

Two New Search Engines: MSN Search/Beta and Google/Scholar

Those of us who enjoy wallowing around in Google and Yahoo!, now have two new toys to play with: MSN Search/Beta available at <http://beta.search.msn.com/> and Google/Scholar available at www.scholar.google.com.

Microsoft has decided to compete with the two main search engines currently in use, Google and Yahoo! Bill Gates has spent around \$100 million dollars and almost two years of development to produce what he hopes is an efficient, user-friendly search engine. Just like in *Jeopardy*, queries can be “entered in the form of a question.” Asking “What is the temperature in Greenville, NC?” will quickly get you a link to the Weather Underground and CNN Weather with current temperature readings. Also, high up on the search list for this question are false drops like the temperature of the sandwiches at Moe’s Southwestern Grill in Greenville, NC; the temperature of office space rented to the City of Greenville (must be maintained at 68-75F); and the importance of keeping Zyban (manufactured in Greenville, NC) at the correct controlled room temperature. Asking “How do I repair stucco?” nets you two do-it-yourself FAQs (including “show me more results from ‘Quickrete.com’”), and the U.S. National Park Service’s Preservation Booklet #22 on “Preservation and Repair of Historic Stucco.” This entry was followed by references to a number of classified ads from a local “bargain-trader” for contractors interested in stucco repair work. These two searches illustrate a new search feature in MSN Search/beta called “Near Me,” a search engine feature that attempts to locate relevant hits from sites close to the requester. Using this feature can produce even more interesting results. For example, searching on the name of the band “Great Big Sea” leads first to some music clips from the group (and a link to an MSN store where you can buy them for .99 cents each), but also a link to the East Carolina Manuscript Collection record holdings of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary!

Asking MSN Search/Beta to locate “Near Me” some Chinese (food) gets you some links to how to learn Chi-

nese, a person who can translate several Chinese dialects, a News Bureau press release on Chinese students registered in distance education courses at East Carolina University and a puzzling reference to a *Hilbert College News* article entitled “Students Against Destructive Decisions Club will hold ham dinner” (actually the dinner was followed by a “Chinese action”). Why this would be “Near Me” (Hilbert College is in Hamburg, NY) can only be explained by the fact that it was a college news bureau press release and also it contained the word “Chinese.” Fortunately MSN Search/Beta has a link at the bottom of the page: “Did get the results you expected?—help us improve,” which prompts you to fill out a form listing the problem(s) you encountered using this feature. From the results displayed by MSN Search/Beta it appears that while “artificial intelligence” has been around for decades, search engines have a lot to learn with regard to how the human mind actually thinks about words.

Google/Scholar is an attempt to limit a searcher’s hits to scholarly (“peer reviewed”) articles. Peer-reviewed journals, theses, technical reports, preprints, and books are indexed with the scholarly researcher in mind. Just like regular Google, Google/Scholar indexes and orders your search by how relevant the search engine thinks a particular article or document relates to your topic. Relevancy is determined by how often the article is cited in the search database and how many times the author is mentioned in peer-reviewed literature, as well as by the type of document cited. The theory is that if the topic is cited in peer-reviewed literature, then it would have a higher relevancy rating for the scholarly researcher. Since Google/Scholar will display citations to books and relevant articles regardless of access on the Web, many items will be only available through local interlibrary loan services for most patrons. If your library has subscriptions to online full-text journal services, then you may be able to link the Google/Scholar search to the text of many of these articles using tools such as SFX.

Because Google/Scholar indexes peer-reviewed articles and academic books, it might not be the best

choice for current topics. For example, a Google/Scholar search for material on the current “flu vaccine shortage” in the fall of 2004 in the U.S., produced a number of citations to articles about shortages in the late 1970s, 2000, and 2001. There were also two articles in *Community Nursing Spectrum* declaring the end to the problem, with the headline “Vaccine Shortage Over.” A regular Google search produced current weekly flu and vaccine information from the U.S. Center for Disease Control, and a two-day-old article in *USA Today* on the current status of the situation. Also cited was a seven-hour-old article in the *Seattle Times* on the shortage! MSN/Search Beta also had current 2004 articles (including CDC information), a few links to advertisements for “Tamiflu” and “Flu Vaccine Distributors” and a link to “Take Action: Don’t Let the Flu Vaccine Shortage Happen Again!” from www.lungaction.org. Doing a “Near Me” search in MSN was a complete failure unless you consider Miami “Near Me”! “Near Me” produced the following incredible false drops: “The Cardiothoracic Survey Network: Transradial approach best for coronary angioplasty in octogenarians” and “Urban News—ECU Football Coach Resigns.” In all fairness, ECU is “near me,” but what does the ECU football coach have to do with the flu—unless he is sick of losing games!

