



Tales from the Terminal Room February 2012, Issue No. 100

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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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Search tools

Google personalisation: web history isn't the only problem

On March 1st a major change to how Google uses your search and personal information was implemented. Under the innocent sounding title "Updating our privacy policies and terms of service" (<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2012/01/updating-our-privacy-policies-and-terms.html>). Google announced in January that it is consolidating more than 60 privacy policies into a single main Privacy Policy. Until now there have been separate Terms and Conditions and policies for each Google product (YouTube, Gmail, Reader etc). There is now just one. In principle this is a good thing and makes sense, but Google have used this to sneak in changes in how it uses your search behaviour to personalise results.

"Our new Privacy Policy makes clear that, if you're signed in, we may combine information you've provided from one service with information from other services. In short, we'll treat you as a single user across all our products, which will mean a simpler, more intuitive Google experience".

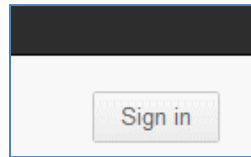
In the past, data such as your web history was kept separate from other Google products. It will now be combined with information that Google has gleaned from its other services, for example YouTube, and your results personalised accordingly. A lot has been made of deleting and disabling the web history associated with your account. It is simple enough to do by logging in to your account and going to <http://www.google.com/history/>. From here you can delete entries and disable your web search history altogether.

You may, though, prefer to keep your web history. Several groups I have talked to over the last couple of months share a Google account for the library or their subject team and use it to keep track of searches and sites they have visited. One example they gave me involved a student who came back to them asking for another copy of the paper that they had given him three weeks previously. He had lost it, forgotten who the authors were, could barely remember the title and definitely could not recall the journal! Trying to repeat the search was no good; it was difficult enough attempting to recreate the search string and in any case Google had made so many changes to web search that the results would have looked totally different anyway. By using the search history the librarians managed to locate not only the search but also the document they had retrieved for the student.

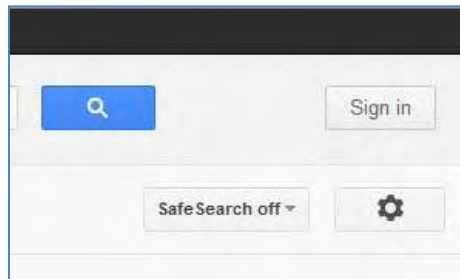
Unfortunately the Web History is not the only piece of information that Google uses when personalising results. To get an idea of what it could be using take a look at your Google account dashboard by going to <http://www.google.com/dashboard/>. Now is the time to do a spot of spring cleaning and remove any "stuff" you no longer use or need. It won't be possible to remove everything but you may be surprised at how much clutter there is in your account. I have told Google a lot about myself including links to other services and networks that I use. Being self employed it is one way of promoting and advertising what I do but now Google's attempt at personalisation has become increasingly annoying. Two weeks ago I went into YouTube. I have told Google that I live in Reading in the UK and YouTube automatically presented me with videos from ReadingBerkshireUK (note that I do NOT subscribe to this channel). The videos about the redevelopment of Reading Station and local transport were relevant but I was not tempted to view any of them – I see enough of it first-hand every day. As for the videos about Reading Football Club I regret to say that I have no interest in football whatsoever. When I visited YouTube a few days ago it had given up trying to persuade me to click on Reading videos and decided to push content that had been shared by members of my Google+ circles. Most of it was irrelevant.

We can expect to see a lot more of this type of intrusion in the future as Google is determined to ram Google+ down our throats (see [And the next Google killer is....Google!](http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2012/01/30/and-the-next-google-killer-is-google/) <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2012/01/30/and-the-next-google-killer-is-google/>). There are even reports that people setting up a new account for YouTube, Gmail, or any other Google product are being forced to set up a Google+ account. (Google Now Forcing All New Users To Create Google+ Enabled Accounts <http://marketingland.com/google-now-forcing-all-new-users-to-create-google-enabled-accounts-3912>). If you do not want this cross-fertilisation to occur then sign out of your

account before searching. But have you noticed how insistent Google is that you have an account and that you are signed in? The new Google home page has removed the cog wheel that gave access to Advanced Search and Language tools from the top right hand corner of the screen. Instead there is now a prominent button exhorting you to “Sign in”.



Once you have carried out a search the cog wheel comes back but it is underneath the persistent Sign in link.



