

Radio Days – 2014-06-07

Discussion – Searching the Internet

Most people are familiar with a search engine like Google but for those who have difficulty in telling the difference between a *web browser*, a *web site* and a *search engine* here is a brief introduction.

- A *web browser* is a program which you use to browse the internet. The most commonly-used web browser is *Internet Explorer* because Internet Explorer comes free with Windows. Internet Explorer is recognised by its logo: a big blue E. There are some other web browsers which I have mentioned before: in alphabetical order they are Chrome, Firefox and Opera. 
- A *web site* is some pages found on the web. My website is www.tobybainbridge.com and you get to it by typing that address into the address bar of a web browser. Your browser will then display my home page: from here you can go to any of my pages. You could also type the address of another web site into the address bar to be taken to that other web site.
- A *search engine* is a *web site* which helps you find information on the internet. There are many search engines: two common ones are *Google* and *Bing*. My favourite search engine is *Google* because I find that it produces more relevant results than *Bing*, but YMMV (Your Mileage May Vary). The job of a search engine is to give you a list of websites which match your search terms. I searched for *search engine* and found over 60 million entries. This suggests that vague, general search terms are going to overwhelm you with information.

Because I use Google for searching more than I use any other search engine, the rest of this discussion will be about using Google to make the most of your searching.

Google Options

One of the things which I most like about Google is that you can change some of the settings. One setting which I always change is to open all links in a new tab. This means that you do not have the continual *click » back » click » back* dance: you just have to click on a tab to see that result.

To set options in Google go to www.google.com.au then click on *Settings » Search Settings* at the bottom of the page. When the search settings page opens just tick the option to open each result in a new browser window then scroll to the bottom of this page and click on *Save*.

It also means that you can close the uninteresting links and, with a good browser like Chrome or Opera, you can *pin* the outstanding results so that they are still there when you next open your browser.

Browser Options

One browser option which is important for me is the ability to search from the address bar. This option is, unfortunately, not available in older versions of Internet Explorer such as those available for Windows XP.

As I explained in an earlier radio talk, Microsoft recently announced that Internet Explorer is equipped with a massive security hole which more and more hackers are putting to good use. This is one of the main reason that I recommend that everybody who uses the internet switches to a better web browser.

There is a list of web browsers at the end of this paper: please download and use one of those browsers to keep your surfing as safe as possible.

Yes: it really does matter which browser you use!

Search Techniques

The best search queries will give you a small number of results so that you can have some chance of finding the most relevant. Writing a good search query is like writing a good job advertisement: the ideal job advertisement would find the one person who wants to do the job which you need done to the highest needed standard for the lowest wage. Just as this job advertisement is not possible to write, so the perfect search query does not exist.

Like so many parts of life you are chasing a moving target: the results which will come from a single search query will vary depending on:

- When you search
- What other searches you have performed recently
- Which computer you use to perform the search

All of this might well make you despair before you even start. However, being able to search the internet is very valuable so it is a skill which is worth practicing.

There are a number of ways which you can use to refine your searches. Here is a small list of ways to refine your searches.

Search Within Web Site

If you know, for example, that you want to find results which are best found in Microsoft's web site then you would add *site:microsoft.com* after your search term. For example, you are frustrated by people who keep sending you Word documents or Excel spreadsheets which you cannot read because they are created in a later version of Word or Excel than the one which you have on your computer or you do not have a copy of Word or Excel on your computer. To open these documents you would use a search term like:

view documents from word 2010 site:microsoft.com

The first two results from this search are the two which you will find most useful. The first result is for a free program from Microsoft which allows people without Word to read and print Word documents and the second is an update to earlier versions of Word which allows your version to read and write documents which have been created in Word 2007 or later. Both of these updates are common ones which my clients have needed in the past.

Search Within URL

A *URL* (Uniform Resource Locator) is the address of a web site. A URL looks like all the web addresses which you see around you. The URL for my web site is www.tobybainbridge.com: if you type this into the address bar of a web browser it will take you straight to my web site.

If, for example, you had seen a website which advertised pet foods and your thought that the URL (address) contained *kitty* then you would type a query like:

inurl:kitty

Please note that you must have the colon (:) immediately after *inurl* and that you cannot have a space after the colon. These are the rules and you will not get the result that you expect if you do not obey these rules.

Searching For Images, Etc

Both Google and Bing will also let you search for images and for YouTube clips. This means that much of the internet is available at the flick of a mouse. Please remember that, if at first you do not succeed, try again.

Searching is an inexact science and the more searching you do, the better you will become. As with so many things in life, searching is part art and part science: just keep doing it and you will become better.

The easiest way to search for an image is to go to the main google page (www.google.com.au) then click on the word *Images* in the top right-hand corner of the page. This opens Google's image-searching page. From here you can load the web address of an image or copy and paste an image to the search box then press *Enter* or click on the camera icon. This will search the web for similar images.

This can be useful for photographers or other artists who want to check to see if any of their images have been used illegally.

Google's Advanced Search Guide

There are, of course, all sorts of things which you can do when searching. Google, as befits the best-known search engine in the world, has its own advanced search guide. The URL is shown at the end of this document for those of you who find that normal searching produces too many results. After all, who has time to search through 200 million results?

For dedicated searchers this guide can, perhaps, be the next best thing to whatever is their next best thing. Remember: Keep On Keeping On!

Google Tutorials

Just as there are many ways to search using Google, so there are many tutorials available to help you get the best out of your searching. One very easy one to follow is at wikiHow, a web site which helps people learn how to do things.

Another website which helps you learn how to search using Google is Google itself. There is more than enough information there to help the most dedicated searcher spend a whole week or two beside the computer just learning more and more about the gentle art of seducing your needs out of the ether that is the internet.

This is the time for you to make up for your lost youth playing billiards and learn the modern art of coaxing information from that ever-expanding resource: the searchable internet.

Further Information

Web browsers	www.google.com/chrome www.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox www.opera.com
Search engines	www.google.com.au www.bing.com
Advanced Google search	www.google.com.au/advanced_search
Google searching guide	www.googleguide.com
Inside Google search	www.google.com.au/insidesearch
wikiHow	www.wikihow.com/Search-Google