



Tales from the Terminal Room December 2010, Issue No. 93

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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/>

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Cost of True Love's Christmas gifts increases by 9.2% according to PNC

PNC Wealth Management's annual review of their [Christmas Price Index](#) (CPI) has revealed that this year True Love will have to pay USD 23,439 for his gifts, an increase of USD 1,974 on last year's prices.



The CPI was started in 1984 and surveys the cost of the gifts given by True Love in the song "Twelve days of Christmas". In 1984 the cost was USD 12,673.56.

James Dunigan, managing executive of investments for PNC Wealth Management said:

"This year's jump in the PNC CPI can be attributed to rising gold commodity prices, represented by the Five Gold Rings which went up by 30 percent, in addition to higher costs for wages and benefits impacting some entertainers"

PNC goes on to say:

"The PNC CPI's surge is in marked contrast to the [US] government's CPI, which grew a mere 1.1 percent, illustrating the difference in size of the two baskets of goods and services."

Whilst the milkmaid's minimum wage did not increase *"the prices for birds flew higher in this year's index, in part due to the costs of feed as well as the availability and demand for certain feathered friends that amplified several prices. The Two Turtle Doves increased 78.6 percent to \$100 and the Three French hens surged 233 percent to \$150. The Partridge in a Pear Tree is up 1.3 percent to \$161. But the partridge alone was up 20 percent to \$12 and the pear tree is identical to a year ago at \$149."*

The full tab for True Love who gifts all of the 364 items according to the song's verses is USD 96,824. Shopping on the internet only makes matters worse. True Love will have to pay USD 34,336 compared with USD 23,439 for just one purchase of the items – USD 11,000 more than this year's traditional index:

"In general, Internet prices are higher than their non-Internet counterparts because of shipping costs for birds and the convenience factor of shopping online" Dunigan said.

But that is mere pennies compared to the items that True Love has to buy in an updated version of the song composed and presented by the Scottish Falsetto Sock Puppet Theatre (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPMDokPgKGA>).



This is a difficult calculation to make as there are regional differences, for example house prices. Also, what car is True Love prepared to buy? A rock bottom of the market second hand banger or a Lamborghini? How much would assorted bling cost, assuming that True Love did not aim a brick at a jeweller's windows? And it's probably best not to enquire too deeply as to how much the lap dancers or a knighthood would cost. Nevertheless, after lengthy discussions with colleagues, who wish to remain anonymous, we have come up with the cost of the modern True Love's Christmas:

One gifting of the items listed in the 'Socks' video: GBP 258,132 or USD 407,920

Gifting of all the items according to all of the verses: GBP 1,055,646 or USD 1,668,214

Happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. If you are True Love, you'll need it to pay for all of those gifts!

Search tools

Zuula – new interface and de-duplication

Zuula (<http://www.zuula.com/>) has a new interface and a new feature. Zuula provides an interface to many different search engines organised by type. Simply enter your search strategy, click on the type of information you want (web, image, news etc) and then click on the tabs of the search engines one by one to see their results. It is a quick and easy way to run a basic search through several tools in succession.

Zuula's new interface is slicker and now automatically de-duplicates web search results. The first in the list is Google and you will notice that the results are numbered. Click on your next choice and you may notice that the numbered results do not start at number one. At the top of the results list there is a plus sign and the text "Why minimized?" Zuula compares the results with your previous choice and "minimizes" duplicates under the plus sign. To see those results, click on the plus sign.

The upgrade also introduced continuous scrolling of search results across all search types so no more clicking on 'next page'

Image search offers size, content (face, photo, illustration, line drawing) and colour, and duplicates are shaded instead of removed. Some of the blog options offer restrictions by date (anytime, last day, last week, last month, last year).

