

Bring organization to your "Surfin Safari"

By Bruce A. Love

For anyone with a personal computer and Internet access, mastering Web surfing skills is easy and rewarding. Whatever your occupation, hobby, or interest, learning how to skillfully surf the Internet will enable you to find information, pictures, audio, and video, relating to any subject you can imagine. Search engines are the tools that help make this happen.

There are several popular search engines. Google (www.google.com) and Yahoo (www.yahoo.com) are two that are easy to use once you understand web-searching basics. In most cases, relevant search results are returned to the Web surfer if good search terms are entered.

Let's say, you want to learn about a dog breed called the Newfoundland. Our first instinct might be to enter "Newfoundland" into the search engine and hit Enter. But Newfoundland is also the name of a Canadian Province. Your initial search will most likely return a list of pages that have nothing to do with dogs. Enter multiple terms such as "Newfoundland" and "dog" and you will get a list of web pages that have both terms. Multiple terms allow you to find the best matches for your intended searches.

All of the major search engines allow Web surfers to use some form of "Boolean" notation in search phrases. Boolean notation (named for the mathematician George Boole) refers to the logical relationship among search terms. The three Boolean terms commonly permitted by Internet Search engines are: "AND," "OR," and "NOT." You can use these terms alone, or in combination, to more accurately describe your desired search result. By default, most search engines assume a logical "AND" when more than one search term is entered. When we entered "Newfoundland" and "dog" into our search engine, the "AND" was implied by default.

The "OR" operator can be used to further refine our search criteria. For example, we could enter "Newfoundland dog OR puppy" (without quotes) to make sure we don't miss any pages featuring the breed. Both Google and Yahoo provide an "Images" search option above the search criteria entry box. You can use that to

view pictures of the searched subjects. Before doing so, it's a good idea to check the "Preferences" link on the search engine to make sure the filtering is set as desired. With SafeSearch turned on, most graphic "adult" images will be filtered from your search results.

Sometimes it is useful to run a search that excludes some items from the search. My wife, who is an avid genealogist, cannot do a simple search for one branch of her family without seeing her "celebrity heartthrob" cousins plastered all over the search results. To filter search results, she now types in "Gyllenhaal -Jake -Maggie" (without quotes) to find her less publicized relatives. The minus sign in front of any search term causes the search engine (theoretically) to ignore any web page that features those terms. This is the most effective way to perform a Boolean "NOT" operation. Using a plus sign in front of a search term is the same as performing an "AND" operation.

Quotes can be very useful in searches. They group words so that they must appear together in a page in order for that page to be returned in a search result. Using quotes is particularly useful when searching the Internet for a person. If I type in my first and last name without quotes, I get pages that have "Bruce" and "love" without necessarily putting them together. If I search for "Bruce Love" I can usually find web pages relating to everyone who shares my name.

After mastering the basic techniques of surfing the Web, you might want to try some "power surfing." Google and Yahoo offer some very interesting tricks for specialized Internet searches. Try searching a phone number (i.e. 814-946-7411) to get information about the person or organization to whom that phone number is registered. You can also enter tracking numbers for UPS, FedEx, and the United States Postal Service to track packages. To find the definition of a word, enter "define:" followed by the word.

So, now that you have had your first surfing lesson:

"Let's go surfin now
Everyone is learnin how
C'mon and safari with me!"

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