Tales from the Terminal Room
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Tales from the Terminal Room (TFTTR) is an electronic newsletter that includes reviews and comparisons of information sources; useful tools for managing information; technical and access problems on the Net; and news of RBA's training courses and publications. Many of the items and articles will have already appeared on Karen Blakeman's Blog at http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/

Tales from the Terminal Room can be delivered via email as plain text or as a PDF with active links. You can join the distribution list by going to http://www.rba.co.uk/tfttr/index.shtml and filling in the form. You will be sent an email asking you to confirm that you want to be added to the list. TFTTR is also available as an RSS feed. The URL for the feed is http://www.rba.co.uk/rss/tfttr.xml

In this issue:

Search tools

Public Data Explorer survives Google Labs

Public Data Explorer has escaped the cull at Google Labs, from which it has now "graduated". There were signs that it might survive when Google started adding public data charts to the top of the results for some statistics searches. It can now be found at http://www.google.com/publicdata/home. Public Data Explorer allows you to search and compare sets of public data such as population, energy consumption, mobile phone usage and government debt across countries. You can select the countries or states that you wish to compare and view the data as line graphs, bar charts, map visualizations or bubble charts.
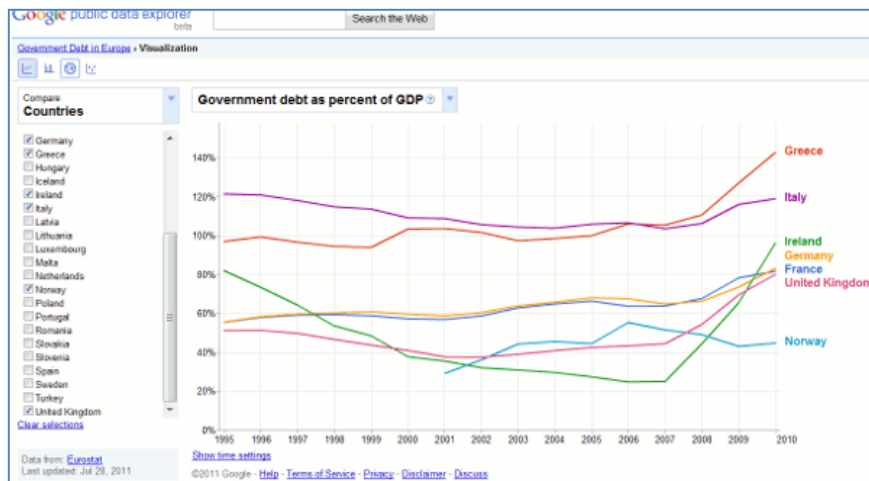

Data sets include information from the OECD, World Bank, Eurostat and various US government departments. There is also an option to upload your own data sets – details are at http://www.google.com/publicdata/admin. This probably accounts for some of the very specific data that is now available, for example: Australian Population Estimates, Unemployment rate Italy and Catalan municipalities indicators. The full list is at http://www.google.com/publicdata/directory. It is worth exploring the more generic titles such as "World Bank, World Development Indicators" and "OECD Factbook 2010" to uncover the full range of what is available.

Google Related is not Google related:

Google recently announced a new toolbar called Google Related (http://www.google.com/related/). It is available as a Chrome extension and as part of the Google Toolbar for Internet Explorer but not for the latest versions of Firefox. Google Related displays a bar along the bottom of your screen that shows videos, maps, images and web pages relevant to the page you are currently on. Nothing new here, I thought. Google has had a related: command and links to similar pages next to entries on your results page for a long time but Google Related is in fact very different.

