How to Find Good Stuff On the Internet

By James A. Cruickshank

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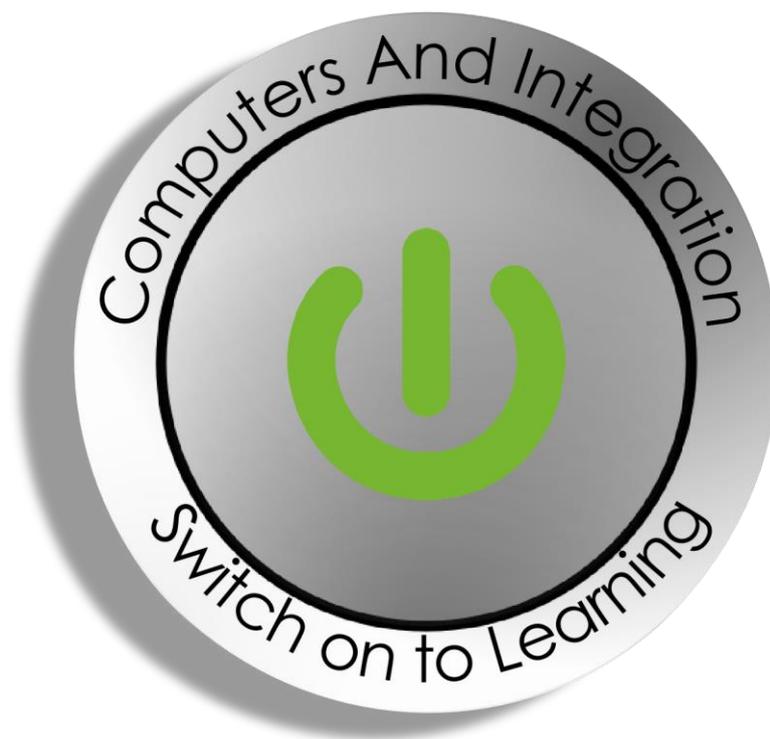
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Preface

Far too often when you search the web, you get thousands and even millions of search results. It is impossible to filter through them. For an Information Professional, 200 search results is considered a manageable number to sift through.

This book seeks to provide a way to get your web search results down to a manageable number. It will teach you about special operators you can use in your searches so that you end up with relevant results.

In short, this book will teach you how to find good stuff on the Internet.

Principle 1: identify the user community for the information retrieved

When you plan a search, you should carefully work out the level of information to retrieve. For example, is the information for an adult or a child.

Principle 2: use unique, specific terms

When searching the web, you'll get more relevant results if you use unique, specific terms. For example, lung cancer is a broader term than pneumonia.

Let's say we want to search for cases of pneumonia in children in Scotland.

A straightforward Google search for that yields 753,000 results. Clearly, sifting through all those is not manageable and would take far too long.

By placing "pneumonia in children" in parenthesis or quotes and searching for cases of "pneumonia in children" in Scotland yields 383,000 results. As you can see that has more than halved the number of search results. That said, it is still a vast amount of information to sift through.

Principle 3: filter the results through the lens of a specific domain

Given that hospitals use the .org domain ending, we can use that to further narrow down the search results. In other words, we can just search across all the .org domains in the country.

To do that we type in: cases of "pneumonia in children" in Scotland:.org. Notice the **:.org** at the end of the line. This further reduces the number of search results down to 41,100. Clearly, the search is going in the right direction.

Principle 4: Use AND to narrow a search

The use of the word AND narrows a search. So, by changing the search string to cases of "pneumonia AND children" AND Scotland:.org, the end results are narrowed down to just 3 results. Clearly, this is much more manageable. That said, the results are nonsense.

Note that OR widens a search and NOT refines by exclusion. For example, not in Glasgow would eliminate Glasgow from the results.

Principle 5: Try changing the domain ending to .ac.uk for academic results

If I change the domain ending to .ac.uk and search for cases of "pneumonia AND children" AND Scotland:.ac.uk, the results are widened to 13,700. This clearly shows that there are more results in the academic domain .ac.uk for what we are looking for.

Principle 6: Use the plus (+) operator to include the word AND in the search

Often the words "and" and "the" are ignored by search engines such as Google. But, by placing a plus (+) before the word "and", the word "and" is in fact included in the search. So, doing a search for cases of "pneumonia +AND children" +AND Scotland:.ac.uk reveals a mere 6 results. Clearly, this is more manageable. The results are still nonsense, but you can at least appreciate how to narrow a search.

Principle 7: Use appropriate sources when searching

To effectively search for cases of pneumonia in children in Scotland you would really be better using public health sources, such as MEDLINE. That said, MEDLINE is an American database, so probably not the best choice of source for medical searches involving Scotland. This is the crux of the point. You need to use appropriate sources for effective searching.

Specific Google searching

For searches involving Google, you can:

- use quotation marks to find exact phrases
- search across specific domains. For example, use the .co.uk domain ending to find UK businesses and the .org.uk domain ending for not for profit organisations as well as charities.

Best Practices for Google searching

- Don't use common words and punctuation
- Use the minus operator (-) to remove many unwanted results
- Order search results from general to specific in the search box to display helpful results in the Google drop-down AutoComplete list
- Use the OR (|) operator to get results with either one of the two words you are looking for

Useful sources of information

- http://www.google.co.uk/ - search the entire Web for anything
- http://www.howstuffworks.com/ - find out how everything works
- http://uk.hundredzeros.com/ - download a wide range of free Kindle ebooks
- http://www.imdb.com/ - find information on movies, TV programmes and actors
- http://www.mouseprice.com/ - find out the value of your home or another property
- http://www.patient.info/ - get medical information that is trusted by doctors
- http://www.skyscanner.net/ - search flights by date, price, and budget — even if you don't know where you want to go
- http://www.wolframalpha.com/ - get fact-based answers to fact-based questions
- http://en.wikipedia.org/ - search an online encyclopedia for information on anything
- http://www.webopedia.com/ - get definitions for computer and Internet terms
- www.dictionary.com - find out what words mean
- https://www.yell.com/ - look-up the Yellow Pages for UK businesses

- https://www.thephonebook.bt.com/person/ - find a phone number for a person
- https://www.royalmail.com/find-a-postcode - find a postcode or an address for a registered building in the UK