

Google offers more than just search tools

By Bruce A. Love

In a recent column, we described how to browse the Internet more effectively by using the right tools, and by applying some simple surfing techniques. One popular tool is a search engine called Google. As search engines go, I like Google because it works well, and has an uncluttered interface. But Google also offers much more than just Internet search capabilities.

Visitors to the Google web site (www.google.com) immediately see the search entry box, and buttons to launch a new search. However, there are links to other features that many visitors overlook. Above the search box is the word, "more," which links to pages featuring free programs, translation tools, newsgroups, and other items of interest.

This week Google rolled out a free photo management program. Download Picasa 2 from Google to easily organize, edit, present, and share digital pictures. Like other digital photo editing programs, Picasa offers filtering effects, color and lighting adjustments, red-eye removal, photo cropping, and straightening capabilities. Editing can be performed on individual files, or on entire groups of pictures all at once. In addition to photo editing, Picasa also brings order to digital photograph collections no matter where the photos are stored on the computer. After installing of the software, Picasa conducts a comprehensive search for all photographic files, and then indexes and displays them by date without changing the actual location to which they are saved on the computer. The program gives users a bird's eye view of all picture folders, and permits users to open individual folders and view thumbnail versions of picture files prior to opening them. Picasa even has tools to allow users to easily e-mail selected photos.

Another cool feature reached through the "more" link on Google is the Translate Tool. With it, it is possible to translate entire web pages, or just text that you write or copy into the translator box. To test out Google's foreign

language skills, I typed the following into the translator box: "How are you today?" Next, I asked Google to perform the translation to Japanese. Instantly, a string of Japanese characters were displayed, (which, of course I could not read). I took this string of characters, copied it into the translation box, and asked for Japanese to be translated back into English. I performed this same test with the German language. In the case of the Japanese translation (which is still under development), I got back "How, as for you is there today?" The German translation came back as "How do you go today?" Obviously, the translation is far from perfect, but I believe the general meaning of the phrases make communication possible between cultures.

If you are interested in composing your own web log, or "blog," Google offers "Blogger." With it, you can post your thoughts to an online bulletin board, and invite friends, family, and/or strangers to leave comments about articles or topics you post. This type of forum is an excellent way for groups and clubs to meet and exchange ideas with others who have similar interests. Hosts of popular blogging sites can even generate revenue by selling advertising space.

Related to blogs are newsgroups. Google's "Groups" are Collections of related messages, and articles. Newsgroups are posted to news servers by users. The servers distribute them to other participating servers. Newsgroups are arranged on Google by topic. For example, if gardening is your interest, click on the general subject of "Home, " and then select the "Gardening" sub-category. There are thousands of groups available from which to choose. A wealth of knowledge can be found on the pages, and from the people in these newsgroups.

Google has already established itself as a premier search engine. As other features and service become available, Google appears poised to become a leader in other areas of information services.

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