



Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Web sites that I have come across and which might appeal to you and to keep you up to date with news and views on Internet trends, developments and statistics. It offers essentially a personal selection rather than comprehensive coverage.

Multiple search engine access

A new comparison tool shows that the major search engines have surprisingly little overlap, even for popular search terms. Thumbshots Ranking allows you to perform your own comparisons, and displays the results visually, making it easy to see both the rankings and comparative positions of pages in search engine results. URLs are represented by small circles, and these circles are connected by a line if the page appears in both engines you are testing. Position the mouse over a circle and the full URL of the page is displayed – click on it and you are taken there. The results give the total number of sites found for the selected search engines, together with the number (and percentage) of overlapping links and unique links. Thumbshots Ranking is essentially a service that enables you to learn more about individual search engines and to optimize your site's ranking accordingly. Your ranking, of course, determines the amount of traffic you are likely to get. Try it out yourself at <http://ranking.thumbshots.com/> and read what SearchEngineWatch has to say about it at <http://searchenginewatch.com/searchday/article.php/3344081>.

Another search tool that can save you time and make Web searching easier is Trovando. With Trovando you only need to enter keywords once in order to be able to access and compare results from some 250 search engines across ten different categories (including the Web, images, reference, tags, news, price, blogs and URLs) by simply clicking on the engine's name. Once you have had a look at the results in the first search engine, simply click on another. The system allows you to add new search engines, tool bars, bookmarks and different browsers. Try it out at <http://www.trovando.it/>.

Emerging consumer trends

Want to know what's going on in the world – what people like and don't like? Then you need to consult Trendwatching.com, one of the world's fastest growing trend agencies that scans the globe for the most promising consumer trends, insights and related hands-on business ideas. Trendwatching.com (<http://www.trendwatching.com/>) keeps you up to date by bringing the world's most promising trends to your desktop. Findings are reported in [free, opinionated Trend Briefings](#) and are aggregated in a free [monthly newsletter](#). One good feature of the site is that it has a database archive of trends, which can be searched. Established in 2002, Trendwatching.com has its headquarters in Amsterdam, The

Netherlands and has a network of over 7000 trend watchers in more than 70 countries worldwide.

Personal search engines

Tired of wading through thousands of irrelevant search results to get to the information you want? Ever wish you could narrow your search to sites you already know and trust? Well, Rollyo allows you to quickly and easily create your own search engines, and explore and save those created by others. Using Yahoo! Search, Rollyo gives you the tools to create your own personal search engines – with no programming required. All you have to do is pick the sites you want to search, and Rollyo creates a customized search engine for you.

If you are always going back to the same site over and over again (such as SAJIM!), then Rollyo lets you create a 'searchroll' that includes just that single site so all your searches are in one place. Rollyo also gives you the possibility to explore and save searchrolls created by the community of Rollyo users and share your knowledge on a particular set of topics.

With Rollyo, you can always expand any search to include the whole Web and receive a complete set of Yahoo! search results. The company is constantly adding new tools to make Rollyo more useful – plug-ins, custom search boxes for your site, simple ways to import your bookmarks so you can use them to quickly create a variety of searchrolls, etc. Have a go at creating your own search engine at <http://www.rollyo.com/>.

Web mashing

The term mash apparently comes from the music world where it refers to the (unauthorized) combination of the vocals from one song with the musical backing of another to create something new and different. Web mashing does something similar – taking data or a feature from one site and seamlessly overlaying it on another to create a hybrid Web site. Seems pretty useful to me and a natural extension of the open-source philosophy.

Have a look at <http://www.housingmaps.com> – this site combines the mapping capabilities of Google with house listings from estate agents. The result is a Web map, which allows you to pinpoint exactly where houses are for sale in a given area (in the USA) and get an overview of any particular available property. It is an excellent way to minimize the time spent driving round an area seeing what's up for sale. The site at <http://ononemap.com/> does something similar in the UK.

Another site, <http://traffic.poly9.com>, grabs textual data from Yahoo Traffic! and maps data from Google to give users up-to-date traffic reports for a given locality in the United States. Entering a city name, for instance, provides the user with a detailed map with various symbols – clicking on them gives the latest information on road conditions, severity of delays, roadworks, accidents, etc. Similarly, a public transit site for the Seattle area has been created by mashing data from various traffic, transport, Webcam and map sites. Have a look at <http://www.busmonster.com>, or try Fotogopo (<http://www.fotogopo.com>) – a mash-up of Google Maps, geocoder.us, and over 800000 US street level photographs arranged by latitude and longitude. The Crusin Mode simulates driving down a given street – move the map to change the street. This is great if you want to see what a given city looks like before going there.