If you are a heavy user of Google services it can be a nuisance having to sign out each time you want to conduct a search. I now have two browsers open on my desktop: one signed out for searching, the other for Google+, Gmail, Blogger etc. Ironically, an alternative is to install Chrome, which is Google’s own browser. This has an Incognito option that depersonalises your search and removes traces of your activity when you close it down. It will keep any bookmarks that you make and files that you save during the session.

In summary, to take back control of your search:

1. Review and prune what is in your Google account’s dashboard
2. Decide whether or not the web history is going to be useful to you. If it isn’t, delete and disable it.
3. Sign out of your account before searching, or use a separate “not signed in” browser, or use Chrome Incognito

And the next Google killer is....Google!

Many of us have been saying for a while that the search engine that will kill Google is Google itself. It has come so close in the past, two of the more recent incidents being the removal of the plus sign from general web search and stopping the ‘ANDing’ of search terms. Prefixing search terms with the plus sign enabled searchers to disable Google’s synonym and variation search so that it carried out an exact match search. It still works in Google Scholar but not in general web search; Google is now using the ‘+’ prefix within Google+ to help users find Google+ business pages, for example +BASF will quickly take you to the BASF business page. Google redeemed itself to some extent by hastily bringing in the Verbatim option, which can be found in the left hand menu of your results page. This will run your search **exactly** as you specify it (Google: Verbatim for exact match search <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2011/11/18/google-verbatim-for-exact-match-search/>). However, while it works with Google commands such as ‘filetype:’ and ‘site:’ it gives up as soon as you start using some of the options in the left hand menu on the results page, such as date.

And now enter Google+ and Search Plus Your World (SPYW). If you decided to add Google+ to your Google account Google has seriously altered the way it handles your search if you are logged in. It now incorporates and gives priority to results from your Google+ network. (For more details from Google see Search, plus Your World – Inside Search <http://insidesearch.blogspot.com/2012/01/search-plus-your-world.html>). At present it is only available if you are signed in on Google.com and searching in English. “Search Plus Your World” is

now the default and personalizes your results based on both your own behaviour and social connections, and content that has been shared with you through Google+. Phil Bradley has written an excellent posting on how this works (http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2012/01/why-google-search-plus-is-a-disaster-for-search.html).

Initially I was in two minds about SPYW. I thought I might find it useful if I wanted to check what people in my Google circles were saying about a particular issue but then realised that most of them prefer to post on Twitter rather than in Google+ and Google+ does not cover Twitter! The Search+ results include

- listings from the web
- pages from the web that have been given priority because of your search behaviour
- pages from the web given priority because of your social connections
- both public and private (or limited) Google+ posts, photos and Google Picasa photos

When it comes to serious research Search+ includes far too much irrelevant information. So how easy is it to turn it off? If you are logged in when you run your search you will see a message above your results that tells you the number of personal results and “other results” that have been found. There is also a toggle that enables you to switch between personalised and non-personalised results. You can also switch it off permanently within your search settings.

You can of course just log out of your Google account before you run a search, or never sign up for Google+ in the first place. But Google is making the latter increasingly difficult. Let’s look at the results that might be popping up on your screen and as an example I’ll use a search on Phil Bradley, search and social media expert and President of CILIP. First of all a search on Phil Bradley before Search+ arrived:

Phil Bradley

About 2,740,000 results (0.88 seconds)

Phil Bradley: [Internet search, Librarians, search engines, web search](#)
www.philb.com/
Internet search information, techniques and Web 2.0 resources for the library and information professional community.
[Web internet search engines 150+ ... - Country and Regional Search Engines](#)

Phil Bradley's Blog
www.philb.com/blog/blogger.html
Links and news for librarians and people interested in search engines, searching the net, design issues and general whitherings and rants.

