

POCKET GUIDE TO THE INTERNET

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Sympatico
NetLife

TOP
500
Sites

Learn to navigate
the Web with
confidence

E-mail
101

Shopping
Online



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V2.0

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Welcome to the Internet!

The Internet is hard to escape. It seems that just about everyone, right down to the neighbourhood breakfast joint, boasts an address on the World Wide Web. (Sure enough, there is a www.greasy spoon.com.) People who want to correspond are as likely to ask for your e-mail address as your real one.

The Internet is overhyped. It is unlikely to make you richer, smarter, more beautiful or better loved. What's remarkable is how unremarkable the Net has become. It is now part of our everyday lives.

At one time, the Internet was the domain of eggheads, who delighted in making complicated technology work. They were like the first automobile owners, who had to be part mechanic to keep the finicky engines running. But today's cars are usually so well-engineered that most of us don't care what makes them purr. We just use them.

Internet technology is also striving to make itself invisible. So, if you are a newcomer, you've picked a perfect time to get wired. Computers and the Internet have never been easier to use. I won't mislead you: you'll still cope with a learning curve. But, for the most part, you won't need to worry about what's under the hood, unless you're the tinkering type. Your main concern will be what to do with your time online.

You'll find that the Internet is an amazingly flexible and powerful tool. It lets you correspond at electronic speeds with friends and family worldwide. You can research your next trip, school assignment or night at the movies

online. Or buy Christmas presents without leaving your home. You can also publish your own Web page. . . . The possibilities are endless.

Whether you have just begun your online voyage or are an experienced surfer, the Sympatico service offers unique advantages. First, the Sympatico-Lycos site has organized the content of the Internet to ensure that your Net time is well spent. The site is also a major destination in its own right. The wide variety of resources and discussion groups covers everything, from automobiles to travel.

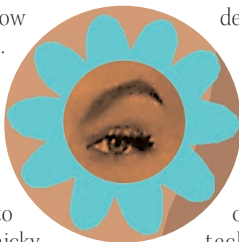
Sympatico is, as well, the country's biggest Internet service provider. It offers members a wealth of help resources, so you can solve technical problems as they arise.

Furthermore, you can choose from a variety of usage packages and connection speeds—including dialup access and blazingly fast DSL connections. I would be remiss not to mention another benefit received by most members: six issues a year of *Sympatico NetLife* magazine. Each issue is bristling with reviews of useful Web sites, features, commentary, how-to articles and Sympatico news.

So, welcome to Sympatico.ca, Canada's most vibrant online community. I hope that your Internet adventure is productive, entertaining and, above all, unremarkable.



Peter Giffen, Editor



JAMIE BENNETT

Subscribing to the Sympatico Service

TO SUBSCRIBE to the Sympatico Internet service, call the 24-hour, toll-free member support line, 1-800-773-2121, for information (Ontario and Quebec members in the Bell region should call 310-SURF). Starter kits are available from selected retail stores. Non-members can subscribe to *Sympatico NetLife* magazine by sending \$19.26 (Quebec residents add 6.5 percent PST) to: Sympatico NetLife, 25 Sheppard Ave. W., Suite 100, North York, Ont. M2N 6S7. You can also order a subscription online at <https://secure.onramp.ca/commerce/indas/netlife.html>. If you are not receiving the magazine, or want to let us know about a change of address, please provide details through the Address Confirmation Page in the *Sympatico NetLife* site (<http://www.netlifemagazine.com>).

Finding the Right Stuff



IMAGINE WALKING into your local library to find all the books piled haphazardly on the shelves, their covers ripped off, and no librarians in sight. For many Internet users, this can be how the World Wide Web appears, especially at first. And until you learn to properly use some of the basic search tools available, that's a pretty fair description of how the Internet will remain.

Many people turn to the first search engine they find, type in a few words and are disheartened to get hundreds of thousands of results, many of them useless. Disappointed, they walk away, convinced there's nothing but junk out on the Net. A lot of information is there—millions and millions of pages of it—but finding what you need can seem impossible.

Even if the Internet did have all the answers (and of course it doesn't), finding them depends on asking the right questions. There are two basic types of tools you can use to find what you're looking for, whether it's on a Web page or mentioned in a newsgroup. First are the directories, such as Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com>), which organize Web pages into broad categories. You can use a directory in the same way you might browse through the stacks at a library or bookstore: go to the section you want, and then look over the titles there. If there's a particular one that catches your eye, you can pull it out and take a look. It's a quick, easy way to find general information.

