

Boolean Search

Increase Web Search Success

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Web searches

Information is paramount. We need it on daily basis. We require information for various reasons including research, analysis, survey and other purposes. In sum, we rely on information to take decisions and to arrive at factual conclusions.

For the most part, the answers to our questions can be predictably obtained from some predetermined sources such as a library, trade bulletin or a newspaper. But in many instances we may have to search for it. Of late, it is becoming increasingly common for people to turn to the web for information.

The principal means by which people obtain information from the internet is through a web search. A web search occurs when we input a query into a browser and have the results displayed on the screen for our consumption. Figure 1 shows a web search box with a term and some few results.

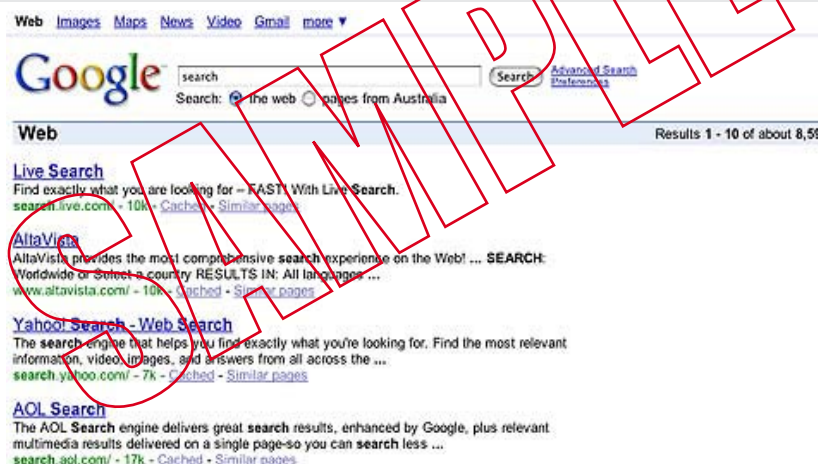


Figure 1. Simple web search results.

Before we delve into how we can customize the results that are displayed, let's take a look at how information is organized around the web.

2.0 The nature of information on the web

A search engine holds dynamic information. It cannot arrange, group or classify the information for you unless you instruct it to do so by using a certain parameter. It is important that you apply a set of rules in accessing this storehouse of information otherwise you may not be able to get meaningful results. In other words, we can only obtain contextual information from a search engine if we know the logical parameter that controls its output.

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5.0 The need for Boolean search

Databases on the internet are developed along a fixed set of rules which makes it possible to retrieve information in a consistent and accurate manner. Boolean search is the method that allows this easy extraction of information.

5.1 How Boolean makes search easy

Boolean searches also make it easier for searchers to extract information. Instead of inputting the term "universities" and then sifting through the thousands of them to extract those that offered engineering courses, you could have made things lot easier within a single input of the appropriate Boolean parameters to narrow your search for efficient extraction of information.

5.2 How Boolean makes search faster

Boolean search enables us to work faster. To appreciate how Boolean search makes things easy, let's take an everyday scenario. Imagine how difficult it would be to go to the internet and type "car" in the browser when we are looking for Fiat. You are resultantly presented with hundreds of pages containing the word "car". It would have been faster if you had typed both terms so you are given lesser pages to browse through.

Boolean search also enforces accuracy. It ensures that we reduce error in presentations to the barest minimum so we have lees time filtering off disqualified displays.

The Boolean search finally affords us the standard with which we can extract information and expect predictable results. It gives us the confidence and assurance that the information presented contains the actual things we need.