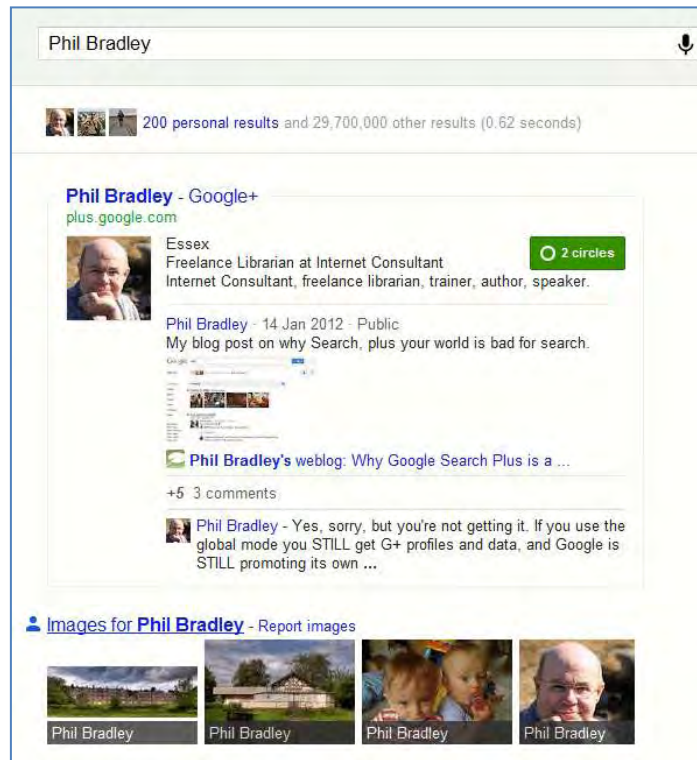
Phil Bradley: [Which search engine when?](#)
www.philb.com/whichengine.htm
Internet search information, techniques and Web 2.0 resources for the library and information professional community.

Phil Bradley's weblog
philbradley.typepad.com/
5 days ago – Search engines, internet search techniques, Web 2.0 resources with a slant towards librarians and librarianship.

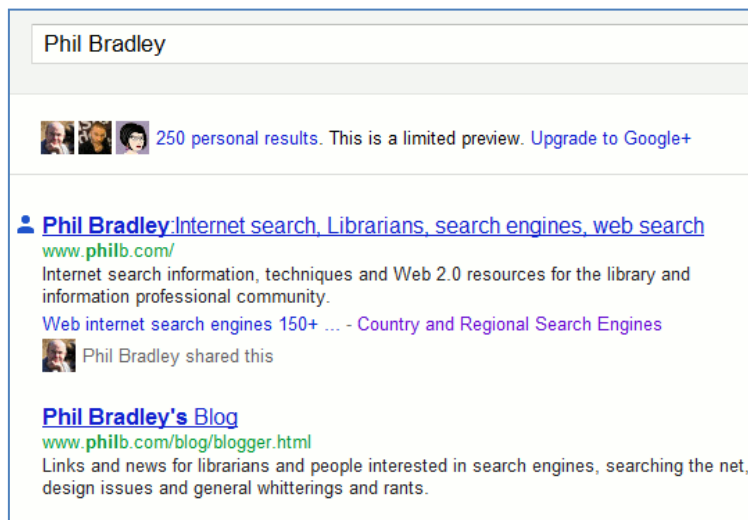
Phil Bradley - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phil_Bradley
Philip Poole Bradley (born March 11, 1959 in Bloomington, Indiana) is a former Major League Baseball outfielder/designated hitter with an 8 year career from ...

Phil Bradley Statistics and History - Baseball-Reference.com
www.baseball-reference.com > [Encyclopedia of Players](#) > [B Listing](#)

On my screen I see pages from his web site, his blog and a Wikipedia entry (which is not the Phil Bradley I am looking for!). When I sign in to a Google account that has Google+ associated with it I see something completely different:



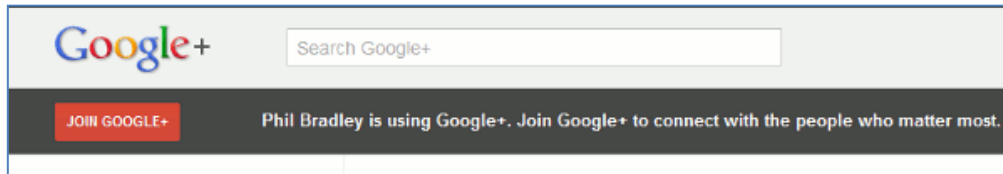
Phil's Google+ profile is given priority above everything else and takes up most of the screen regardless of whether or not it is the most relevant or most up to date (Real-Life Examples Of How Google's "Search Plus" Pushes Google+ Over Relevancy <http://searchengineland.com/examples-google-search-plus-drive-facebook-twitter-crazy-107554>). And don't think you can escape with a Google account that does not include Google+. Google has ways of enticing you to "upgrade":



Search+ has even tainted the suggestions that pop up as you type in your search:



