

## InfoTech Column

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### Search Engine Alternatives:

#### *Will you suffer the DTs if you quit Google?*

**Delirium tremens:** (colloquially, the DTs) is a condition associated with complete and sudden withdrawal by an individual who has a history of long-term dependence on a certain behavior addiction, such as with alcohol consumption, heroin or steroids use, or the like.

Ever wonder if you're addicted to *Google*? Do you need your daily or hourly fix? Does your second choice of search engine come to mind instantly? What about a third and fourth?

#### Finding the methadone of search engines

First let's not forget the real™ search engines. Those search engines that run the big guys, *Dialog*, *LexisNexis*, your *OPAC*, etc. These are the heavy lifters of the search world and actually do proper, targeted, Boolean logic and retrieve accurate results sets that are not optimized to disguise inaccurate results in the interests of speed of retrieval. I am always amazed at the number of articles that quote search retrieval numbers as some form of 'data' when these numbers do vary by time of day, search traffic, server, locality, etc. When you're seeking comprehensive and quality results you just can't beat the good, proprietary engines.

The web engines are great for meat cleaver searchers where the top-of-mind, top-of-the-list results are sufficient. The popularity and other mathematically or socially-based algorithms are great to bring the good answers to the forefront. Information professionals know that the good or the most popular answer is not always the best. Best counts more in research that has an *impact*. Will the patient be cured or made healthier? Where should I invest my money without following the masses? What strategy should I bet my company on? Whatever competitive advantage comes from finding that golden needle in the haystack, not finding the same stuff as the rest of the mob.

So, let's make sure we keep aware of the full range of search tools we need to have in our toolkit. Here's a tip. Take this list below and write one of each URL in the sidebar into your calendar *every* Monday morning. Change your homepage from Google (or your intranet, etc.) to each one for one week each. I think that you really can't get to know or be comfortable with a search engine until you play with it for a week. Remember that you're just learning and that some of these search engines are betas.

There are the Big Four which you should reacquaint yourself with in case you've forgotten them or maybe they've changed a lot since you last looked. The big

four are *Yahoo!*, *MSN Search*, and *AOL*. They comprise, with Google, the only remaining 'big harvests' of the web. Many other search engines rely on their harvests for delivering the user search experience. Oh yeah, and also remember that Yahoo! and some other search sites (like *MySpace*) get significantly more page views than Google. Why is that? Visit and learn.

So, here's a short list of alternative search tools to add to your information pro's kit bag.

In the traditional vein, the sites like *Ask.com*, *Teoma*, *HotBot*, and *AllTheWeb*, are still worth playing with and seeing what innovations they're doing in the general search space. I'd probably not get too into *Lycos*, *AltaVista*, *LookSmart*, *Netscape Search*, etc. which are just vestiges of their former selves but you never know who's going to rise from the dead in this space. They still often have good technology that now has a different business model than public web search. You can visit and see what you think but these guys are part of web search history. Most of them now rely on the web harvest from one of the big four.

However, the above list is pretty traditional and oriented to the general search space and to retrieval results that are usually displayed as simple lists and look pretty similar to each other. They're useful in playing the *Guess My Business Model* game. Am I really about the search experience, server sales, proofs of concept, ads, social networking, or what?

### **The Fun Space to Search and Play**

My personal alternative favorite right now is *Exalead*. I love the organization it uses and the information density of its display to provide some context for my search results and alternative ways to view them. I also like the thumbnail previews. It takes a little getting used to, but it's worth the effort.

If you're not into visual displays, play with *Mooter*. It uses visualization of your results as a middle step. I think it helps improve the quality of the question and the search by providing more contexts. The multiple clusters remind us about similar words that have multiple meanings. (Hint: Try searching mercury, or Ford)

*Clusty* is a search engine that is powered by Vivisimo. I like the left hand sidebar that displays a taxonomic navigation option. Again, it helps to improve the quality of my searching rather than just having some math PhD decide what is relevant through an algorithm. It puts more personal choice back into my fingertips.

If you've avoided playing with visualization tool *Grokker* because it involves a download, you can experience it more easily now. Just go to their homepage and you can search Yahoo! using Grokker through a web-based client.

Lastly, and one of my favorite playthings, try *KartOO*. This search tool is developing quite rapidly. Pay particular attention to the language choices, visual maps, taxonomy display and the next map button. I have found that kids get this display mode quite quickly, before they've been taught to prefer plain lists.

So there's a few to help you break your addiction to Google. You can find dozens more on the lists maintained at *SearchEngineWatch* so don't feel that you just need to limit yourself to my list. There are plenty more!

And we won't even start discussing your addiction to e-mail. We'll leave that for your next therapy session. (grin) I'm looking forward to seeing many of you next month in Baltimore. The doctor will be in.

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## **Sidebar:**

### **Search Engine Alternatives**

SearchEngineWatch Search Engine Lists

<http://searchenginewatch.com/links/>

Yahoo!

<http://www.yahoo.com>

MSN Search

<http://search.msn.com>

AOL

<http://search.aol.com>

MySpace

<http://www.myspace.com>

Ask.com (formerly Ask Jeeves)

<http://www.ask.com>

Teoma

<http://www.teoma.com>

Lycos

<http://www.lycos.com>

AltaVista

<http://www.altavista.com>

LookSmart

<http://www.looksmart.com>

Netscape Search

<http://search.netscape.com>

HotBot

<http://www.hotbot.com>

AllTheWeb

<http://www.alltheweb.com>

Mooter

<http://www.mooter.com>

Exalead

<http://www.exalead.com>

Clusty

<http://www.clusty.com>

Grokker

<http://www.grokker.com>

KartOO

<http://www.kartoo.com>