are mentioned in posts over a selected period of time. In a business context the occurrences will usually match reports in the mainstream media. When they don't, click on the peaks in the graph to see what is going on behind the scenes. Superb for picking up on rumours and gossip
4. **Bureau van Dijk's (BvD) "A Taste of Mint"** <http://mintportal.bvdep.com/>. A free directory from BvD giving basic information on companies world-wide. One experienced researcher at the workshop commented: "It found the company I have been looking for when every other directory failed!"
5. **Chipwrapper** <http://www.chipwrapper.co.uk/>. A Custom Google Search Engine that searches across the UK's major national newspapers: The Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Financial Times, The Guardian, The Independent, The Sun, The People, News of the World, The Scotsman, Daily Star, The Telegraph and The Times. It also searches the BBC News web site, ITN and Sky. There is a review of Chipwrapper on Karen Blakeman's blog at <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2007/12/29/chipwrapper-search-uk-newspapers/>
6. **CIA World Factbook - Country Profiles** <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>. Key statistics on every country. For those of you of a more adventurous disposition, when it comes to travel it even includes the number of airports with unpaved runways.
7. **Companies House** <http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/>. The UK official companies registry. This is the closest you can get to the original company documents that a registered company has to file. Some information is provided free of charge (Use the Webcheck service). Documents are charged for on a pay as you go basis.
8. **FITA Import Export Business and International Trade Leeds** <http://www.fita.org/>. The "Really Useful Links" in the menu on the left hand side of the screen takes you to a range of international sources on business information. One participant of this workshop found the "Doing business in" section especially useful.
9. **Freepint Bar** <http://www.freepint.com/>. Head for the discussion area, labelled as the Bar, where you can post your query and tap into the knowledge of regular 'tipplers'.
10. **Google Finance** <http://www.google.co.uk/finance> , <http://www.google.com/finance> . This is a possible competitor to Yahoo Finance. It has been steadily improving over the last 18 months since its initial launch but still does not quite have the authoritative "feel" of Yahoo Finance. Also it does not appear to have the individual stock exchange coverage of Yahoo. It does, though, beat Yahoo when it comes to the share price graph and historical downloads options. The share price graphs are 'annotated' with labels at the appropriate time on the graph and these link to news articles that are listed to the right of the graph. Yahoo Finance's downloadable historical share price data in figures goes back 5 years: Google's goes back to 1996.
11. **Google News**. For the UK go to <http://news.google.co.uk/> but there are a plethora of country versions that give priority to local content. Good coverage of the last 30 days of free world-wide, national, local, and industry news. One workshop participant said that Google News found a breaking story that had not been picked up by the industry press and her subscription services.
12. **Hometrack**. <http://www.hometrack.co.uk/>. This site provides key statistics and data on the UK housing market and financing of that market. Especially relevant in the current economic climate.