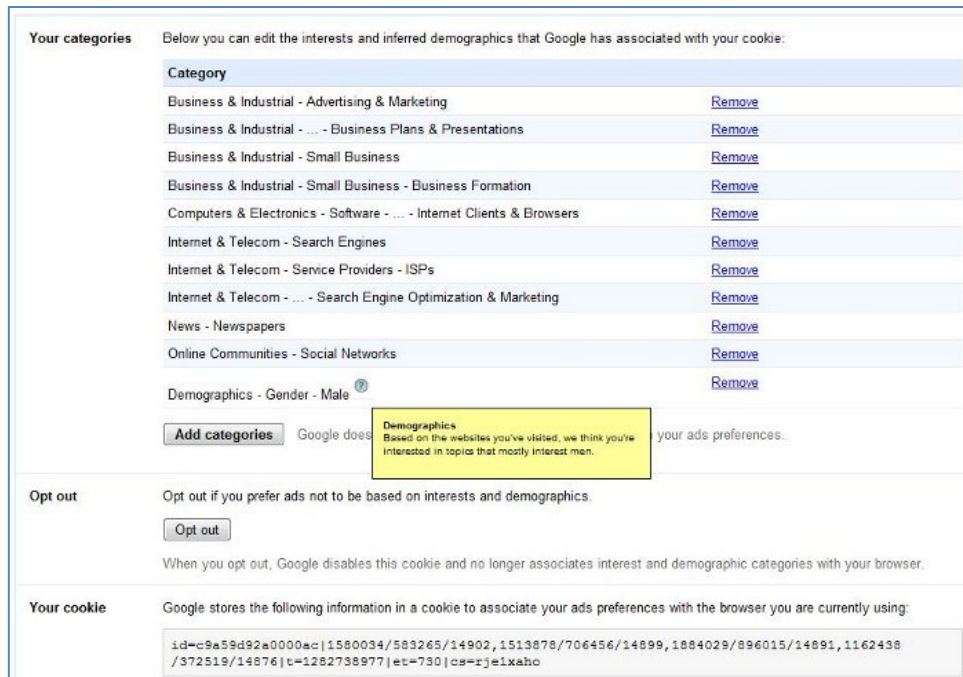
You can change the order of the search engines under Preferences and also increase the number of results per page to a maximum of 60.

If you haven't tried it out already give Zuula a go now.

Google thinks I'm male

I have always suspected that there was something different about me. Am I slightly eccentric, totally bonkers, or perhaps I am an alien from another planet? Google has the answer. After believing for the whole of my life that I am female Google tells me I am male!

I am gave a presentation in Edinburgh to the Scottish Financial Crime Group about what Google knows about us as individuals. For the purposes of accurate research I enabled Google's web search history, suspended my usual advert and cookie management, and disabled my browsers' ad blocking plugins. The ads drove me mad and my Google search results began to go all over the place. It was a ghastly experience. I was not, though, expecting my Google's ad preferences page to tell me that based on the pages I had viewed it had deduced I was male. Here is the screen shot of my ads preferences:



Google obviously thinks that we ladies are not interested in business, computers, internet or social media. So what would classify me as female? Viewing recipes perhaps? Shopping for clothes online? Or visiting pages about embroidery?

Normality has now been restored to my computer and I have regained my sanity. I have disabled web history, opted out of targeted advertising, re-implemented my cookie management procedures and re-enabled my ad blocking plugins.

If you want to see what Google thinks about you, go to <http://www.google.com/ads/preferences/>

Removing information about you from Google

A question that I am often asked during my workshops is how can one persuade Google to remove a page or information from the web. Sometimes the person wants personal photos or videos to be removed or they are asking on behalf of a company who wants less than flattering comments and opinions deleted. In most cases Google does not control the content put up on web sites or social media, it merely indexes it. So the short answer is that you cannot make Google remove information you do not like except in very specific circumstances, for example copyrighted material on YouTube, images of you or your house on Street View.