The second—and more powerful—set of tools is search engines. Imagine if you could search through every word of every book in a

By Ric Mazereeuw

library, then you get an idea of how useful these can be. Fast, efficient search engines cover most of the Web, and are often combined with detailed directories to give you a choice of how to search. To get started, just click the Search button on the Sympatico toolbar from anywhere on the Sympatico site. There you'll find several engines to power your search.

Directories

General directories, such as Sympatico-Lycos and Yahoo!, are good places to start a search, especially if you're looking for information on a broad subject. Directories organize the Web into categories, like Business, Science and Recreation. Under each category, sites are broken down even further. By "drilling down" through the links, from categories to subcategories, you can usually find a list of sites covering basic topics very quickly. If you're looking for more detail on a specific subject, topical indices work the same way as general directories, but are more focused.

While Yahoo! covers almost every topic in much the same way as a regular public library does, topical indices focus on very specific categories. Imagine libraries just on needlework (<http://www.antibe.com/stitchery/needlework.html>) or neuropathology (<http://www.neuropat.dote.hu>), for instance, and you'll get the idea how useful these can be. The Argus Clearing House (<http://www.clearinghouse.net>) is a good place to find topical indices on specialized subjects. Directories can focus on

Illustrations by Mir Lada



Our guide to search engines and directories will help you to burrow through the mountains of info on the Internet to find what you need

specific regions, as well as topics. If it is Canadian information you're after, several sites specialize in it, including Maple Square (<http://www.maplesquare.com>), Yahoo.ca (<http://www.yahoo.ca>) and Canada.com (<http://www.canada.com>).

While following links is an easy way to find what you're looking for, many directories also let you search their index by typing in a "keyword" that describes what you're looking for. This can help you find sites listed under more than one category. Keep in mind, though, that your search will be limited to the directory itself.

One of the good things about directories is that the information is already sifted and organized for you. As people submit their sites, they can choose the category under which to file it. Directories sometimes have "editors" who look at each submission, and

put it where it belongs. Such organization can help overcome some of the mayhem of the Web by showing only those sites that focus specifically on your subject, and not the ones that simply mention it in passing.

Sometimes, though, you might need to find something very specific, that may be only cited on a page, and not have a listing of its own. If you're hunting for a certain company's homepage, for example, a directory is a good way to start. But if you're looking for reviews of their product, you're probably better off with a search engine.

Search engines

When you conduct a search, you aren't really searching the Web, but each search engine's record of the Web. These databases are built up by computer programs, called "spiders" or "crawlers," which roam through the Internet,

following links and compiling a record of everything they find. Unlike directories, which generally record the title and a basic description, many search engines record every single word on every page. Many sites, including Excite (<http://www.excite.com>), offer a combination of searching within their directories or expanding your search to include anything on the Web.

Search engines are extremely powerful, but that power can work against you, unless you know what you are doing. Think of them as extremely eager, but slightly clueless, librarians. If you use keywords like “growing tomatoes” to start your search, the engine may call up every page it knows which mentions either word. Fortunately, it will also rank results based on their perceived relevance to your search, and many engines claim to use artificial intelligence to determine what you’re looking for. Still, the words “growing tomatoes” entered into Infoseek (<http://infoseek.go.com>), for instance, gives nearly seven million responses, covering everything from gardening sites to a Web site with the lyrics to a John Denver song called “Home Grown Tomatoes.” The key is learning how to narrow your search. Some “natural language” search engines, like Ask Jeeves (<http://www.askjeeves.com>) and AltaVista (<http://www.altavista.com>), let you type your questions in plain English, and try to figure out what you want.

Planning your attack

Take the time—before you even turn the computer on—to plan your search. Figure out what you’re really looking for, and come up with as many keywords and synonyms as you can to describe it. Then, during your search, keep refining your keywords and your approach based on the results you get. Several search engines, including Excite, will actually suggest new terms to help narrow down your hunt.

You should pick one search engine at a time, and learn how its advanced searches work. By reading the comprehensive instructions on its Web site, you can reduce the

results you get from an overwhelming 50,000 to a more manageable 50.

Getting more horsepower

Since each engine works a little differently, there is no common set of commands that works with all of them. It’s crucial to read at least the basic help instructions when you use a search engine, since the commands that work with one may not have the same effect on another. Still, some basics do apply to most engines:

PHRASES: If you’re searching for a phrase or a name, such as “to be or not to be,” or the “Toronto Blue Jays,” enclose the entire set of words in quotation marks or parentheses. This lets the search engine know to only return pages where the words appear together.