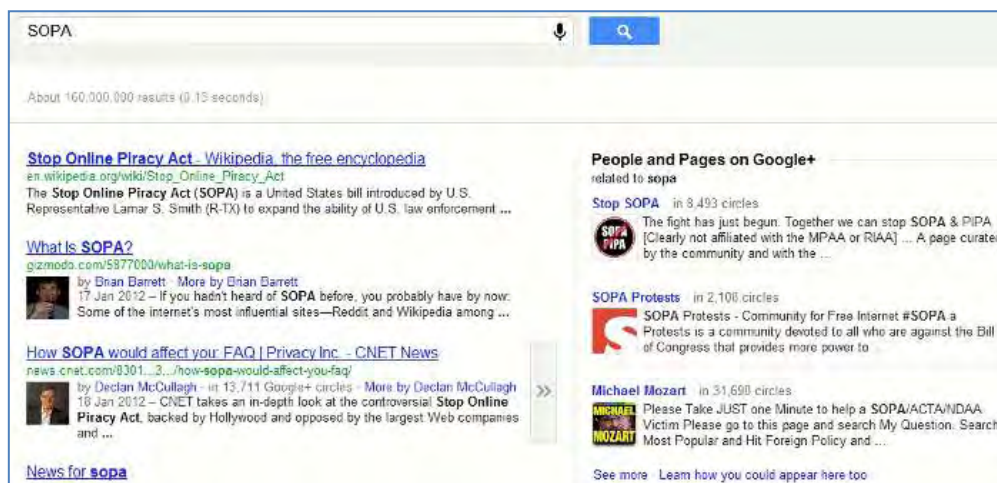
Phil's Google+ profile is given prominence and if you click on the link without having an account yourself you are invited to join:



To see what the suggestions should look like a group called Focus on the User (<http://www.focusontheuser.org/>). has produced a bookmarklet for Chrome, Firefox and Safari and extensions for Chrome and Firefox. This tries – and succeeds most of the time – to display your search results without the intrusion of Google+ results. For my search on Phil his Google+ profile is replaced with Twitter.



When I run a search on my own name my Google+ entry is supplanted by my LinkedIn profile. "What Google should be" does not, though, remove the extra "content" that Search+ sometimes adds to the right of your results. Run a subject search and you may see "People and Pages on Google+" that are supposedly related to your search terms.



I have not yet found these entries to more relevant than standard search results and the link "Learn how you could appear here too" indicates that Google sees this as another way of persuading people and organisations to join Google+. Switching it off is not easy. It is still there if you are logged out of your Google account. It is still there if you add &pws=0 to the search URL (in fact &pws=0 does not seem to work anymore at all for depersonalising results). It does disappear, though, if you use Incognito in Chrome. The intrusion of Google+ is most obvious when running searches with just one or two terms or more consumer biased searches. As soon as you start building more complex searches involving filetype: or site: for example, or research more scientific subjects then Google+ takes a back seat.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to make Google behave. Using advanced search commands is one way but many searches do not require them. The best method I have found so far is to use Chrome as your browser and open an incognito window. This depersonalises your results, ignores your web history and existing cookies, and leaves no traces of your search activity. Alternatively,

since Google has clearly lost the plot when it comes to search, try another service. The three that I would currently recommend are DuckDuckGo (<http://duckduckgo.com/>), Bing (<http://www.bing.com/>) and Blekko (<http://blekko.com/>).

Top search tips from Google and advanced search workshops

Sixteen people attended the two half day search workshops that I ran on Monday, 6th February 2012. As usual, I asked them at the end of the session to come up with a list of what they thought they would find really useful. I ran another workshop for twenty-two people from a variety of backgrounds and sectors on 8th February. This event was organised by UKeiG and hosted by Birmingham University. (My slides for this day can be found on authorSTREAM at <http://www.authorstream.com/Presentation/karenblakeman-1328026-ukeigoogle20120208/> and on Slideshare at <http://www.slideshare.net/KarenBlakeman/how-to-make-google-behave>).

Here, in no particular order, are their combined top tips

1. An understanding of how Google works and is “improving” search is vital.

Minor changes in functionality and ranking algorithms can cause havoc and are impossible to counter unless you know what is going on. Google’s various official blogs are a starting point but they don’t tell you everything. Identify and monitor blogs from searchers and organisations that monitor what Google and other search engines are up to. (A selection are listed on the final slide of the presentation)

2. “Google assumes that all searchers are stupid and don’t know how to search” said one workshop participant. It takes far too many decisions on our behalf: automatically corrects what it thinks are typographical errors, excludes and adds terms to the search without asking, changes results according to past searching behaviour, and gives priority to network connections. To bring Google to heel, learn how to use advanced search commands and the options available in the menus on the left hand side of the results pages.

