

The Federal Lawyer In Cyberia

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Revealing the Connection Between John Wayne Cowboy Movies and Research for Cyberian Lawyers

Mild mannered semi-geek that I am, I was at home, very relaxed, casually watching the Turner Classic Movie channel's celebration of the 100th birthday of John Wayne, when the idea for this issue's column germinated. Yes, you guessed it. The title of the movie I was watching was "The Searchers." So, in honor of the iconic John Wayne having crossed the century mark, I'd like to celebrate "The Searchers" by recommending several more obscure search engines for your consideration.

After all, we know that the search results produced by Google™ are based on relevance and popularity. It follows that scrolling through Google's results page isn't the best way to get off the beaten path. And, partners, we know that "Duke" Wayne would have liked getting off that path.

Alternatives to Google

Contrary to popular belief, there are alternatives to Google, even though that is the only search site with a large enough market share to have a noun ("Google") converted in our modern parlance to a verb ("Googlize"). Make no mistake. Google is dominant. According to the data available now for searches done in April 2007, Google processed a staggering 49.7 percent of the searches that originated in the United States that month. (As found at www.comscore.com, the leading engines for that month, in terms of volume, were Google (49.7 percent), Yahoo™ (26.8 percent), Microsoft™ (10.3 percent), and Ask™ (5.1 percent). Of these four top engines, only Google increased its market share that month.

Ms. Dewey

If you have a sound card in your computer and you have installed the Flash™ animation add-on available through the Adobe™ Web site at www.adobe.com or, more specifically, at www.macromedia.com/software/flash, you owe it to yourself to visit "Ms. Dewey"™ at least once. It is a search site named after the venerable Dewey decimal system, which is still used in many public libraries.

When you go to www.msdewey.com, be prepared to be at least mildly amused and perhaps even somewhat enlightened. Ms. Dewey, played by comely actress Janina Gavankar, immediately greets you at the

site. Ms. Dewey draws her search results from Windows Live Search,™ a Microsoft product, though her results are a bit slower to display than they'd otherwise be, because the site figures out how to include a contextually appropriate response from Ms. Dewey.

Beware, this librarian has attitude! She's got a lot more going on than the school marms in Duke's movies. Some users are not charmed; they find Ms. Dewey to be every bit as obnoxious as the notorious "Microsoft Bob." For example, *Tech Digest* reported that "The site may be occasionally entertaining, but it is really annoying to have the character [that is, Ms. Dewey] standing there loudly flipping magazine pages while you're trying to research a topic. ..."

ZDNet's Mitch Ratcliffe describes Ms. Dewey as "taking cute too far." Philipp Lenssen, writing on GoogleBlogscoped.com, calls the anthropomorphized search page's character "inhumanly dumb." Indeed, Ms. Dewey herself says that "it's better to keep your mouth shut and appear to be stupid than to open it and remove all doubt."

Still, attitude and all, she's worth a look, if only to see how one site has made "the searcher" less sterile.

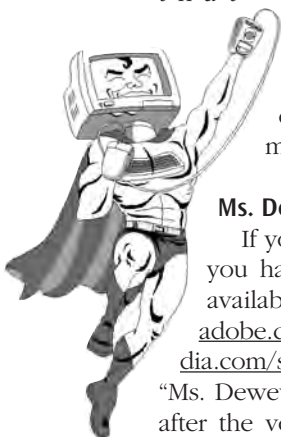
Ask

Ask.com used to be known as Ask Jeeves. It now calls itself "the fastest growing search engine on the Web." True or not, instead of ordering results simply by popularity, à la Google, Ask orders them by "popularity among pages considered to be experts on the topic of your search." You'll find many of the listed sites to be the same, but the order of relevancy may be significantly different. And Ask has an innovative and time-saving page preview feature. The site also includes editorially selected "Smart Answers" to your queries, which appear within your search results. Give Ask a look.

Ask Mobile

Last October, Ask introduced Ask Mobile (mobile.ask.com), a new service designed specifically for searching the Internet from mobile devices. This site's search approach is designed to minimize keystrokes, increase navigability on small displays, and accelerate page loading.

On the occasion of its launch, the head of Ask said that "Mobile is an increasingly important access point for searchers. ... The new Ask Mobile makes it easy for users of Web-enabled cell phones, PDAs and other



mobile devices to take advantage of the world-class relevance and industry-touted search tools offered by Ask.com.” According to him,

Ask Mobile offers links to key search categories directly from the home page, making it easier to navigate to relevant results. The design saves significant keystrokes for many searches; for example, looking for the weather in the 94114 zip code requires 50 percent fewer keystrokes on Ask Mobile compared to mobile products offered by other major search engines. Fewer keystrokes is an extremely important concept when considering the difficulty of typing on mobile devices and the absence of full-sized keyboards.

Clusty

The hideously named Clusty.com site takes a different approach to searches. It aggregates the results from several search engines (Google is not included), then “clusters” them (hence the hideous name) to help you further refine your search.

Clusty was started in Pittsburgh, Pa., when three scientists at Carnegie Mellon University decided to tackle the problem of information overload in web searches. Rather than focusing exclusively on search engine result ranking, they decided that grouping results into topics—or clustering them—made for better search and discovery. (The Clusty site also provides rankings.)

For example, a Clusty search for “*Brown v. Board*” produced the following clusters and hits, each with hyperlinks: Anniversary, 50th (35); *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (26); Civil Rights (20); Commemoration (16); Lesson, Plan (12); *Brown v. Board of Education* National Historic Site (8); Fifty (9); Landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (7); Legacy (9); and NPR (5). As the Clusty site says, “When was the last time you went to the third or fourth page of the search results? Rather than scrolling through page after page, the clusters help you find results you may have missed or that were buried deep in the ranked list.”

Oh, and by the way, the geeks behind Clusty apparently have recognized that their name is, well, a little weird. The site bears the tag line “And with a name like Clusty, it’s gotta be good.”

Conclusion

As Gabby Hayes would have said, “See ya again in Cyberia, Buckaroos.” **TFL**

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