Seek and ye shall find

Google-mania!

*By Jay Nelson, **Editor***

In "The Library of Babel", the great Argentinian writer, Jorge Luis Borges, envisioned an infinite library where everything that is or ever could be written is stored, and the people who spend their lives fruitlessly seeking the one perfect index to it all. Though written in 1941, the story is an apt metaphor for the World Wide Web and the importance and difficulty of being able to locate anything useful in the ocean of information it contains.

Fortunately for us, we have something close to that "perfect index" already. We've got **Google**.

Unlike earlier directories like Yahoo!, Google is a powerful **full-text search engine** whose "spiders" automatically scan billions of pages, storing data about words, images, and links on immense server farms. Its ease of use, handiness, and simplicity of appearance have won it millions of fans. Most people use it to find information by keywords or topics. But that's just for starters. It can do much, much more.

Google's services keep mushrooming, too. Free email, scheduling, document and photo sharing, translating, chat, news and interest groups — the list goes on and on. Google can now create blogs, 3D models, or websites. They own **YouTube** and have mapped the Earth, the Moon, and Mars; they've created their own browser and smartphone, scheme to scan all the world's libraries, are about to introduce their own e-book reader, and plan to offer some lucky town broadband.

The search engine can scan the Web for text and pictures, but also books, blogs, patents, trends, videos, products to buy, even scholarly papers. Furthermore, there are a number of clever tricks, called "**Google hacks**" that make it even more useful.

Smart searching

First, though, it helps to know some basics. The search engine is *not* case sensitive, and it usually ignores words like "a", "the", "of" and so forth. Up to 10 query terms are permitted at one time, and Boolean operators, like *AND* and *OR*, can be used to determine how they relate. Quotation marks around a phrase will make it search for the entire string as a single term, rather than its separate parts. Click on "*Advanced Search*" next to the *Search* button to see more options.

Some helpful tricks to speed up searches are to use obscure keywords to limit possibilities, or full-word wildcards (replacing terms with an asterisk ***) to find other word variations, changing the word order, or even repeating terms (such as *baseball baseball*), which tends to get more tightly focussed results. Commonly misspelled names and terms can be deliberately used to narrow the search, as Google will try to correct them for you. Definitions can be found using the "*Searched the web for*" phrase which appears on the results page followed by linked terms. Or you can enter *queryword:* or *define:* followed by the word you need to know about.

These last are part of a group of specific commands, called "**special syntaxes**". These cause Google to search certain parts of webpages or for certain kinds of information. This can really come in handy.

For instance, putting *link:* at the beginning of a query followed by a URL will generate a list of all the webpages that link to that address. Starting with *site:* followed by an address or domain will restrict the search to specific place. With *daterange:* you can limit it to a specific time period, *filetype:* to a particular kind of document, *cache:* can find outdated material, and so forth. And you can often combine these terms, too.

Telephone numbers can be found with *phonebook:*, while *rphonebook:* limits it to residences and *bphonebook:* to business listings, which you can further limit by product. You can also use these for reverse lookups by entering a phone number (including area code) to find the owner.

You can also find *time:* for any city in the world, convert currencies (like *100 dollars in euros*) and even use Google as a built-in calculator. This kind of versatility is what cloud computing is all about.

Killing time with Google

Google does have a certain playfulness about it, shown in the way they regularly change their logo for special occasions and in the "*I'm feeling lucky*" link.

Not only does it have a huge directory of games, you can play with the interface itself. "Google whacking" — trying to come up with a two-term search query that has only one result — is one popular time-waster, and much harder than it sounds. Or you can look for weird things on Google Maps, guess which searches are more popular with Trends, or what's being looked for with Image searches. There are many more diversions out there, but to find them, all you have to do is Google.

Google v. Facebook v. You?

By Jay Nelson, **Editor**

Google is not the only corporate colossus contending for dominance over the Web. **Microsoft** remains a major player, and the social networking site, **Facebook**, has become a new challenger. In fact, Facebook recently had even more daily traffic than Google.

They may have much more soon with their newest initiative, a "*Like*" button embedded on many pages across the Web. When clicked, it will let your friends and followers know you're excited by that content. It will also appear on your public profile.