3. If you have a Google account investigate your Dashboard

(<http://www.google.com/dashboard/>). This contains all of the information you have given Google about yourself plus data that Google has collected from your various accounts such as Gmail and Google Reader. Clear out anything you don’t need or use (you won’t be able to do this for everything) and make sure you are not sharing anything that you want kept private, for example docs and maps.

4. Web History

One of the things that Google uses to personalise your search results is what you have searched for and clicked on in the past. This is stored in your web. Your account's web history can be viewed and managed from within your dashboard <http://www.google.com/dashboard/>. Some people find the web history useful so you might want to keep it.

5. **Order matters.** Changing the order in which you type in your search terms will change the order of your results. The pages that contain the terms in the order you specified in your search are usually given a higher weighting. Also keep an eye on any oddities when combining advanced search commands. For example the search allintitle:diabetic retinopathy site:ac.uk comes up with sensible results. Switch the order to site:ac.uk allintitle:diabetic retinopathy and Google totally loses the plot and returns two rubbish results

6. The results page left hand menu

The menu on the left hand site of the results page has options that can be used to focus and narrow down your search. Open up the ‘More’ links to ensure you are seeing the full range of options. The menus change in content depending on the type of resource you are searching, for example images, blogs, news.

7. Search Translated foreign pages

For a different perspective, search for pages and sites in other languages. Use 'Translated foreign pages' in the results page side menu. This is another option that Google hides so to reveal it you will have to click on 'More search tools' at the bottom of the menu.

8. Google no longer searches for all of your terms all of the time. It now does what it calls a 'soft AND'. See the first comment to my blog posting on this issue at <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2011/11/08/dear-google-stop-messing-with-my-search/#comments>. If you want all of your terms to appear in your documents exactly as you typed them in then you have to use....

9. Verbatim. This tells Google to carry out an exact match search. Run your search as normal and then use Verbatim in the menu on the left hand side of your results page. It is normally hidden from view so click on 'More search tools' at the bottom of the menu and Verbatim is right at the bottom. It appears that you can use advanced search commands such as filetype:, site:, and the tilde (~) with Verbatim but it cannot be combined with the date options or 'Pages from the UK' in the results page menus.

10. site:

Use the site: command to search within a single site or type of site.
For example:

diabetes diagnosis site:statistics.gov.uk

pancreatic cancer statistics site:nhs.uk OR site:gov.uk

11. intitle:

If there is too much "noise" in your results list try searching for your terms in the title of the document. This will ensure that your subject is the main focus of the article.

12. filetype:

Use filetype: to search for particular types of information or reports for example PowerPoint for presentations, spreadsheets for data and statistics or PDF for research papers and industry/government reports. Note that filetype:ppt will **not** pick up the newer .pptx so you will need to include both in your search, for example

filetype:ppt OR filetype:pptx

You will also need to include .xlsx if you are searching for Excel spreadsheets and .docx for Word documents.

13. Numeric range search

Use this for anything to do with numbers – years, temperatures, weights, distances, prices etc. Use the boxes on the Advanced Search screen or just type in your two numbers separated by two full stops as part of your search:

macular degeneration statistics UK 2009..2012

14. Minus to exclude terms from a search

To exclude pages containing a term prefix the term with a minus sign.

15. Tilde (~) for synonyms

Use the tilde (~) before a word to include synonyms in your search. This can be used with Verbatim if you want an exact match for most of your terms but are happy for Google to include variations on one or two of the others.

16. Dictionary

For definitions of a term use the Dictionary option in the menu on the left hand side of your results page. (You will have to click on 'More search tools' at the bottom of the menu).

17. Public Data Explorer is one of Google's many well kept secrets. It can be found at <http://www.google.com/publicdata/> and allows you to search data sets from organisations such as the IMF, OECD and World Bank. You can compare the data in various ways and there are several chart options.

18. Bookmark your most used Google resources. Google has a habit of hiding and moving links to resources and tools such as the Public data Explorer, Advanced Search and Language Tools. Bookmark them so that you can always find them (unless, of course, Google decides to remove them altogether).

19. Google Trends and Google Insights. Three tools that are intended for people maintaining websites can also be useful to researchers in identifying trends, alternative search terms, and research into key players and competitors in a sector.

Google Trends <http://www.google.com/trends/> – can be used to view search trends over time and to compare multiple search terms

Google Trends for Websites <http://trends.google.com/websites> - looks at search trends for individual websites or you can compare several websites. In addition it shows what people 'Also visited' and 'Also searched for'.