"Removing Your Personal Information From Google"

<http://searchengineland.com/removing-your-personal-information-from-google-55014> is an excellent overview from Search Engine Land of how you should go about having sensitive

information removed (if possible) and dealing with negative publicity. Your first move is to contact the web site owner yourself but unless the information is libellous, breaches copyright or data protection laws you might not have much luck. Suing the web site owner is an option but you could end up generating even more bad publicity for you and your organisation. Swamping out the negative information with your own positive responses is by far the best approach and one that requires you to know how to use social media.

The oft cited example of how **not** to tackle bad publicity is that of Nestle. (Just Google Nestle social media fail or Nestle social media disaster.) “Nestle fails at social media – Attempts to censor Facebook” from TechEye <http://www.techeye.net/internet/nestle-fails-at-social-media> is a neat summary of the events. There are also umpteen Slideshare presentations on how Nestle “did it wrong”. Many people have forgotten or never knew what the original argument was about, but after the social media debacle the perception of Nestle as corporate bad boys was reinforced. The Search Engine Land posting has links to other articles offering sound advice on the topic including:

The Real Lesson in the Yelp User Review Lawsuit

<http://www.ninebyblue.com/blog/social-media/the-real-lesson-in-the-yelp-user-review-lawsuit/>

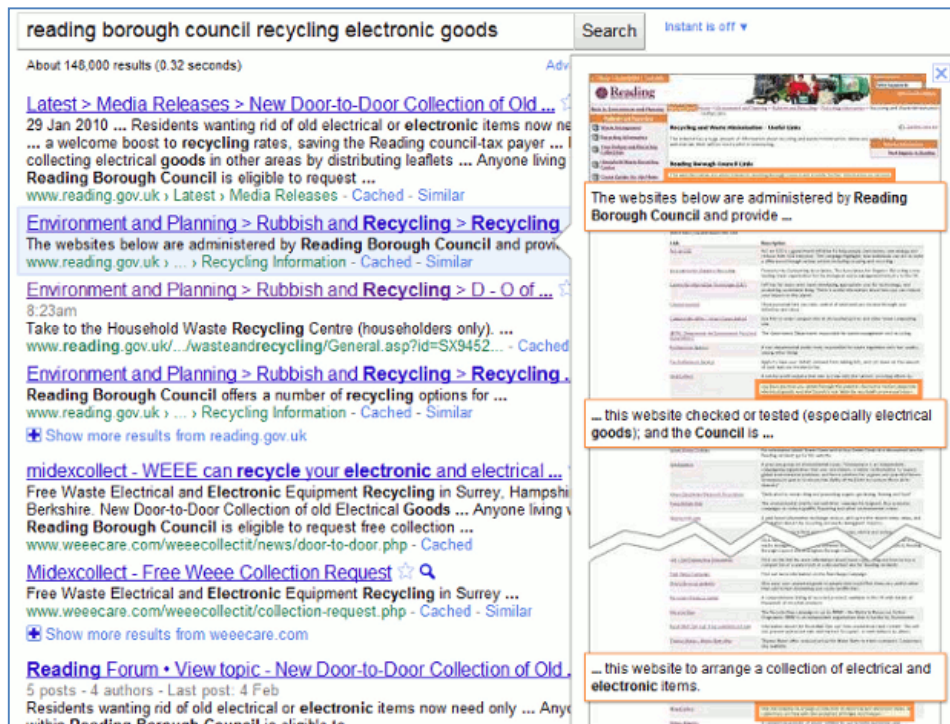
and

Official Google Webmaster Central Blog: Managing your reputation through search results

<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2009/10/managing-your-reputation-through-search.html> (I love the bit “.. *don't assume that just because your mom doesn't read your blog, she'll never see that post about the new tattoo you're hiding from her.*“)