If I view similar results for the First Great Western home page or type in
`related:http://www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk/` I see a list of sites that are similar in type and content to First Great Western for example National Rail Enquiries, Virgin Trains, Trainline, Arriva, Southwestern Trains.
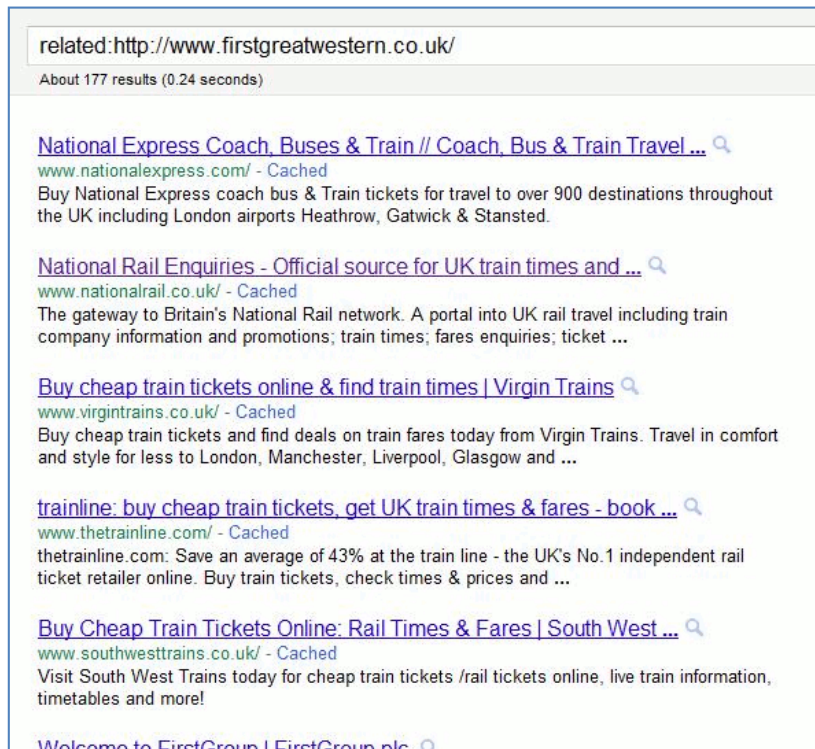
If you have found a page that contains the type of information you are looking for 'related:' has always been a good way to find additional sites containing similar content and of similar quality. The option is also available on the Advanced Search screen, but you have to click on the '+ Date, usage rights, region, and more' link; it's at the bottom of the page under 'Page specific tools'

Google Related results are very different. Once installed it monitors every page you browse and offers content about or directly related to your current page.

Google does not always find related information for every page and currently only supports English language pages. I found that it worked for about 60% of pages that I viewed. There also seems to an unhealthy abundance of Wikipedia articles: one would be more than enough. It does sometimes come up with interesting additional information but there are times when it is not needed and its

intrusion becomes infuriating. I really do not want it getting in the way when I am booking train tickets, as in the above example, or listening to BBC Radio 4. Thankfully it can be switched off for individual pages or whole sites but I cannot see a way of switching it back on if I later change my mind. You should also be aware that Google personalizes the results of the Related bar by watching how you search and navigate the web, so what I see in the bar for a particular page will eventually not be what you see.

Overall, some of the information it finds is interesting but to be honest I have not found much that is vitally important to my search or browsing activity. If you are curious have a go and see if it works for you.

Google can seriously damage your news

Many of us have known for a while that the search engines, and in particular Google, customise results. What you see on your screen will not necessarily be what someone else sees on theirs even with what appears to be an identical search. Location, browser, search history, your browsing behaviour and your social networks are just some of the factors that are used by Google to personalise your results. I recall sitting next to Marydee Ojala at a business information conference in the Czech Republic in 2008 and under discussion was a search visualisation tool. We both ran the same search – Czech coal production, I think it was – and from the maps that were generated on our screens it was obvious that we had completely different sets of results. Marydee had what we decided was an "unadulterated" set with pages that did include the keywords but were not exactly on topic, for example a report on a local football match sponsored by Czech Coal. In contrast, my results were mostly Czech coal production statistics and news on the energy sector in the region. I regularly research the European energy sector and the search engine underlying the visualisation tool used my search history to adjust the results accordingly.

Fast forward to a couple of weeks ago and a request appeared on one of my discussion lists from Mary Ellen Bates for us to run a search on Israel in Google News and to send her a screen shot of what we saw. 37 people responded within 6 hours and the results are very interesting indeed. Full details are on Mary Ellen's blog (Is Google really filtering my news? http://www.librarianoffortune.com/librarian_of_fortune/2011/09/is-google-really-filtering-my-news.html) but here are a few highlights:

- One story appeared in more than 90% of the search results, another appeared in 70% …. Of the remaining 14 stories, none were seen by more than 30% of the searchers, and most were seen by less than 15% of the searchers
- More than a quarter of the stories showed up in only one searcher's search results
- Almost one in five searchers saw a story that no one else saw
- Only 12% of searchers saw the same three stories in the same order

The 6 hour spread of the responses may account for some of the differences. Google is constantly picking up stories and changing the grouping and ranking of the articles. Nonetheless, the results still show that you need to use your advanced search skills and look at more than the top headlines for the full picture. To quote Mary Ellen: *"Bottom line: Holy moley, Google does filter the news. You really need to go beyond the first few search results if you want to get a relatively well-rounded view of the news."*

Updated and new social media guides

The first of my updated guides and one new totally guide covering social media and collaborative tools are now up on http://www.rba.co.uk/web2/. I use these guides in some of my social media workshops and they are intended to help people get started with the various tools. You will notice that there are two "Getting Started with Blogger" guides: one for the old interface and one for the new. Don't worry if you have not seen the new version of Blogger. Google is rolling this out gradually so it may be a while before the option appears on your screen.