13. **Intelways** <http://www.intelways.com/>. An interface to many search tools grouped by type e.g. news, video, image. Type your search terms in once and click on the different search tools one by one. A reminder of the different types of information that you should be looking at and of the wide range of search engines that are out there.
14. **Intute** <http://www.intute.ac.uk/>. This is an excellent starting point for anyone working in business and wanting to identify quality resources on a wide range of subjects and industries.
15. **Nationmaster** <http://www.nationmaster.com/>. An interface to a plethora of statistics on web sites world wide. Some of the statistics are 2-3 years old but there are links to the original site, enabling you to search for more up to date information. Several people mentioned that this is a good 'index' of where data is likely to be found.
16. **OFFSTATS** <http://www.offstats.auckland.ac.nz/>. The new set of web pages for the University of Auckland Library providing information on Official Statistics on the Web, and at a new address. An excellent starting point for official statistics by country and subject/industry. As well as the makeover, there have been many additions to the collection of resources.
17. **People!** Contact a relevant research, trade or professional body for help in locating experts, sources of information and reports. They may not have anything on their web site but there may be something 'on file' that they are willing to supply free of charge or for which they are prepared to negotiate a fee.
18. **Phil Bradley's web site and blog** <http://www.philb.com/> and <http://philbradley.typepad.com/>. Excellent sources of information on Web 2.0 'stuff' and search tools. In particular, his blog has no-nonsense reviews of new search tools that claim they will change the world of search.
19. **RBA Sources of Business Information** <http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/>. Selected sources of business information organised by type e.g. statistics, share prices, company registers.
20. **Research Wikis** <http://www.researchwikis.com/>. This is a wiki covering market and industry data that is in the public domain; several workshop delegates commented that it looks promising. The content is variable in quality. Some reports are highly structured and detailed while others are just a "stub. Many are US biased, and the sources of the data are not always cited. Nevertheless, the reports do give you an idea of the issues affecting the sector and the terminology that is used. One of the University based workshop participants thought that the site's recommended structure and headings for a report would be useful to students who are new to carrying out industry and market research.
21. **Silobreaker.com** <http://www.silobreaker.com/>. A relatively new service pulling together information from newspapers, journals, blogs, video and audio. In addition it offers geographical hotspots, trends, and a network visualisation tool that was singled out by several people as being particularly useful.
22. **UK National Statistics** <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/> We will not go into the confusion users suffered when the UK government official statistics web sites were re-organised on 1st April 2008 [No, it was not an April Fool's]. Work your way through the new menus and you will eventually end up on the on the old statistics.gov.uk pages. Even without the frequent design changes, the site can be difficult to navigate. Nevertheless, there is an incredible amount of good quality data here. For the web based 'stuff' and formatted documents (PDF, DOC, XLS, PPT) it is often easier to go to the Google Advanced Search page, type in your terms in the search box at the top of the page and in the 'Search within a site or domain' box type in statistics.gov.uk. If you want to look for specific file formats, select the file extension from the drop down menu under 'File type'. The 'Time Series' data have to be searched from within the statistics.gov.uk site itself.

23. **The Wayback Machine - The Internet Archive** <http://www.archive.org/>. The Wayback Machine takes periodic snapshots of the Internet. Ideal for seeing how a company portrayed itself on the Internet in the past and for tracking down sites, pages or documents that have disappeared.
24. **Yahoo Finance**. Go to any Yahoo site and click on the Finance link. For the UK version go to <http://uk.finance.yahoo.com/>. Yahoo Finance provides basic information on stock exchange quoted companies on the major stock exchanges around the world. Information includes current share price information (delayed by 15-30 minutes) provided by the stock exchanges; company profiles; charts in which you can compare the company share price with another company, the sector and an index such as the FTSE 100; current news on the company focussing on the regulatory news; and daily historical share prices as figures that can be downloaded to spreadsheets.

Information Resources

Ask updates news service

Ask (<http://news.ask.com/>) has updated its news service to 'Big News'. Search results look very much like Ask's web search with an option to narrow by category and suggestions on other types of resources you might like to view such as images, profiles and encyclopaedia entries. In addition you can filter the sources by region for example Europe, Middle East, Oceania. Results are automatically sorted by relevance, and stories about the same topic or event are clustered together. You can, if you wish, choose to sort your results by date.

The screenshot shows the Ask Big News search results for 'Richard Branson'. The search bar contains 'Richard Branson' and the results are sorted by 'Relevance'. The top result is 'Biofuels take off' with a 'Big Factor Average' score of 43. Below it is 'Virgin Challenges BSkyB Order' with a score of 15. A 'Big Factor Average' graph is overlaid on the page, showing scores for 'Breaking' (82), 'Impact' (81), and 'Media' (81). The page also features sections for 'Images', 'Profile', and 'Encyclopedia'.

The most obvious change, though, is the numeric "Big Factor" ranking that appears next to each group of stories or event. This analyses four aspects of the event:

- Breaking: timeliness of a story, with more weight given to breaking news
- Impact: the story's impact across the web, which includes references in articles, multimedia, and blogs
- Media: the number of images and videos associated with the story
- Discussion: how much buzz a current event is generating in forums and other discussion areas

Scores range from 1-100 and you can display a graph of the relative importance of each of the factors by moving your cursor over the score. Click on the score and Ask displays the news