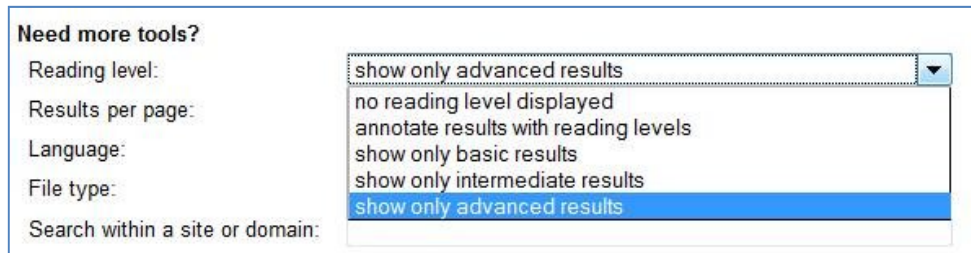
Google previews web pages in results

Google are offering previews of web pages in your results. Run your search as normal and next to each result in your list you should see a magnifying glass. Click on it and Google gives you a preview of the page with the areas containing your text outlined and the text in boxes superimposed on top of the preview. Although it is a useful tool for assessing the relevance of a page I do find it irritating that Google then automatically previews every result as I move my mouse around the results page. You have to click on the magnifying glass again to switch it off.



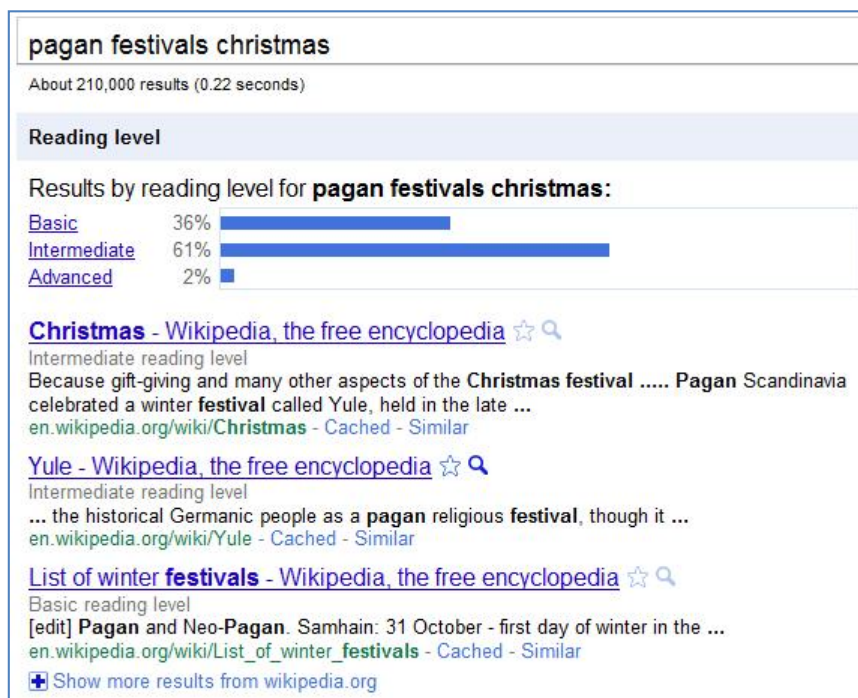
x-Factor web pages are “advanced” says Google’s new Reading Level

Google has rolled out a new search option that assigns a reading level to the pages in your results list. Don’t be surprised if you haven’t spotted it yet; it is hidden on the advanced search screen. Under the “Need more tools?” section you can choose from the drop down menu to see all of the results with reading level annotations, basic results, intermediate results or advanced results.



Google does not give much away as to how it calculates the reading level and it has nothing to do with the reading age that publishers assign to books. It could involve sentence structure, grammar, the length of sentences on a web page, the length of the document, the terminology used and doubtless many other criteria. But Google isn’t saying.

If you have opted to see the annotations, at the top of your results page you will see a graphic showing the percentages for each of the categories. Under the title of each entry in your results list is the reading level.