The guides are Word documents so that you can edit them for use in your own organisation. I have given them a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License but if you are not sure whether your use of them will be covered by that license do get in touch with me.

So far the guides include:

> Getting Started with Twitter
> Introduction to Blogs
> Getting Started with Blogger – Old Interface
> Getting Started with Blogger – New Interface

FixMyTransport
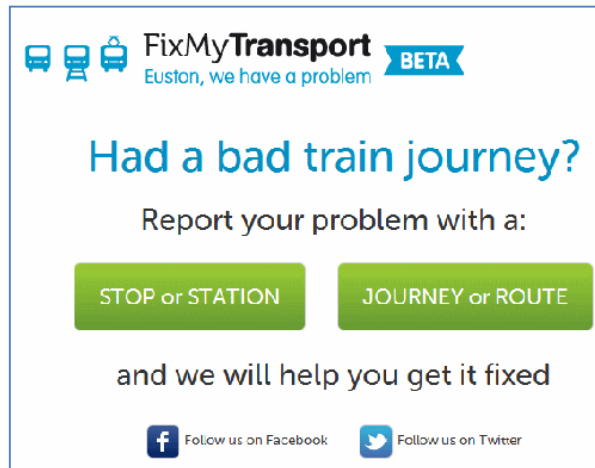
FixMyTransport (http://www.fixmytransport.com/) is a new web site run by those excellent people at MySociety. MySociety also runs TheyWorkForYou (http://www.theyworkforyou.com/), which tells you what your MP and Parliament is up to, FixMyStreet (http://www.fixmystreet.com/) for reporting local problems to councils, and WhatDoTheyKnow (http://www.whatdotheyknow.com/) for Freedom of Information requests. There is a full list at mySociety – our projects (http://www.mysociety.org/projects/).

Subtitled "Euston, we have a problem" FixMyTransport was built to help resolve common public transport problems and is aimed at smaller problems such as "*persistently broken ticket machines, buses that always leave early, or silly rules that appear to do nothing but create inconvenience for travellers.*" Sound familiar? Want to do something about it other than moan? Use FixMyTransport to report a problem and they will send it to the relevant company or authority. Any reports or messages you send will be public and you cannot use this site to directly apply for compensation for cancelled or severely delayed trains.

Each train company has its own Passenger's Charter and levels of compensation for delays and the quickest way to apply is to download and use the train company's form, which of course is usually well hidden. You could report the delay via FixMyTransport but the train company will probably reply that you need to use their form. Bear in mind that you have to apply within 28 days if your claim is to have any chance of success so going direct is the best way to ensure you submit your claim on time. A Google search may bring up the information you need but you might have to resort to an advanced 'site:' search on the train company's web site, for example `site:crosscountrytrains.co.uk delays compensation`. A list of train operating companies is available on http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/tocs_maps/tocs/. There is also a list of Passenger's Charters at "Train delays and cancellations – your complete guide to refunds and compensation" (http://www.bitterwallet.com/train-delays-and-cancellations-your-complete-guide-to-refunds-and-compensation/23772) but this is out of date and four of the links no longer work.

FixMyTransport is still in beta and they welcome feedback on how you think it could be improved. If you use public transport in the UK, bookmark and use this site.

Internet Librarian International search workshop

Internet Librarian International 2011 takes place at the Tara Copthorne Hotel, London on October 27th and 28th. Details of the whole event are at http://www.internet-librarian.com/. On Wednesday 26th there are several pre-conference workshops taking place (http://www.internet-librarian.com/2011/day.php?day=Wednesday#Track) and I am involved in the full day WebSearch Academy session along with Marydee Ojala and Arthur Weiss. We'll be looking at what's new in search engines, Google alternatives, searching the social real-time web, visual searching and developing your search strategy. Registration details are at http://www.internet-librarian.com/2011/registration.php.

Business Information: Top Ten Tips from Bristol

The University of the West of England (UWE) hosted the UKeiG 8th September workshop on business information. The list of participants included people from academic libraries, public libraries, the legal sector and freelance researchers. The day got off to an interesting start with one of the participants telling me that a colleague of theirs thought there wasn't any quality business information on the web! I hope I proved them wrong. Some of the materials provided on the day can be found on my web site at http://www.rba.co.uk/bi/.