Google/Scholar is great for research topics like “artificial pacemaker.” Here researchers will find references to articles from periodicals like the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Circulation*, *Cell*, *Archives of Internal Medicine*, *Acta Medica Scandinavica*, *Surgical Forum*, *Annals of Surgery*, *Pacing*, and *Coloproctology* (!). While searching for “artificial pacemaker” and “pacemaker, artificial” produced the same number of hits (18,700), the order of the articles presented is completely different. Since with “pacemaker, artificial” (the MeSH heading) the articles are presented in a slightly more relevant order, it appears that using controlled vocabulary, even in a full-text searching environment, will give you more relevant hits.

How do these two new search engines compare with the old standbys “Yahoo!” and regular “Google”? I tried the search “out-of-state wine sales” on all five (Yahoo!, Google, Google/Scholar, MSN/Search, and MSN Search/Beta). Yahoo! found 1,460,000 hits on the topic. The first ten were a mix of general articles on the topic, with the closest being an article on the striking down of the Virginia statute on interstate wine sales. The articles included a few editorials, including one arguing that wine sales should be kept out of groceries stores in general. MSN Search found 282,203 hits, the first ten of which were generally the same as the ones found by Yahoo! However, MSN Search found a few additional articles that were displayed first, including a 2001 *Business Week* right-on-target article, “Fermenting a Wine-Sales Revolution,” and the full text of an undated Texas court ruling from a site called www.wine-lovers-page.com/texas.shtml.

MSN Search/Beta found 870,419 hits, none of which were in the regular MSN Search version, and

very few of which were highly relevant. The first hit was for a Melrose, Illinois, wine shipper, Prime Wines, and the second one was entitled “New York State Wine Time,” which contained links to Wineries in NY State. Also included were a link to the Michael Mecker Web log, Red-State.com (Ohio), statistics on 2002 California Wine Sales, Houston Wine (“The Wine Lover’s Internet Resource”), a copy of a link to the Virginia ABC Banquet wine sales application form, and the URL of the Sonoma County Wine Library.

MSN Search/Beta using the “Near Me” function found 396 results near Greenville, North Carolina, including the “ECU Pirate Club—Pirates Supporting Pirates,” a reference to *North Carolina General Statutes* on sales tax on motor vehicles, a North Carolina General Assembly bill on reduction of out-of-wedlock births, *Stocknotes* by the ECU School of Business, and a link to Gaston College’s *Opportunities for Life* magazine (university tour to Barcelona included “tour of Torres Winery, wine tasting included”). The ECU Pirate Club site was interesting to note in that a few of the club sponsors were restaurants that served wine and a number of sponsors were located in Winterville, North Carolina! Obviously the search engine was truncating on “win.”

Google had some of the best and most relevant articles on interstate wine sales. Google found 1,710,000 hits on the search topic, including testimony in a Federal Trade Commission hearing on direct marketing of wine, and an article in *Wired News* that included a color map in PDF format showing the status of interstate wine shipment by state.

Google/Scholar bombed out on this search with 5,350 hits, including alcohol licensing in New Zealand, multi-scale partitions (in an *Advances in Computer Machines Symposium*), a *National Tax Journal* 2000 article on the decline of wine tax revenue; “Grape Purchasing and Disease Management Strategies for Premium Wine Grapes” from the horticultural management faculty at Cornell University; “Vineyard and Vintage View” on Missouri wine sales, not including out-of-state sales, from Southern Missouri State University’s Department of Fruit Science; “Farmer’s wine fair: a case study” from the *British Food Journal*; and “the Rock, the Reef, and the grape: the challenges of developing wine tourism in regional Australia” in the *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (available from www.ingenta.com). When trying to locate “out-of-state wine sales” “near me,” a few of the search engines did locate relevant documents dealing with wine sales in Virginia, closest out-of-state sales location near me!

As you can see, results vary with these search engines. While the MSN Search/Beta and Google/Scholar show promise in new and “near” areas, they don’t seem to function as well as the two major search engines, Yahoo! and regular Google. Only time and user input will tell if these beta versions replace or even survive to supplement the old favorites. As we have all found out in the past, relevancy is often in the eye of the beholder and not in the algorithm of the search engine.