Click on the Basic, Intermediate or Advanced links next to the bar chart to see pages for that reading level. The eagle-eyed amongst you will have spotted that Google appears to be mathematically challenged because the numbers do not add up to 100%. In all of the searches I have done so far 1 or 2% are missing from the statistics. Looking through the lists of results some pages have no reading level assigned to them and they seem to be documents that contain very little information, have more numbers than text, and some are formatted files. Note, though, that most file formats do have a reading level so why some are not picked up remains a mystery to me. Some Daily Mail articles do not have a reading level either but many would argue that they fall into the ‘very little information’ category!

Once you have used the Reading Level in the advanced search screen you can change your search on the results page and it remains as part of your search strategy until you close down your browser or tab.

You can also check out an entire web by using the site command, for example site:rba.co.uk



And this is where you can start to have some fun comparing sites (WARNING – this is addictive!). Phil Bradley has done some in his blog posting [Google adds reading level](http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2010/12/google-adds-reading-level.html) (http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2010/12/google-adds-reading-level.html). He also highlights some potential problems with labelling pages in this way. For example ‘basic’ does not necessarily mean stupid, but some people may be deterred from selecting basic pages nevertheless.

Most of my pages are classed as intermediate and I am happy with that. Many of them are listings and analyses of business information sources. My husband’s blog on the other hand is 71% advanced and 27% intermediate. This comes as no surprise to me as he has a habit of littering his postings with complex calculations on topics such as wind turbine energy generation and the EROEI of tar sands oil production. (Just the sort of thing not to read before you have had your second cup of coffee of the day.) That plus the industry specific jargon that he uses makes an advanced tag inevitable.



The evidence so far seems to be suggesting that using terms or jargon that are relatively uncommon in the whole of the Google database is a heavy factor in determining the reading level. Let’s look at what one might consider to be an intellectually challenging topic: the use of zeolites in environmental remediation.

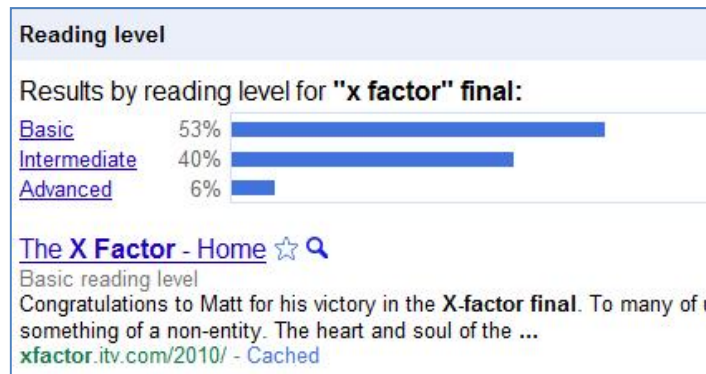


That seems to confirm it.

As a final test and for a bit of fun let’s look at what Google makes of a search on the recent x Factor final.



Nooooo! Surely some mistake? The X factor home page is rated as basic but 93% of the results are advanced. There is indeed a mistake but it was my sloppy search strategy. Changing the x factor part of the search to a phrase gives what I would expect and a switch to 53% basic, 40% intermediate and 6% advanced.



Out of curiosity, I looked at the content of the advanced pages and am now totally bemused. I cannot see how they could ever have been classified as such, but then this is Google we're talking about. Perhaps Google cannot comprehend the scoring system, why so many people watch it or why the programme exists at all?



I have experimented with several other searches. Some came up with results as bizarre as those for the x Factor search but it is interesting how the breakdown can be changed by slightly modifying your search strategy, for example by using phrases when appropriate or a plus sign before a term to force an exact match search. Google's Reading Level could be useful as a training tool to show how small alterations to a search strategy can radically change the results. But as with all things Google, we do not know how it works and the results can sometimes be very strange. Use with caution.