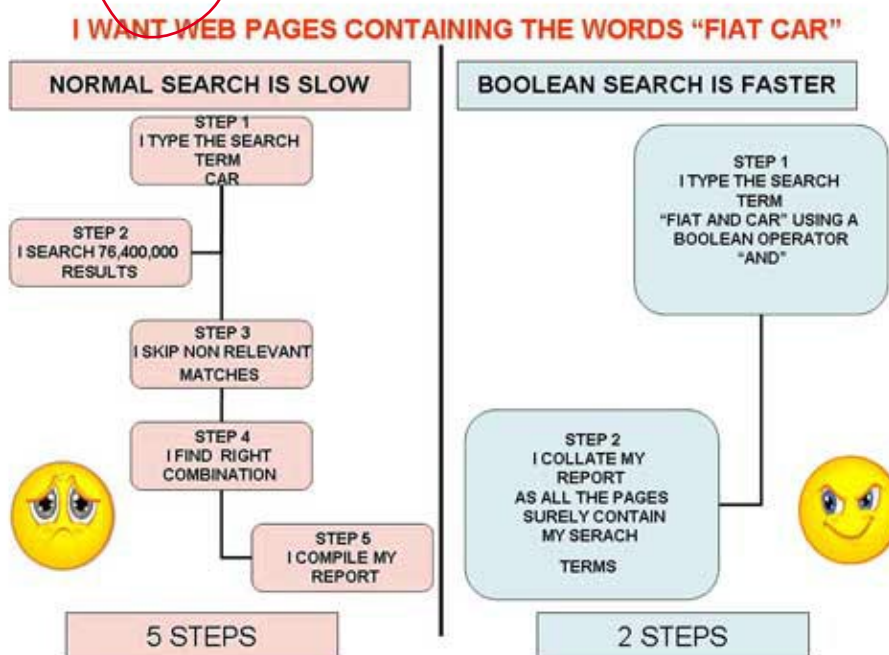


Figure 8. Boolean search is faster

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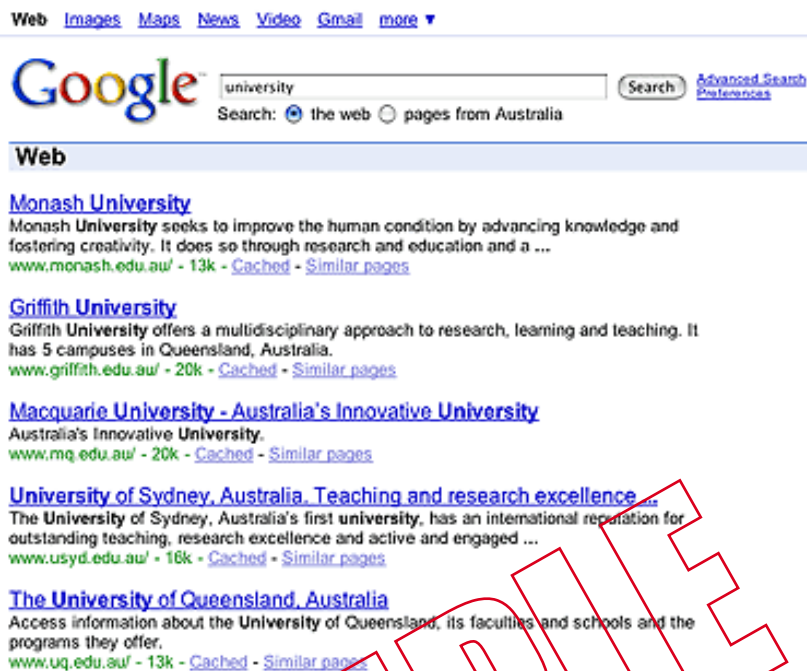


Figure 11. University results

We have results about universities alright but we needed colleges too since they are also institutions of higher learning. The results excluded that term. There are 519 million pages returned for the search "university". So we did the search the wrong way. We narrowed down our results. So let's go again. We type "university" or "college" and now notice a change in the quantum of results.