The money-making potential of this for advertisers is obvious as it is irresistible. If they are allowed to use this data — which Facebook denies — users could be tracked across the Internet and greeted with ads tailored to their specific preferences at every turn.

Google already does this, albeit very discreetly. But for both giants and partakers of their services, there are very important privacy issues involved. Especially as the founders of both mammoth corporations seem to believe less in privacy than in proprietary information.

What, in fact, do these companies want? Why do they offer these free services? What do they gain by it, and perhaps most importantly, how can they afford it?

The answer is simply "**information**". Data is money. Though Google's ads everywhere are great income earners, it is the database *itself* used to place them that is invaluable. This great mass of facts, besides containing all sorts of personal information gleaned from your searches and surfing, is a data-miner's dream.

For instance, lists appearing on product pages at **Amazon** — yet another heavyweight — headed "*Those who bought this also bought…*" are extracted from the decisions of thousands of other buyers. No one knows why, say, someone who chooses a certain bestseller might pick up a bathmat also that day, nor is it important just who those individuals are. But such patterns of purchasing can be precisely determined to target consumers, without knowing the who or why.

There are huge advantages to this. Surfing for information and products becomes focussed, more convenient, and personal. Time is saved, annoying blind alleys averted. The problem is that we don't yet know the **social cost** of such practices — because we don't know what truly personal information these companies have, who has access to it, or exactly what it is used for.

But all this data's high value is shown by things like a virus called "Koobface", designed just to infect Facebookers' PCs, and evil widgets which were actually spyware that were also tried. Thus, Google being hacked, or Facebook changing its privacy policy, is important to all users, which is just about everybody these days.

In the end, we have only the power as consumers to buy or not. But the more information we have, the smarter choices we can make. So too, it is hoped, with the websites so many depend upon.

iPhone Productivity Tips

By Mark Costlow, **President**

The iPhone's lack of a physical keyboard is both a blessing and a curse. It allows for a much larger screen, but makes it harder to input data. Here are a few helpful tips. These should work anywhere you enter text, such as email, websites, and texting.

Tip #1: If you press *SPACE* twice quickly at the end of a sentence, it will automatically insert a period for you, so you don't have to switch to the punctuation screen and back again.

Tip#2: If you need to enter a number or special character like a percent sign, you normally press the punctuation button, then the key for the special character, then press the punctuation button again to return to the text layout. Try this instead: press the punctuation button and leave your finger on the screen. The punctuation keys will appear. Slide your finger across the screen to the key you want and let go. This accomplishes the same thing as the 3 previous button-presses, but all in one "swipe" motion.

Tip#3: Remember that in current software releases, the iPhone supports the landscape keyboard. Turn your phone sideways to get a much larger keyboard, which can help in banging out a lengthy message.

Tip#4: Some people love the iPhone's typing corrector, and some people hate it. If you are among the latter, you can disable it! Go into the *Settings* app, select *General*, then scroll down to *Keyboard*. *Auto-correction*, *Auto-Capitalization*, and a few other settings can be toggled here.

Follow SWCP on Facebook and Twitter

Southwest Cyberport has joined the social networking revolution on **Facebook**, at *tinyurl.com/swcp-fb* and also at **Twitter**, *twitter.com/swcptweet* .

Notice Us Before NOVA

We're on TV too! A brief blurb for SWCP appears before the first showing of the latest episode of **NOVA** on PBS on Tuesday nights. We are proud of this opportunity to give back to our community by helping to sponsor smart TV programming.

Net Notes

Eternal tweets

Tweets, that most fleeting form of communication, are about to become part of the historical record. The Library of Congress, as part of its embrace of digital media, has decided to save and catalog all 55 million messages of 140 characters or less sent each day.

The archive, a gift by the company, will be part of the Library's ambitious "Web capture" project. In over a decade, it has already stored 167 terabytes of digital material, far more information than in the 21 million books in their collection.

Hailed as a "second-by-second history of ordinary people", your tweets, urgent and trivial alike, may bore generations of graduate students yet to come.

—New York Times