

Search Engines Handbook



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v.

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To my father, Lee Fielden,
who steadfastly held that it was
always possible to learn something new.

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Search Engines

Men have become the tool of their tools.— Henry David Thoreau

Here is a short list of search engines, all included because they are either good, or have historic innovations, or are promising for the future. There are plenty more search engines, and all of their designers are hard at work to improve results.

The list includes some heavyweights (AltaVista and Google) some behind-the-scenes folks (Inktomi) and some new entries, some of which are barely out of their starting blocks (Teoma and WiseNut). We will briefly look at some metasearch engines, which harness a selected range of other search engines to provide a broader search experience.

GOOGLE (<http://www.google.com/>)

This is a good one. The founders have come up with a fine search engine, in many ways far ahead of everyone else, and the current standard to beat. They did it quickly and thoughtfully, and as an immeasurable bonus, have so far resisted many of the commercial pressures that have marred the products of other notable search engine companies.

Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page did the basic work as graduate



Google <http://www.google.com/> © 2001, Google.

students at Stanford, and for several years as a beta-test version Google ran off a couple of old PCs in the proverbial Silicon Valley garage.* The goal early on was to make a search engine that could cope successfully with even very simple queries, and the overall design of the product reflects some very innovative thinking.

Once arrived at Google's search page, your first pleasant surprise is the relatively clean interface, just a nice clear screen with a minimum of distracting directions and links. In its initial phase, the interface was even more minimalist, but even as more content has been added, the clutter-free initial page is still effective.

The search window is a text box and has a button to click for searching. A legacy of the whimsical nature of graduate student projects is revealed in the existence of the "I'm feeling lucky" button, which has no explanation whatsoever. This choice leads you merely

*For a "white paper" discussion of Google's theoretical framework, see the somewhat dated but still instructive paper at <http://orew7.scn.edu.au/programme/fullpapers/1921/cam1921.htm>, Sergey Brin and Lawrence Page, [Aug. 2001].