Top Business Search Tips – 27th October 2010

October 27th saw me back in Wales running another business information workshop. This built on the session I ran in July (see Top Business Search Tips at <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2010/08/10/top-business-search-tips/>). We looked at more advanced search techniques for business research with an emphasis on industry/market sectors and covering official data, market research and what can be gleaned from social media. As usual I asked them to come up with a group Top 10 Tips at the end of the day. There were two tips that were common to both sessions: my own business sources listings (well, they were influenced slightly in that some of my pages were mentioned during the session) and StatsWales, which is **the** place to go for statistics if you are doing business in Wales. They were also at liberty to suggest sites and tips that I did not mention in the workshop but which they, their users and clients find useful.

1. British Library's **Business Essentials on the Web** <http://bl-business-essentials.wikispaces.com/>

“Our wiki is a one-stop shop listings site of essential websites for small businesses and entrepreneurs. The aim of the site is to save you time trawling the web, by bringing together useful sites for small businesses in one place.”

Recommended for the Industries section that gives useful sites and starting points for SMEs and start-ups who may be researching industry sectors.

2. **Business Information on the Internet** (<http://www.rba.co.uk/sources/>) Business resources organised by type for example statistics, market research, company registers.

3. **Slidefinder** <http://www.slidefinder.net/>

Google's filetype ppt search looks for your terms anywhere in a presentation. Slidefinder's default search finds single slides that contain all of your terms. Two of the participants gave this one a thorough road test and were seriously impressed!

4. **Repeat one or more of your search terms once, twice, thrice...** to change what appears in your results page. Useful if you are fed up with the same old pages coming up again and again. You can enter up to 32 search terms in Google before Google starts dropping terms.

5. **Filetype search.** Use the Advanced Search file format or the filetype: command to focus your search on PDF (market/industry reports, government documents), XLS (for data and statistics in spreadsheets), PPT (expert presentations, conference talks or overviews on a topic from independent experts, academics, government bodies). If your file extension is not listed in the advanced search screen menu enter your search terms in the standard search box followed by command filetype: and the file extension. For example

```
wind turbines energy generation UK filetype:pptx
```

Use Docjax (<http://www.docjax.com/>) as a quick way of searching both Yahoo and Google for PDF, XLS, DOC and PPT files.

6. **StatsWales** <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/> The place to go for official statistics on Wales.

“StatsWales is a free-to-use service that allows visitors to view, manipulate, create and download tables from the most detailed official data on Wales.” Email alerts and RSS feeds are available.

7. **Getting British Business Online** (<http://www.gbbo.co.uk/>) A collaboration between Enterprise UK, Google, BT, and e-skills UK with the support of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. This site provides a simple and quick way to for small business to create their first website. Recommended by several of the workshop participants in conjunction with...

8. **Business IT Guides** (<http://wales.businessitguide.com/>) E-business support from the Welsh Assembly.

9. **Realise the importance of social networks.** Yes, they are biased and it can be difficult or impossible to find out who is behind the rant and the extreme negative comments but a lot of people read and forward these to their followers or friends. What started out as an isolated complaint can snowball to a major hate campaign. Companies ignore social media at their peril. Get in there quick if a customer is making a lot of noise about a bad experience and turn it to your advantage.

10. **Time!** The internet, search engines, business resources and social media are ever changing. Try and find time to keep up to date and try out new “stuff”.

Business Information Resources

Scottish Business Information Service (SCOTBIS)

The Scottish Business Information Service (<http://www.scotbis.com/>) is a national information service for Scottish businesses based on the resources held at the National Library of Scotland. SCOTBIS provides users with a free enquiry service and also offers fee-based research and other charged services. Further information of their services is available on their web site and details of their charges are at http://www.scotbis.com/index.cfm?section_id=01.05. The Web Resources section lists useful sites and key starting points for business including market research, statistics, company information and starting a business. Some of the information concentrates on Scottish markets and companies but most of the information is of value and interest to businesses based elsewhere.