Going on business or holiday to Chicago? Then you may want to check out the crime situation by going to <http://www.chicagocrime.org>. The mash-up lets visitors view reported crime data by crime type, street, date and time, police beat, tourist route and so on. A map is given showing the exact location of the crime together with information relating to it, such

as whether arrests were made or whether it was a domestic dispute. Statistics are also provided showing the most common locations for certain types of crime [e.g. assaults with hands and fists seem to take place mostly on school grounds; homicides usually take place on the sidewalk (pavement) or street]. Such crime mapping could be usefully applied to other cities in various parts of the world too!

If you are going skiing this winter at a resort somewhere in France or maybe Colorado, then check out the snow conditions, whether ski lifts are open, what the weather is like and view blogs and photos (as well as getting details on apartments to rent) at <http://www.skibonk.com>. Or maybe you are planning to go to this year's Football World Cup in Germany and need a hotel near one of the venues. Just go to <http://www.pmgeiser.ch/germany/> to get details on the venue (location, number of seats) and then nearby hotels (with details) shown on a map.

Of course, it's possible we have been using such sites for a while without realizing that they were part of a trend combing data from different sources (indeed, in my last column I talked about Google GlobeTrotting – which seems to be a mash-up). Some companies such as Google, Yahoo and MSM seem to be encouraging mashing and have made their methods available for linking to maps. It shows the ingenuity and creativity of programmers and is clearly leading to some extremely useful information. The Programmable Web site (<http://www.programmableweb.com/mashups>) lists over 350 mash-ups and there are many, many more, including some in South Africa that are not on this list. To learn more about mashing and how to mash, as well as some additional mash-up sites, consult the entry in Wikipedia ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_\(web_application_hybrid\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashup_(web_application_hybrid))).

Use of search engines

Nielsen//NetRatings, a global leader in Internet media and market research, has reported that Web surfers often use search engines to navigate their way to common Web sites rather than typing the Web site's URL directly into the address bar. In fact 43% of online searchers use the search box much like an address bar.

Web users' top search terms were popular, well-known Web site names, such as 'ebay' and 'google', rather than subject or topical terms. Leading the top ten most popular search terms for November was 'ebay' with 13.9 million requests, followed by 'google' and 'yahoo', with 13.3 million and 8.0 million requests respectively.

Interestingly, five of the top ten search terms were for sites with search engines themselves, supporting the argument that Web visitors are not likely to be loyal to a single search engine. Other popular search terms were for retail and auction sites including Wal-Mart, as well as for sites offering a service, such as Mapquest. What all ten search terms had in common was that they were the names of popular Web sites rather than topics. In actual fact, the first topical search term, 'weather', ranked number 23 on the list.

Google was the top ranked search engine with a 46% share of online searches, followed by Yahoo with 23%. Read more at http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_060118.pdf

User-led communities

To find the biggest Web success stories in 2006 one needs to look away from the traditional giants such as Google, Microsoft and Yahoo! According to Nielsen//NetRatings user-led communities are the Web future. The photo Web site builder tool and community site Piczo was the most successful brand in the UK in 2005 in terms of audience growth with an astonishing 9669% growth – driven mainly by an audience of women under 18 (45% of

users). Piczo technology gives the user the ability to create a comprehensive personal Web site – including pages that contain photos, text, guest-books, chat boxes and music – without requiring html code.

Number two in the fastest growing online brands of 2005 in terms of the UK audience is the greeting cards company American Greetings, followed by Shopzilla, a shopping guide and directory. The community and consumer-led content theme of the UK Top 10 continues with sites such as LimeWire, which provides file sharing software, Wikipedia, the 'free communal encyclopaedia that anyone can edit', Skype, Internet telephony and Blogger, one of the original blogging guides and services.

Services such as Piczo and the younger audience most likely to be using it provide clues as to where the Internet, driven by the explosion in broadband and digital technology, might be heading. More details can be found at http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_060123_uk.pdf.

About the author

Dr David Raitt is senior technology transfer officer with the European Space Agency in the Netherlands. His work involves finding applications for space technologies in non-space sectors, particularly those useful for improving everyday life. An information scientist by education and training, David is also editor of *The Electronic Library* and chairman of the Internet Librarian International conferences.

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