Google Insights for Search <http://www.google.com/insights/search/> - advanced options for identifying search trends including countries and categories.

If you are responsible for content on your web pages these tools can help identify terms that could increase traffic to your site.

20. Try alternatives.

If you have had enough of Google and do not feel secure with the way it monitors your activity and personalises results try DuckDuckGo (<http://duckduckgo.com/>) as an alternative. DDG does not track, filter or personalise and several people found some of the results to be better than Google's. Many of the workshop participants had tried Bing but there was little enthusiasm for it. They had found that the results were not as relevant as Google's and there was concern over Bing's links with Facebook, personalisation and what it calls "adaptive search". Google is so often considered the bad guy because of the amount of personal information it gathers but it does at least show users a lot of what has been collected about them. The same cannot be said for Bing.

Official companies register for the Ukraine

The Ukrainian official companies register can be found at <http://irc.gov.ua/ua/Poshuk-v-YeDR.html>. The interface and information is in Ukrainian only but Google's translation option does a good enough job to help you through the site. If you use Google Chrome as your browser you can enable its automatic translation prompt by going to Options, Under the Bonnet, and ticking the Translate box. Many thanks to Ladymyr Bondar for alerting me to the site.

Twitter Notes

The following are some of my recent tweets and retweets. They are selected because they contain links to resources or announcements that may be of general interest. I have unshortened the shortened URLs.

February 23

How desperate are we to keep our petroleum based society? "EU tar sands vote looms"

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/feb/23/eu-tar-sands-vote>

Excellent guides on impact & citation analysis (H-Index, G-index etc)

<http://libguides.newcastle.edu.au/researchimpact> (via @simonjbains & @jaygee35)

Password reuse visualizer from Mozilla <http://flowingdata.com/2012/02/21/password-reuse-visualizer-from-mozilla/> and <http://mozillalabs.com/blog/2012/02/watchdog-visualize-your-password-reuse/>

February 22

Why Are Brands Shutting Their Facebook Stores? <http://mashable.com/2012/02/21/facebook-brands-closing-stores-fcommerce/> (Mashable Business)

How to Remove Your Google Search History Before Google's New Privacy Policy Takes Effect

<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/02/how-remove-your-google-search-history-googles-new-privacy-policy-takes-effect>

February 21

Yandex Starts To Drink From The Twitter "Firehose" <http://searchengineland.com/yandex-starts-to-drink-from-the-twitter-firehose-112204> Russian search engine to integrate Twitter feed into its search results

February 20

RT @damyantipatel: Librewery lists 6000 beers (via ResearchBuzz) – app for the shambrarians

<http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/1/prweb9116616.htm> [I've tried the Android version and so far it's been very good in providing information on beers I encounter on my travels]

February 13

An excellent article from Katy Wrathall. You can't continue to develop professionally when unemployed – or can you? <http://smilylibrarian.wordpress.com/2012/02/13/you-cant-continue-to-develop-professionally-when-unemployed-or-can-you/>

For those of you interested chemistry: Antony Williams -Improving online chemistry – one structure at a time <http://www.slideshare.net/AntonyWilliams/improving-online-chemistry-one-structure-at-a-time>

February 12

Opt out of Google targeted ads at <http://www.google.com/ads/preferences>. Also <http://www.aboutads.info/choices/> and http://www.networkadvertising.org/managing/opt_out.asp

February 9

Brands of the World "Download vector logos and logotypes" Library of freely downloadable vector logos <http://www.brandsoftheworld.com/>

BBC News Video – Fake rhino attempts zoo escape <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16950361> A zoo in Tokyo simulates a rhino escape to prepare staff for a possible emergency. Two employees wore a life-size rhino costume and tried to escape the compound.

“Interesting Quotes From Google’s Search Lead, Amit Singhal”

<http://searchengineland.com/interesting-quotes-from-googles-search-lead-amit-singhal-110721>

From @sengineland

February 7

RT @stephendale: Over 3 years later, “deleted” Facebook photos are still online. (What a surprise!) <http://arstechnica.com/business/news/2012/02/nearly-3-years-later-deleted-facebook-photos-are-still-online.ars>

February 6

RT @tadawes: Colleges sell naming rights to bathrooms | Inside Higher Ed
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/02/06/colleges-sell-naming-rights-bathrooms>

And finally..... February 3

[A practical tip for dealing with recalcitrant technology] Camera kept saying lens cap was on when it wasn't. Three thumps on the arm of the sofa and it's working again. Old techniques are always the best.

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