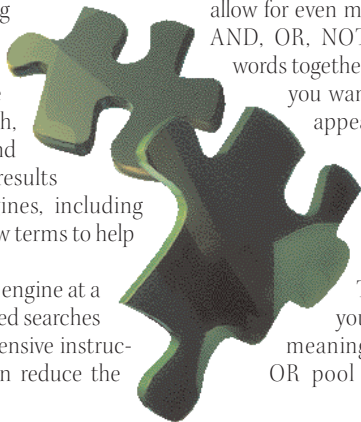
CAPITALIZATION: Don’t use capital letters when searching, unless you’re looking for proper names. If your search is in all lowercase letters, most search engines will return pages regardless of how the capitalization is used on them. If you do use capital letters, you’ll only get responses that match exactly.

+/- SIGNS: Most engines will let you use the + and - signs directly in front of a word to narrow your search. Use the + sign in front of words that must appear in your results, and a - in front of words that should not be included: “+opera -soap” will search for information on operas, but won’t return sites about daytime TV shows.

BOOLEAN PHRASES: Instead of the + or - signs, some engines accept Boolean phrases. While these are similar to the + and - signs, they allow for even more detailed searches using AND, OR, NOT, and NEAR. AND joins words together, and tells the search engine you want pages where both words appear. The OR and NOT (or

AND NOT in some engines) options permit further refinement by allowing synonyms and disqualifying words you don’t need.

This is helpful where one of your keywords has a double meaning (for example, “billiards OR pool AND NOT swimming”).



Imagine if you could comb through every word of every book in a library, then you get an idea of how useful search engines can be

Finally, the NEAR command will search for words that are within a certain number of words of each other. The search: "water NEAR safety" will return pages with the phrase "water safety" and "safety in the water."

Wild cards

Some search engines, including Lycos and Excite, will automatically expand your search to include related words. You can search for "computer," for instance, and you will also get responses with the words "computers" and "computerization."

You can ask other search engines to do the same with the use of what's called a "wild card," usually represented by an *. So while a search for "vegetarian" will only return that word, "vegetarian*" will also look for vegetarians and vegetarianism. Wild cards are also important when you want to take into account the differences between American and Canadian spellings of the same word, such as colour, travelling or judgement. Type in "colour," and the engine will ignore pages with the American spelling. Use colo*r, instead, and you'll get both versions.

All-in-one search engines

All-in-one search engines submit your search query to a range of engines. Dog Pile (<http://www.dogpile.com>) shows the results from about a dozen different engines, letting you compare what each one comes up with. It's a good way of trying out various engines quickly. MetaCrawler (<http://www.metacrawler.com>) does multiple searches of engines, but merges all the results, eliminating duplicate sites.

Specialized search engines & directories

If you can't find what you're looking for with a general search engine, don't give up. There is a

wide range of specialized search engines available, like Aqueous (<http://www.aqueous.com>), for "water related sites," from bikinis to boating. For a good directory of these engines, try Search.com (<http://www.search.com>), which even features a search engine for search engines. Also, many sites allow you to search their private databases, not catalogued by Web spiders. You will likely find more details by searching Movieworld Hong Kong (<http://www.movieworld.com.hk/moviebase/index.shtml>), for instance, than using a standard tool.

While the Web has a lot of data, if you are looking for detailed or obscure information, you should also consider the Usenet—the global network of newsgroups that can be accessed through the Internet. Newsgroups are online discussion groups that cover thousands of topics. Most search engines allow you to search Usenet postings along with the Web. A searchable list of newsgroups can be found at Deja.com (<http://www.deja.com>).

The future

As the traditional search sites become all-in-one portals, newer search engines are hitting the Web with innovative approaches to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack. Direct Hit (<http://www.directhit.com>), for instance, lists results based on sites previous searchers have spent the most time on. Google (<http://www.google.com>) rates the sites it returns by the number of sites which link to them.

But with all this search power at your disposal, you still must take a minute to consider how trustworthy the information you find is. There are times when a good old-fashioned encyclopedia is faster, easier and more authoritative. After all, just because you can find almost anything you want on the Net—from the latest Elvis sightings to who really killed JFK—it doesn't necessarily mean it's true. @