The screenshot shows the SCOTBIS online interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the SCOTBIS logo and the text 'National Library of Scotland'. Below this is a breadcrumb trail: 'You are here: Home > Starting a business > Export Information'. The main heading is 'Export Information'. Below the heading, there is a section for 'Sort order' with a dropdown menu set to 'Title' and 'Ascending', and a 'Change' button. A 'Records 1 to 14 of 14' indicator is present. A 'Save all checked General Web Resources' button is also visible. The list of resources includes:

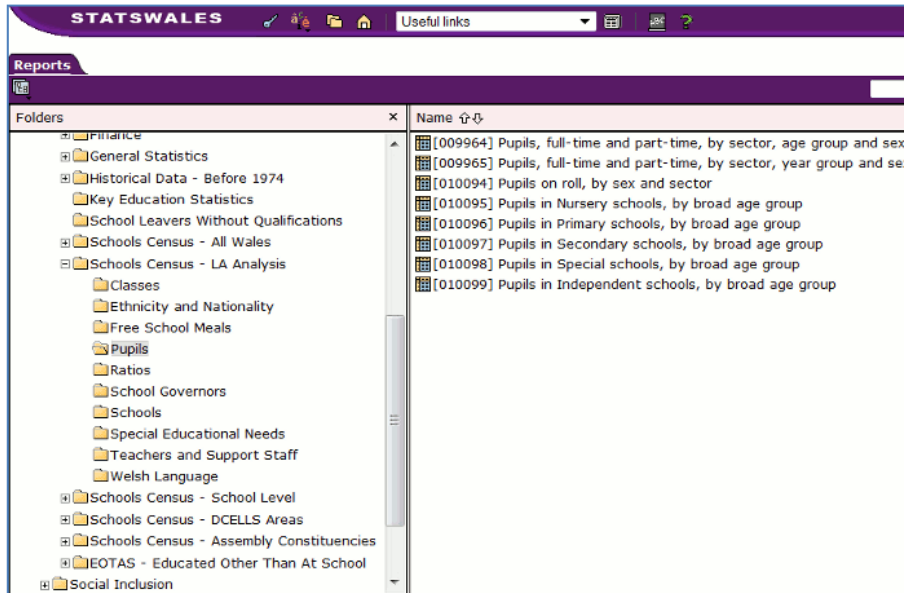
Title:	Description:	URL:	Resource type:	Countries:
British Exporters Database	Database of over 18,500 UK exporters. Information is free but you need to register to use this database. UK registered companies can also add information on their company free of charge to this site.	http://www.exportuk.co.uk/	Web	UK
Export Bureau	Website for non-profit making companies and export information associations. The site includes a directory of exports, currency converter, shipping & freight information and key global statistics.	http://www.exportbureau.com/	Web	International
Export Zone	Produced by the British Chambers of Commerce this site provides a range of useful links for exporters. Categories include marketing research, visiting			International

As well as browsing through the list of resources you can search the site using keywords and limit your search to title, industry or country/region. There is also an option to restrict your search to specific databases, for example companies, market research reports. The What's New section lists the latest resources added to the listings and databases and there are RSS feeds to keep you up to date.

