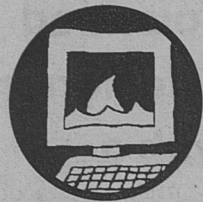


CYBER



SHARK

BY MIKI THOMAS

Search Engines

With so much information available on the World Wide Web, searching it can be overwhelming — especially using a search engine.

Say you are looking for sites about depression glass. You plug in “depression glass” and wind up with a gazillion hits for “depression,” another gazillion for “glass,” and only a few hits actually about “depression glass.” It is enough to send you into a cata-tonic fit.

However, there are some ways to use search engines to your advantage and actually find what you want.

Search engines are basically searchable databases of site information gathered from the web. Given the huge number of sites on the web, it's impossible for humans to manually scavenge for new ones. A robot called a “spider” or “crawler” is sent out to do the job.

Depending on how the spider is programmed to record information, addresses of websites are usually filed based on title and the first few words of each page. This is useful information because your search results depend on this filing system; sometimes your hits will list sites complete unrelated to your topic except for one word in the title.

About the only human element in this process comes when some of these sites are put into categories in a webguide, which is often found in the opening page of a search engine.

The best resource on search engines (sadly, the only one I've been able to find) is *Search Engines for the World Wide Web* by Alfred and Emily Glossbrenner. It covers major search engines such as Alta Vista, Yahoo, and Excite as well as specialized ones such as Deja News, which searches Usenet newsgroups, and Four11, the email and telephone directory. The most helpful aspect of the book is its collection of quick reference charts for many search engines; they clearly demonstrate how search engines work differently.

For instance, some search engines are menu-driven — a user clicks on category names to narrow down the search. Most, however, let the user start a search using keywords and phrases.

To fine-tune a keyword search and reduce hits, you can use restrictive terms including AND, OR, and NOT. Depending on the search engine, you can substitute + or - for AND or NOT, while a space between words or phrases indicates OR. Be careful about actually writing out

AND, OR, NOT: in Excite and some other engines, doing so turns off its concept-based approach to searching.

Other ways the bigger search engines let users fine-tune searches include Alta Vista's field search, which searches based on title or host, and Hot Bot's “meta words” feature which can restrict a search according to domain or web site feature.

Using advanced searching techniques can be tedious — you may not get what you want on the first try. It does take practice to get the keywords and search request just right. Some search engines allow for plain English search requests, so you can actually ask a question to start a search: “Where can I find information on speaker systems?” However, I've found that sometimes doesn't always work as it should; you can still wind up with many irrelevant hits.

Perhaps the easiest way to search is through specialized search engines. Their databases are smaller, so your chances of finding what you want are greater. There are three search engines providing information for the GLBT community: Gayscape, Rainbow Query and a new one called GayInsider.com.

Gayscape is mostly for men, with a webguide including such topics as Bear Photos and

Leathermen Personal Pages, but it does offer a searchable database of more than 52,000 GLBT websites. It offers you a choice of a menu-driven search or keyword search. Plus, if you have a website yourself, Gayscape allows you to add it to its database.

Rainbow Query also offers both menu-driven and keyword searches. I found both to be easy to navigate, with only a few dead links in the results.

GayInsider.com is new; as such, it has a number of bugs it needs to work out before it can be a useful tool. Its user interface and webguide topics are suspiciously similar to Yahoo's. However,

“Community,” has only a handful of sites under such topics as “politics” and “people.” I next decided to check out its “In The News” section, clicking on “Matthew Shepard.” I wound up with a “404 Site Not Found” message. This site definitely needs work.

If using search engines is too frustrating for you, try Internet or World Wide Web guide books such as Harley Hahn's *World Wide Web Yellow Pages*. For GLBT web surfers, Jeff Dawson's *Gay and Lesbian Online* is now in its third edition with more than 3300 Internet and websites listed. ▼

the hot list

Alta Vista

www.altavista.digital.com

Yahoo

www.yahoo.com

Excite

www.excite.com

Deja News

www.dejanews.com

Four11

www.four11.com

Hot Bot

www.hotbot.com

Gayscape

www.gayscape.com/gayscape/welcome.html

Rainbow Query

www.rainbowquery.com/

GayInsider.com

www.gayinsider.com/gayinsider/

GayInsider.com does not have Yahoo's number of websites available on its database. I tried searching for sites on “religion,” a hot topic among the GLBT community, and came up with nothing. It turns out that the webguide category it would belong to,

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nada. zippo. zilch. nichivo. nothin' baby!

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Stay in touch with the Vermont community between issues of *OITM*.

We've set up three new e-mail listservs to keep you up to date with everything from the local gossip to national issues.

VTPrideNet: an e-mail discussion list. LGBT folks from across Vermont — and the people who love them — can now exchange messages

If you'd rather get your chatter in one neat package instead of individual messages, check out VTPrideNet-digest. Instead of getting each e-mail separately, you'll get one long message that contains all the day's postings.

For those who aren't up for chatter but want to keep up with major newsevent notices and paper deadlines (of course), there's VTPrideNet-announce. There's no discussion on this list — just announcements as events warrant.

To subscribe to any of the lists, send e-mail to

majordomo@queernet.org

In the body of your e-mail, you should include one of the following lines to specify the list you want to join:

subscribe vtpridenet

OR

subscribe vtpridenet-digest

OR

subscribe vtpridenet-announce

If you need assistance, email us at oitm@together.net

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