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Research and the gathering of information

By Jason Preece

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Search Engines

Those of us who work in the IT industry know that the key to success is knowledge. Knowledge of your chosen market, of your competitors, new software, new hardware and a million other things that you need to know.

Granted, it's not an easy task. It often takes dedicated `geeks' continually surfing the Net for the necessary information day in, day out, to filter through the masses of information overload that is commonplace on the Net today. But there are certain `methods' that might make it a bit easier and more efficient.

Most users of the Internet are familiar with `Search Engines' but few understand how they actually work and although it isn't necessary to understand the actual algorithms used for individual engines it's important to have an idea of the type and quality of the results that get shown.

The main types of engines are the generic search engines such as Google and All The Web, next are the Directories such as Yahoo and finally there are the Meta Search engines such as IXQuick and Metor. Although there are others such as PPC's and Mete-meta search engines (All in one) I won't list them all as it may confuse the issue.

These engines provide results in different ways and, if you can understand them, will enable you to find more information on any particular topic than would normally be available to you if you were to use only one or two engines.

Firstly, the generic search engines use an automated searching program (spider) to try and locate any site that matches the query that you entered into its search box. It then lists them according to its own idea of what it believes is the most relevant to you. The directories, however, have humans to sort out different sites into different sections and hopefully weed out sites that would not be appropriate to your request. These are a bit more limiting but often give quality information. Lastly we have the Meta

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search engines, these utilise the services of a multitude of different search engines to search simultaneously for sites that match your query. Again, they then sort out the sites according to what they believe might be the most relevant to you. The biggest use of these is to find leads for a subject you are not familiar with.

Ok, that's the basics sorted out.

Advanced search tools

Many engines have advanced search features that use a mixture of Boolean search tools and restrictive results that can give a more precise return on your query. These normally include instructions such as:

`AND', `+' or `Must include': Blocks results that don't have the keywords that were inputted within a site.

`OR' or `Should include': Will allow sites with one or more of the keywords that were inputted.

`NOT', `-' or `Must not include': Prevents sites containing keywords that have been specified by the user from being listed.

If a string of keywords are contained by "speech marks" these will be searched for as if they were a single word. E.g. "A hotel in Paris" would list primarily all the hotels in Paris whereas A hotel in Paris, without speech marks, would list a lot of hotels that might have nothing to do with Paris.

Searching methodology

Without some sort of plan, it will be easy to get lost among the myriad of web pages out there on the Web so it is important you keep track of:

- 1.What you are searching for.
- 2.Where you have been.
- 3.A list of URL's (Uniform Resource Locator) you wish to follow up on.

Some of you might laugh, but it's easy to get distracted and it's important that, if you are searching for a specific piece of information, **you do not get sidetracked.**

Documentation

It is important, when you are collecting information, that you have an understanding of the Copyright Laws. This basically means when you are storing your information make sure you display who wrote it and the site that you got it from.

Information organisation

What do you do with all the information you collect? Lots of people just copy and paste onto poorly

labelled documents into non-descript folders and then wonder why they can't find it when the meeting is in ten minutes.

Labelling is important. One of the greatest mistakes I often see is when people insist in using some sort of code to define whatever contents they have e.g.: '1986 world cup, English football team, goalie', I mean, what's the point in using code. We don't have any restrictions saying we have to use no more than a dozen letters, do we?

When creating a document, always save it with a name describing whatever the content is about. Save the document into a folder that has been clearly marked with whatever topic it is meant to hold.

That may seem long-winded but it becomes invaluable when your research begins to grow and you end up with over a thousand documents or book-marked sites. It will also improve your chances in finding any particular document in the future when using the search facility.

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How to Get Started on Your Marketing Plan

By Bobette Kyle

When developing or updating a marketing plan, knowing where to start is often a challenge. To better develop effective marketing strategies, begin by gathering information about both your business and the larger business environment (competition, trends, statistics, etc).

Internally, the amount of information you gather about your own business will depend on your company size. Information can include business strategies and plans; company marketing plans; pricing; and income statements. Employee knowledge is also a valuable resource. As you gather information, if you at first turn to internal sources then expand your understanding through external resources you will do fine.

External information about the business environment often takes the form of existing research, articles, competitive information, and industry news. While these are often available in both print and digital, the focus here is finding information online.

Gathering Information Online – Getting Started

The numerous news sources and billion or so Web pages available on the Internet make finding information much easier than in pre-Internet days. Before the Internet, gathering information meant trips to the library, purchasing expensive publications and reports, and commissioning your own primary research. Now, it is a matter of knowing where to search.

Research and the gathering of information

You can start searching the Internet by looking in each of the general areas below. Organize useful material as you find it. Purchase, bookmark, or file each resource so you can draw upon it during marketing plan development.

These external resources, together with your internal company information, will be your initial knowledge base as you develop your Marketing Plan. As you progress along the planning process and the specific information you need become clearer, these initial resources are likely to be jumping-off points for gathering more specific information.

Information Sources

Annual Reports and other SEC Filings. These documents are required by publicly held U.S. companies and often include statistics and other industry information.

Books. Books can often provide detailed insight and analysis you cannot find elsewhere.

The Government. At last count 100 U.S. Federal agencies had statistical programs, many with data available on the Web. You can find the complete list at fedstats.gov/agencies/index.html.

Message Boards and Newsgroups. You can pick up on trends, hot topics in the industry, and

competitor information by following discussions.

News Articles. These often give clues to the business environment and can lead you to additional information sources.

Newsletters. By reading and subscribing to competitor and industry newsletters you can get insight into current promotional tactics and other activities.

Research Sites. Archives, press releases, newsletters, and executive summaries on these sites can provide relevant research findings and statistics.

Search Engines and Directories. Search by keyword or drill down into directory sub-categories to find information.

Subject Sites. There are some general sites – suite101.com, about.com, and business.com to name three – with numerous topic-specific pages. Check for pages relating to your industry or product.

Trade Associations and Publications. You will often find industry information, statistics, and membership lists online.

White Papers and other Company Publications. Companies will sometimes publish free white papers that summarize the industry trends or other information.

Search these resources and follow a sound marketing plan strategy for greater business success. For

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more about developing marketing plans read the articles at

Bobette Kyle draws upon 10+ years of Marketing/Executive experience, Marketing MBA, and online marketing research in her writing.

Bobette offers a range of marketing plan tools to fit your business and budget. Find out more at

or visit the Web Site Marketing Plan Network at

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Keepad: A novel concept in web research tools.

Using Technology to Manage Customer Loyalty

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Winning Texas Holdem Poker Strategy

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