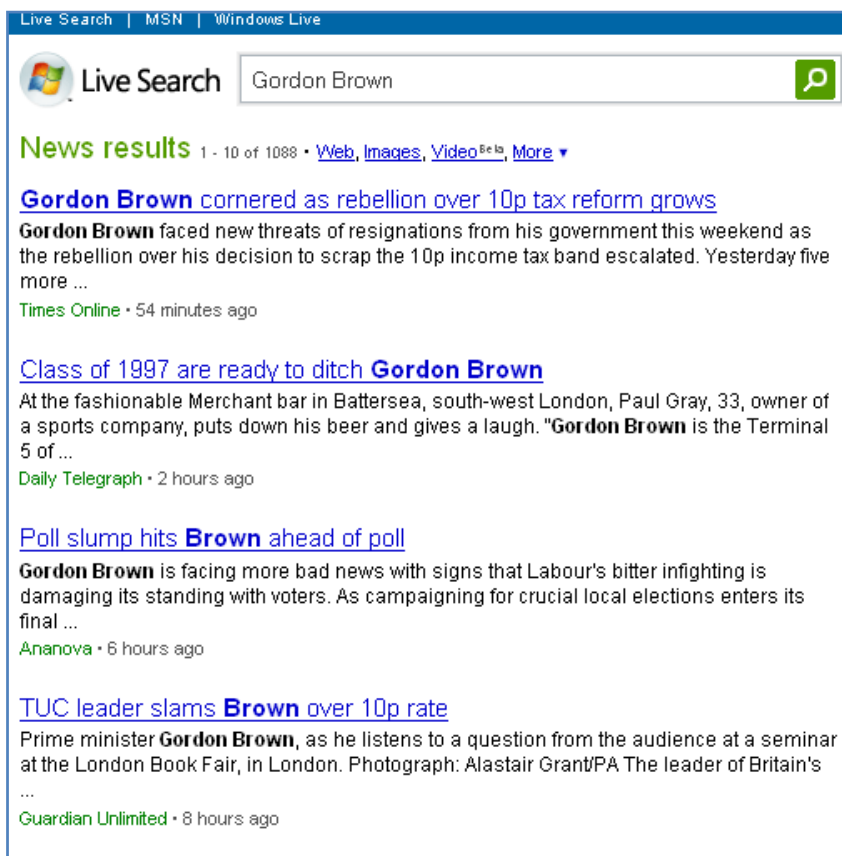
articles, blogs, images and videos related to the event. I am finding this a really useful feature and a quick way of identifying videos of news and interviews on the story. If you want to monitor this particular story, click on the "Track" link that is part of the Big Factor score icon and you can add the RSS feed to your favourite feed reader. If you want regular updates on your entire search, at long last you can have an RSS feed on that as well.

The lack of RSS alerts has been the main reason why I have not regularly used Ask News in the past, but the availability of feeds plus the innovative features they have now introduced have convinced me to add them to my main collection of current news sources. A long time coming but well worth the wait. I do have one niggle - don't I always?! - Big News is only available on the .com site. The UK site has the same old interface and results: I have to remember to enter news.ask.com as the URL. As with other developments and new features that they have introduced, I hope that they will roll this one out onto the UK site soon.

Live.com updates news interface - but only for the US

Ask is not the only search engine to restrict new services to its US site. Following [Live.com's announcement](http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2008/04/17/we-ve-revamped-news-search.aspx) (<http://blogs.msdn.com/livesearch/archive/2008/04/17/we-ve-revamped-news-search.aspx>) about its revamped news results, I waited with bated breath to see the new improved service in operation. Alas, nothing happened and after several days of monitoring and hearing from other bloggers how wonderful it is I was still getting the same boring old results. Then I twigged that it was probably because Live.com automatically kicks me into the UK version of its services rather than the US one. Those of us in the UK see a straight forward linear listing of text articles.

Live News - UK version



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying 'Live Search | MSN | Windows Live'. The search bar contains 'Gordon Brown' and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar, the results are categorized under 'News results' with a sub-header '1 - 10 of 1088'. There are four news items listed, each with a title, a brief description, and the source and time of publication:

- Gordon Brown cornered as rebellion over 10p tax reform grows**
Gordon Brown faced new threats of resignations from his government this weekend as the rebellion over his decision to scrap the 10p income tax band escalated. Yesterday five more ...
Times Online • 54 minutes ago
- Class of 1997 are ready to ditch Gordon Brown**
At the fashionable Merchant bar in Battersea, south-west London, Paul Gray, 33, owner of a sports company, puts down his beer and gives a laugh. "Gordon Brown is the Terminal 5 of ...
Daily Telegraph • 2 hours ago
- Poll slump hits Brown ahead of poll**
Gordon Brown is facing more bad news with signs that Labour's bitter infighting is damaging its standing with voters. As campaigning for crucial local elections enters its final ...
Ananova • 6 hours ago
- TUC leader slams Brown over 10p rate**
Prime minister Gordon Brown, as he listens to a question from the audience at a seminar at the London Book Fair, in London. Photograph: Alastair Grant/PA The leader of Britain's ...
Guardian Unlimited • 8 hours ago