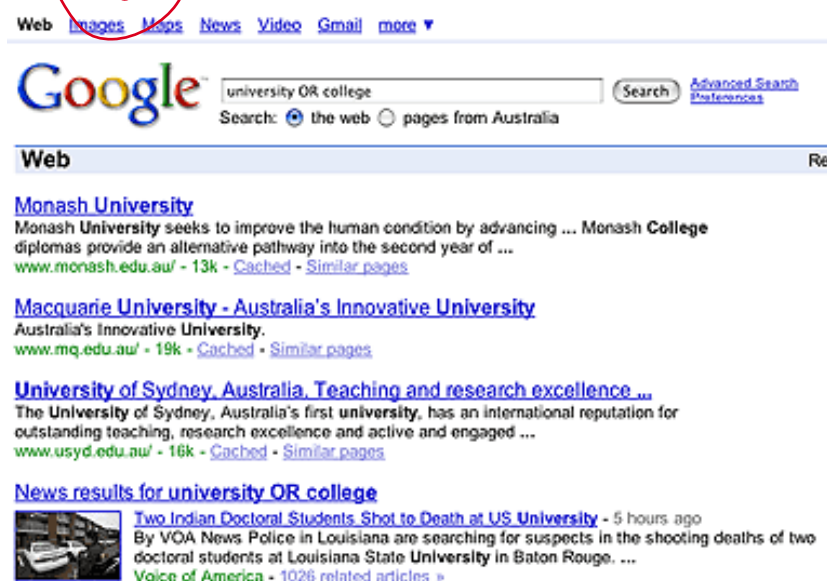


Figure 12. University OR college results

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We have reduced the number of pages returned to 107 million because we have filtered off all pages that did not have the two terms in combination.

Example 3. NOT operator

We are looking for the name “Mercedes” on the net. You may know that the name is also the brand of a large automobile manufacturer. We are however interested in the personal name Mercedes. As a test, let’s see the results for the term Mercedes.

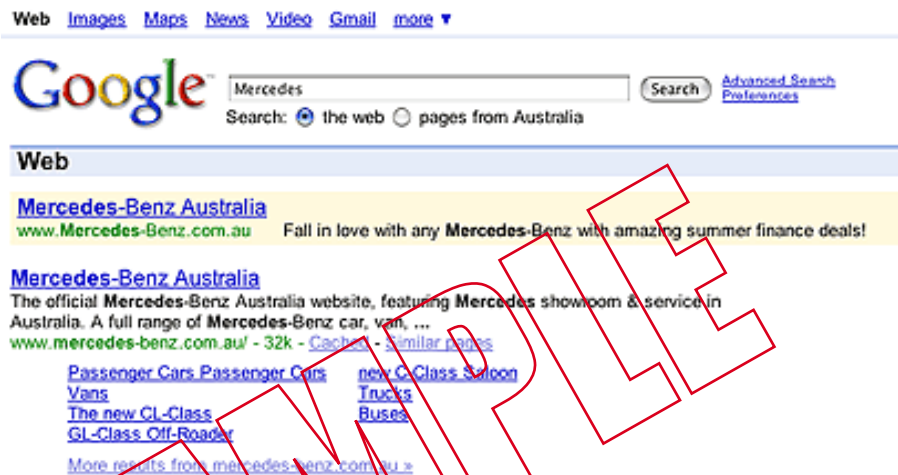


Figure 15. Mercedes

You realize almost every result include that of the automaker which inflates our search results to 150 million and reduces it relevance. We therefore need to apply the exclusive NOT operator to limit the results. Let’s now input “Mercedes NOT car maker” and see the results.

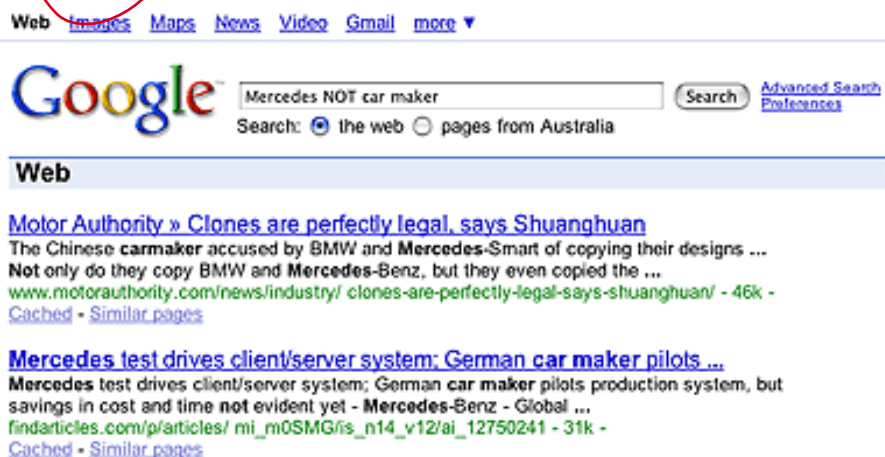


Figure 16. Mercedes NOT car maker

We now have 2.1 million as pages returned. Our targeted search using the AND parameter has taken off all irrelevant pages and given us exactly what we need.