Wired to the World

by Ralph Lee Scott

Zurfing the Net

Tired of those goofy search engines that leave you with 56,789 hits on your topic, when what you need is seven relevant Internet sites? Try "Zurfing" the Net instead of just plain surfing! *ZurfRider* is a recently (1997) developed search tool that can help you make sense of today's confusing Internet searching tools. *ZurfRider* can be downloaded from: *www.zurf.com*. A free download trial with a 50-search limit is available, while for the fantastic price of $19.95 you can get an unlimited version.

ZurfRider is a truly revolutionary Internet search tool that brings the power of dozens of search engines to your desktop. The list of things it can do is almost a catalog of search engine problem-solvers. Instead of having to go from one search engine to another, *ZurfRider* calls dozens at once and then organizes the results together based on content. *ZurfRider* automatically verifies that each link is valid before display; thus you will never go into a dead link again. When search statements are faulty, *ZurfRider* prompts you by asking questions based on your search. For example, if you search "hto dogs," "hot dogs" would be suggested as an alternate term. *ZurfRider* highlights terms that match your search; thus you never have to wade through canine pages when looking for "hot dogs." No more references to sites such as "It's Hot in Phoenix Today as the Dogs Get Off the Plane —ASPCA Provides Gratis Drinking Water for the Animals." The software attempts to provide an intelligent interface for the search query. For example, in the "hot dog" search, *ZurfRider* was able to determine that this search was related to: food, eating, and restaurants, but not warm Fidos. Results were displayed in traditional Windows-grouped folders for easy sorting. The first site retrieved was a link to the "Ten Top Hot Dog Restaurants." An embedded window allows the searchers to select the words that most nearly represent what they are looking for and not select unwanted terms such as pets, animals, etc.

While *ZurfRider* is looking over the 'Net, it prompts you with a status window that tells you how things are going, and lets you stop at any time. *ZurfRider* can determine the language of the site, and thus eliminate all those references with the Japanese characters that do not display on your screen. This software package groups search results into folders when large numbers are retrieved, and then you can easily discard folders you do not want to view. You can also store previous searches for future recall.

The Zurf Incorporated Home Page features a monkey covering its eyes and suggests that users stop monkeying around with the Internet and get serious with an intelligent search engine. The *ZurfRider* slogan is "Shred the Web" implying that the software will zip you to your site with a search tool that has a brain. *ZurfRider* is integrated with MS *Internet Explorer* for faster results running under Windows95. It works just fine with Netscape's *Navigator*, but lacks some of the tight software integration found with *Explorer*. *ZurfRider* is about half the cost of its competitors: Quarterdeck's *WebCompass 2.0* ($49.95); Symantec's *Fast Find* ($49.95); and ForeFront's *WebSeeker* ($49.95). Competitors' software also lacks many of *ZurfRider's* features. For example, no competitor offers the ability to group related results together or the intelligent query re-definition feature of *ZurfRider*.

The package can be purchased only over the Internet with a credit card. Files are shipped/downloaded in a compressed/zipped format and must be unpacked to install. After unzipping, run the file called: zurf.*. Several known bugs are documented on the *www.zurf.com* Web site. The most serious one I encountered occurs when launching a URL. The user receives the message "– embedded" rather than gaining access to the URL in the browser. The solution to this error message is to reinstall the browser. It appears that reinstalling the browser after installing *ZurfRider* corrects most known bugs. A "Feedback Form" is also on *www.zurf.com* for reporting additional bugs you encounter. All in all, the software appears to work well and is amply supported for your $19.95. Librarians always want to know: "Can I do Boolean searching with *ZurfRider*?" The answer is yes, but only on those search engines that allow Boolean operators. Using Boolean searching will help refine the results, however some systems do not use these operators, so they cannot always be relied on. Since *ZurfRider* allows you to pick and choose search engines that use Boolean operators, you can avoid those engines that do not offer this feature. I think it is always good to try using the operators and then look over the results. This is part of redefining your search strategy. In arranging the search results, *ZurfRider* always favors those hits that have the complete phrase, such as "hot dogs," over those sites that just have "hot" and "dogs" listed. It all depends on what you are looking for, but *ZurfRider* is hard to beat! An undesirable feature is that you cannot print directly from the search screen. First you have to "Select Results in Browser," then you can print from the browser.

Other interesting things you can do with *ZurfRider* are to play its theme music while you surf (Zahn-Perry song entitled of course "Zurf's Up!"); learn how to surf efficiently using a "Beginner's Course"; check out the lingo in the "Surfonary"; and finally visit the *ZurfRider* mascot, "Phil the Wonder Dog." All in all, *ZurfRider* is quite a deal for $19.95 and also a whole lot of fun! This software actually finds stuff for you on the Web. It is like a second brain. Perhaps "Hal," the computer in *2001*, has been turned on again and has returned as *ZurfRider*.

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