It was only when I changed my Language settings from English (United Kingdom) to English (United States) that I saw what all the fuss was about. The results page, as many have commented, is more 'Google-like'. The appearance is similar, stories are clustered together and photos included in the listings. One up on Google, though, is the inclusion of news videos. Roll your cursor over the thumbnails and you see a preview.

Live News - US Version

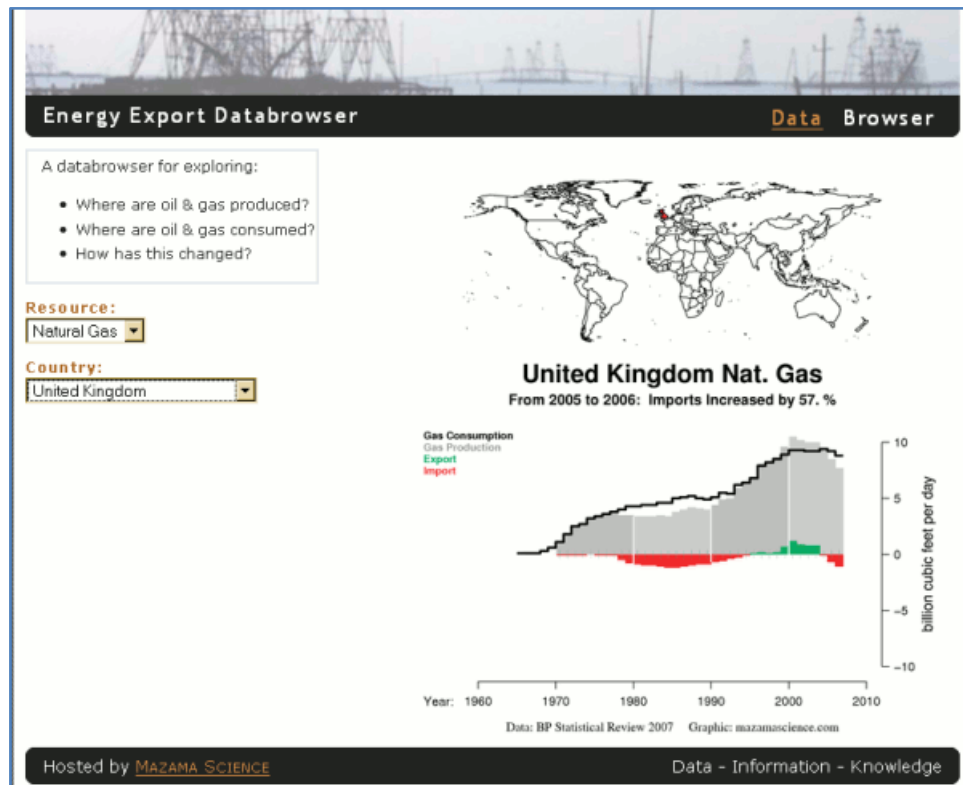
The screenshot shows a Live Search page for 'Gordon Brown'. At the top, there's a search bar with 'Gordon Brown' entered. Below it, the 'News results' section shows a top result from the Guardian: 'TUC leader slams Brown over 10p rate', dated 6 hours ago. To the right is a small portrait of Gordon Brown. Below the main result are several video thumbnails with titles like 'Gordon Brown meets with Bush', 'Bush, British PM Discuss Approach on Iraq', 'McCain meets with Brown', and 'British PM returns for visit with Bush'. On the right side, there are navigation links for 'Browse Top Stories', 'Refine by CATEGORY', and 'Related searches' including 'Lib Dems', 'Mr Brown', 'Downing Street', 'Tony Blair', 'President Bush', 'Prime Minister', and 'David Cameron'.

Overall, I prefer Live's presentation of the results to Google's but Live at now offers RSS feeds for alerts.