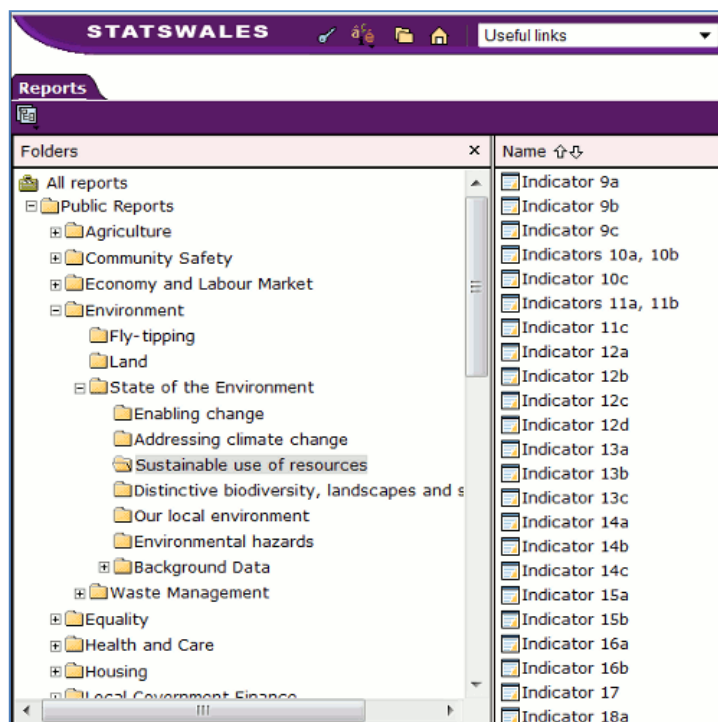
SCOTBIS is an excellent starting point for anyone wishing to search for and purchase business information and for reliable, good quality business resources.

StatsWales: free official statistics on Wales

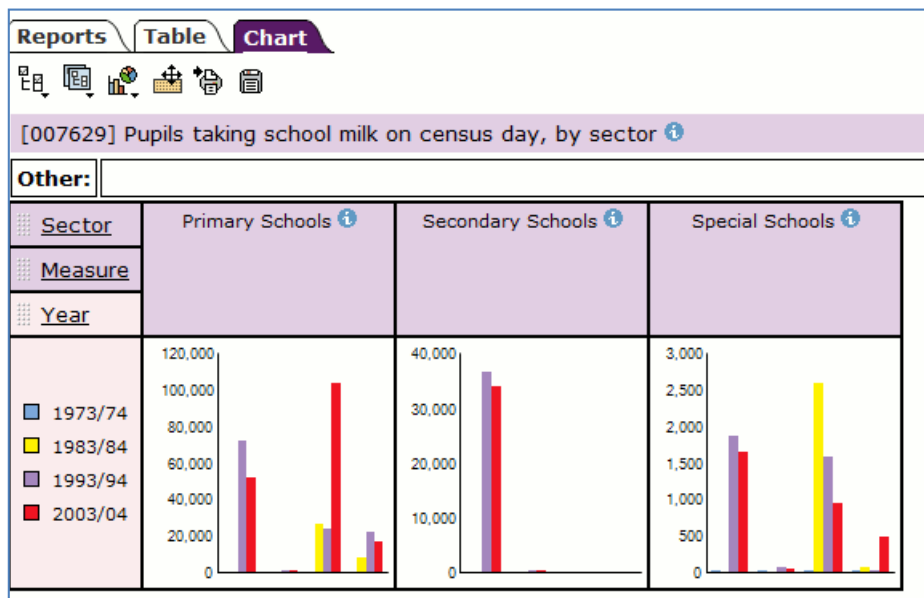
When looking for UK official statistics many of us immediately think of <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>. If you are looking for data on Wales, though, you really should be heading for the Welsh Assembly's StatsWales at <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/>. This is a free-to-use service that allows you to "view, manipulate, create and download tables from the most detailed official data on Wales". You can run a keyword search on the data or simply browse the Reports folders.



The built in search option may be your best bet (Note: Google 'site:' search does not work on this data collection). Most of the tables, charts and reports are clearly labelled but there are some sections where all you are told is that the data is "Indicator 9a" or "Indicator 12c", for example! It is only when you click on the file that you discover its contents.



You can also select subsets of the data and produce your own tables and charts. If you register you can create your own profile, design and save your reports.



There are many options for viewing and manipulating the data on the web site itself and it can seem overwhelming at times. You may prefer to just download the data sets and work on them offline, but if you think you might be a regular user of this site it is worth working through the tutorials and getting to grips with the StatsWales tools. You can register for e-mail notifications of changes to specific datasets and RSS feeds are also available to alert you to new sets that have been added to the site.

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