Those of you who have attended my Google, general search or business information workshops will know that towards the end of the afternoon I always ask the group to come up with a list of top ten tips. These can be useful sites that they have discovered during the day, essential services that they already use or commands that help focus the search. A combined list of tips from previous business information workshops is at http://www.rba.co.uk/bi/TopBusInfoSearchTips.pdf. Below, in no particular order, are the new tips from the 8th September workshop.

1. **Biznar** http://www.biznar.com/ Biznar is a federated search engine that runs your search in real-time in about 80 resources. There is a list on the Advanced Search screen where you can deselect individual or groups of resources. Many of the workshop participants de-selected Google Groups, which seemed to their dominate results, and some went as far as to exclude the whole Blogs and Social Networks group. The results are combined into a single list and on the left hand side of the scree are organised into folders such as Topics, Authors, Publications, Publishers and Dates. These are computer generated but can help you narrow down your search.

2. **Export.gov** http://export.gov/ "Helping U.S. companies export". Information on markets and doing business outside of the US. As the strap line of the web site suggest this is aimed at US companies but the reports contain information that is relevant to anyone looking at external markets.

3. **Guardian Data Store** http://www.guardian.co.uk/data Visualizations and mashups of data relating to major stories in the news. Links to the original datasets are provided so that you can download the raw data.

4. **Company Check** http://www.companycheck.co.uk/ and **Company Director Check** http://company-director-check.co.uk/. Both services use Companies House data. Company Check provides 6 years of figures and graphs for Cash at Bank, Net Worth, Total Liabilities and Total Current Liabilities free of charge and lists the directors of a company. Click on a director's name and you are taken to the Company Directory Check – launched last week – where you can view other current and past directorships for that person.

5. **Companies House** http://www.companieshouse.gov.uk/. The official registry for UK companies. Services such as Company Check and Bizzy (http://bizzy.co.uk/) may provide more information free of charge but it is always worth double checking with Companies House to see if there is more up to date information. The list of documents available for a company in combination with the free services may be enough for you to make a decision on whether or not to do business with that company. Use the free WebCHeck service to locate the company in the register and then click on "Order information for this company". You will then see a list of available documents: titles such as "Struck off and dissolved" followed by "Application for

administrative restoration" might suggest that you should run a mile!

6. **Zanran** http://zanran.com/ This was recommended for identifying charts, graphs and tables of data in PDFs and Excel spreadsheets. Run your search and Zanran comes up with PDF and spreadsheet files that match your criteria. Hover over the file icon in your results list and you will see a preview of the page that contains your data. We did come across a few oddities: my test search on gin vodka sales uk came up with the bar menu for the Time & Space Restaurant at the Royal Institution of Great Britain. The Zanran "About us" page tells you more about what they do (http://zanran.com/help/about_us)

7. **Applegate directories** http://www.applegate.co.uk/ A collection of business directories for electronics, engineering, plastics, rubber, chemical, oil, gas and recruitment services covering the UK. Recommended for generating lists of companies by location.

8. **Kompass** http://www.kompass.com/. Well established directory with world-wide coverage (some of us can remember the black, hard copy volumes!) Search is free and some results are free. Pay as you go options are reasonably priced and there is extensive country and industry coverage.

9. **Public libraries' databases and resources**. A reminder from the public libraries contingent that you can access their resources free of charge for personal use from your desktop using the identification on your library card, for example NewsUK and the The Times Digital Archive. Some library authorities also provide access to business databases.

10. **Google Advanced Search** Use the advanced search screen or commands to help focus your search on statistics and market research. For example use the 'filetype:' command to search for spreadsheets containing statistics or PDFs of industry/government reports. Use 'site:" to focus your search on academic or government sources, for example `site:ac.uk`.

Business information workshop – November

I shall be running another full day business information workshop on November 7th in London. This event is being organised by TFPL and will cover key starting points, company information, industry information, official statistics, market research, news sources and social media. There will be time allocated to practical sessions so that you can try out stuff for yourself. Details are on the TFPL web site at http://www.tfpl.com/training/courses/coursedesc.cfm?id=TR945&did=2

Twitter Notes

The following are some of my recent tweets and retweets. They are selected because they contain links to resources or announcements that may be of general interest. I have unshortened the shortened URLs.

30th September

Time to get your nominations in for IWR Information Professional of the Year Award 2011
http://www.online-information.co.uk/online2011/conference/iwr-award.html

RT @universitysham: Decline in renewable energy in Scotland http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-15122699 Low rainfall reduces hydro power output & wind energy down

RT @universitysham: Germany imports nuclear electricity from Czech Republic
http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/nukefree-germany-isnt-exactly-nukefree-09292011.html
Not as nuclear free as is portrayed!