Energy Export Databrowser

The [Energy Export Databrowser](http://mazamascience.com/OilExport/) (<http://mazamascience.com/OilExport/>), set up Jonathan Callahan, is based on [BP's Statistical Review](http://www.bp.com/productlanding.do?categoryId=6848&contentId=7033471) (<http://www.bp.com/productlanding.do?categoryId=6848&contentId=7033471>) and provides a quick and easy way to view country data on consumption, import and export of crude oil and natural gas. It covers over 80 countries and data goes back to the 1960s. There is feedback on the browser itself and an interesting discussion on the accuracy and validity of the underlying data on [The Oil Drum](http://www.theoil Drum.com/node/4127) (<http://www.theoil Drum.com/node/4127>).

Energy Export Databrowser: UK natural gas consumption, production, export and import



Research Recap

Alacra's [Research Recap](http://www.researchrecap.com/) (<http://www.researchrecap.com/>) pulls together industry, economic, academic, market, investment and credit research reports. It concentrates on free content but also offers links to selected paid research deemed of relevance to the topic. Priced reports are sourced from a wide variety of providers, including the Alacra Store. Much of the paid research is usually password-protected and will not show up in a Google-type search, but Research Recap has made arrangements with providers to review their proprietary research to determine what is appropriate to highlight for Research Recap's audience. Research Recap does not claim to be comprehensive and may not include items that are widely circulated elsewhere. Research Recap is published in blog format and is also available as an RSS feed.

Directories: Major Companies of the World 2008

Seven new Editions of the **World's Major Companies Series** have been published by Graham & Whiteside and are now available for purchase on the [dataresources](http://www.dataresources.co.uk/contents/en-uk/d57_worldsmajorcompanies.html) (http://www.dataresources.co.uk/contents/en-uk/d57_worldsmajorcompanies.html) web site.

Major Chemical and Petrochemical Companies of the World 2008

This directory covers more than 7,000 of the leading chemical and petrochemical companies worldwide.

Major Energy Companies of the World 2008

More than 4,000 companies involved in coal mining and coal products; electricity supply; fuel distribution; natural gas supply; nuclear engineering; oil and gas exploration and production; oil and gas services and equipment; and oil refining worldwide.

Major Financial Institutions of the World 2008 (2 Vols)

Over 9,000 leading financial institutions worldwide, including banks, investment, insurance and leasing companies.

Major Food and Drink Companies of the World 2008

9,800 of the leading food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drink companies worldwide.

Major Information Technology Companies of the World 2008

This directory covers more than 3,100 of the leading information technology companies worldwide.

Major Pharmaceutical and Biotechnology Companies of the World 2008

The world's largest pharmaceutical companies, providing essential business profiles of the international leaders in the industry.

Major Telecommunications Companies of the World 2008

Profiles of more than 3,500 of the leading telecommunications companies worldwide, including many of the top Internet companies.

Gizmo of the Month

Page2RSS

<http://www.page2rss.com/>

Page2RSS monitors web pages for changes and notifies you of those changes by RSS. Simply type in the URL of the page you wish to monitor and then add the feed URL to your favourite feed reader. Excellent tool for pages that do not offer their own RSS feeds.

Meetings and Workshops

Workshop: Business Information: Key Web Resources

Organiser: TFPL

Venue: TFPL, London

Date: Thursday, 17th July 2008

Presenter: Karen Blakeman.

URL: http://www.tfpl.com/skills_development/courses/cd.cfm?linkid=TR945&catid=f&searchid=2

Outline: This one day workshop looks at key sources of business information available on the Internet. It will compare what is available for free with pay-as-you-go and subscription services, and highlight quality, coverage, functionality and price. Throughout the day, there will be practical sessions during which you can work through exercises or try out your own research. Each delegate receives a comprehensive set of notes. The workshop will benefit anyone who plans to use, or already uses, the Internet for gathering business information.

Workshop: Assessing the Quality of Information

Organiser: TFPL

Venue: TFPL, London

Date: Friday, 26th September 2008

Presenter: Karen Blakeman.

URL: http://www.tfpl.com/skills_development/courses/cd.cfm?linkid=TR943&catid=f&searchid=2

Outline: This course provides a step by step guide to assessing and evaluating the quality of information. All types of media will be covered but the emphasis will be on electronic resources. The techniques are applicable to all sectors and types of organisations and all levels of expertise.

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Archives

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

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