September 29th

RT @lindsmgreen: Interesting comparison Kindle Fire & similar @guardiantech Can Kindle Fire match the iPad? http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2011/sep/28/kindle-fire-ipad-amazon-jeff-bezos

September 28th

RT @Philbradley Yrs to build up Delicious - one day to wreck it: Delicious has managed to destroy itself in a single day http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2011/09/years-to-build-up-delicious-one-day-to-wreck-it.html?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter

September 26th

Looks like Slidefinder.net is no longer being updated. A pity - it was very useful for finding individual slides in a presentation

September 25th

Seriously, be afraid. Be very afraid Phil Bradley's weblog: Facebook taking control http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2011/09/facebook-taking-control.html You have been warned

Yet another way to screw up your news search? "Google News Launches "Standout" Tag for Featured Content" http://searchengineland.com/google-news-launches-standout-tag-for-featured-content-94256

September 23rd

RT @ScottishBIS: Agency worker rules could see IT jobs moving offshore http://www.computing.co.uk/ctg/news/2110593/agency-worker-rules-jobs-moving-offshore

September 21st

[A bit of fun at the expense of metadata!] RT @brinxmat: Describing Greek goat's cheese in rdf, that's fetadata. Bring on the bread and we'll have us some pitadata.

RT @sharonodea: More interesting analysis from @Econsultancy: Is Facebook a black hole for brands? - http://econsultancy.com/uk/blog/8028-is-facebook-a-black-hole-for-brands [Interesting article and one that probably strikes a chord with many who have been struggling with Facebook as a marketing tool]

RT @felmundo: Who Knows Your Company Best? It's Google http://www.cmswire.com/cms/information-management/who-knows-your-company-best-its-google-012757.php via @sharonodea

September 20th

Google Earth measurements 'wrong', speeding court hears. Telegraph http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/8774427/Google-Earth-measurements-wrong-speeding-court-hears.html Surely some mistake - Google knows best ;-)

September 19th

RT @**Glynnn** China continues to cap rare earth exports...now looks to be a permanent arrangement; via Planet Ark http://planetark.org/enviro-news/item/63292

RT @briansolis: The Real Costs of Social Networking http://www.briansolis.com/2011/09/the-human-cost-of-social-connectivity/ via @carlhaggerty

September 17th

Solar Activity Spells Doom for NASA Satellite http://news.discovery.com/space/space-weather-just-got-real-satellite-to-deorbit-sooner-110916.html & real time satellite tracking at http://www.n2yo.com/?s=21701

September 11th

Brilliant summary of UK e-petitions :-) "Looking at UK government e-petitions" via @Wordshore http://www.wordshore.com/2011/09/11/looking-at-uk-government-e-petitions/ [I particularly like the one "Don't listen to idiots signing e-petitions....We, the people, are idiots. Please, for pity's sake, ignore us more often." http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/2843]

September 6th

RT @JamesFirth Social web blocking: stop staff seeing low regard customers have for u?! http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/news/8744308/Sharp-rise-in-Facebook-and-Twitter-blocking-at-work.html Note also @SurreyCouncil blocks twitter, blogs

RT @JamesFirth: Something you should consider if you're trying to fund any online venture from advertising: http://badculture.wordpress.com/2011/09/05/what-happens-to-the-vast-sums-of-money-spent-on-online-advertising/ [In essence, don't give up the day job]

September 3rd

Excellent free resource for UK company directors "Company Director Check" http://company-director-check.co.uk/index.php

September 2nd

RT @infoforenergy DECC UK energy production & use flow charts http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/statistics/publications/flow/flow.aspx less coal, more gas, more gas imported

RT @NazlinBhimani iLibrarian 25+ Resources to Create Library Videos at http://oedb.org/blogs/ilibrarian/2011/25-resources-to-create-library-videos/

Meetings and Seminars

Workshop: WebSearch Academy (Pre Internet Librarian International conference workshop)
Date: Wednesday, 26th October 2011
Venue: Tara Copthorne Hotel. London
Organiser: Information Today
Presenters: Marydee Ojala, Arthur Weiss, Karen Blakeman
Outline: What's new in search engines, Google alternatives, searching the social real-time web, visual searching and developing your search strategy..
URL: http://www.internet-librarian.com/2011/day.php?day=Wednesday#Track

Workshop: Business Information: key web resources
Date: Wednesday, 9th November 2011
Venue: London
Organiser: TFPL
Presenter: Karen Blakeman
Outline: will cover key starting points, company information, industry information, official statistics, market research, news sources and social media. There will be time allocated to practical sessions so that you can try out stuff for yourself
URL: http://www.tfpl.com/training/courses/coursedesc.cfm?id=TR945&did=2

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