

What Else is Google Doing?

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Last month we reviewed the topic of local search featuring Google's new mapping system. This month I'll review other new Google features. Among the most interesting are Blogger, Google Desktop, and Google Answers.

In my opinion, local search is the hottest new web technology to impact how local business marketing takes place. But we covered that last month. Google and the other dominant search engines (Yahoo!, MSN, AOL, and Ask Jeeves) have been very busy competing, building brand loyalty, and vying for market share. You may have noticed that Newfangled focuses most of their attention on Google and not as much on the other search engines. I've written about Google, and we've created most of our search engine optimization strategies and tools for Google. Our current focus on Google is justified since they maintain a comfortable dominance among search engine users. Of course, things on the web change quickly, and MSN or Yahoo! could encroach on Google's lead. If this were to happen, we would adjust our focus, but I'll admit it...I'm a Google fan. I hope they continue to lead the search engine industry.

I like Google for two reasons. First, their tools work extremely well. They deliver what they promise. Second, they focus on simplicity. Everything they build has a clean, easy-to-use, and intuitive interface. They don't clutter their screens with unnecessary buttons and links. I recently saw a quote on Slashdot.com that commends Google's ideology, "It's pretty interesting to realize the subtle way in which they've [Google] risen to the top by simply providing what people want -- no more, no less..."

Even Microsoft has been paying attention to Google's keep-it-simple-success. A comparison of search.msn.com and Google is revealing in this regard. I recently used Microsoft's SpyWare to cure my home computer of a massive AdWare pop-up invasion. It was surprisingly easy to use, and the interface was very clean. I'm glad that Google's success has, at the very least, inspired their competitors to clean up their acts.

Blogging with Google's Blogger

More stuff from Google

Google currently has market dominance, and with their recent IPO they are flushed with cash. So what are they doing with all these resources? The Google home page doesn't indicate much of anything, but if you click on the "more >>" link, you're in for a treat. Behind that link are dozens of mini Google tools: Google News, Google Scholar, Google Catalogs and more. I'm going to provide a brief description of some of my favorite Google sub sites, but I'd encourage you to visit the site and explore other tools because they're adding news ones all the time.

Blogger - Blogger is perhaps the most popular of Google's sub sites. Blogs are a popular topic in the news these days. Blogs are basically online personal journals. Some blogs allow visitors to post comments to journal entries. Some blogs gain enough attention to become highly specialized news outlets. If you've read Malcom Gladwell's Tipping Point (which I recommend), you might remember one of his categories of people who heavily influence trends and fads... he called them "mavens." A maven is the kind of person who knows everything there is to know about a very specific subject. They can tell you exactly which DVD recorder to buy, when to buy it, what store has the best price, where to get the best rebate, and how to get 100 DVD recordable discs for free when you buy it. There are product mavens, political mavens, entertainment mavens, technology mavens, and they all love to blog! Of course, non-mavens also like to blog, and you can find blogs on almost any subject.

Blogger is Google's online tool that allows you to set up and maintain your own personal blog for free. It's easy to use, and you can add as many journal entries as you like. You can even pick and customize their various design options.

Google Answers Research

Google Answers - I recently discovered Google Answers, and I think it has a lot of potential. Google is currently evaluating and recruiting a large number of online researchers. These qualified researchers review posted questions and respond to the questions for a small fee. Anyone can post a question, setting their own price for the answer. Google has worked out a simple process to handle the transaction... to make sure answers meet their customer's satisfaction. The cost for research ranges from \$2.00 to \$100 depending on the complexity and value of the question and the quality of the answer. Answers are usually provided within 24 hours.

This an incredible resource; once a question has been answered, it can be viewed by everyone. Every day Google Answers grows with qualified research on hundreds of subjects. You may be able to find a professionally researched answer to a question by just browsing or searching the Answers site.

Finding Information with Google Catalogs

Google Catalogs - At first, I thought Google Catalogs was kind of silly. Google scans print catalogs and allows you to browse them by category and "flip" through them, page by page. Clicking a page enlarges it. You can zoom in to read all the details. What blew my mind is that not only can you click through all of these scanned pages, but the text is still searchable! I went to a paper manufacturer's catalog and typed in "acid-free," and, in the mini-page display, yellow highlights showed up over each occurrence of the words where they appeared on the printed page. I was able to click the yellow box to zoom in to the page to get more information. Here's one practical application of this technology: Call Mac Warehouse and tell them to stop sending you three copies of their catalog every other day because you can access it and search it anytime you want on Google. It saves them some money, saves a couple trees, and makes the information you need accessible whenever you need it.

Searching Google Images

Google Images - You probably know about this one already, but in case you don't, Google Images is an excellent way to find very specific photos and illustrations of obscure items or concepts. Of course, these images are copyright protected by whoever took them or created them, but for comps and layouts they can be really useful. If you ever need a quick shot of a Six-Million Dollar Man lunch box, you can find it.

Finding Papers and Journals with Google Scholar

Google Scholar - Google Scholar limits search requests to its library of scholarly papers and journals. The results show the standard title and description, but it also displays the date of the paper, the source, the author, and the number of times each paper has been cited by other scholarly sources. If you need serious data and vetted knowledge, this is an excellent resource. Quoting these sources in your proposals can add scholarly weight to back up the strategy or direction you are recommending to your client.

Searching Special Topics with Google

Google Special Searches - Similar to Google Scholar, Google's Special Searches limits search results to specific topics. As this is one of the newest areas in Google there aren't lots of choices. They currently have a Google University Search as well, as various technology platform areas (Apple, Windows, Linux, etc.). Wondering if Apple's new Tiger operating system will support classic mode? The Apple Special Search area is the perfect place to get an answer (by the way... the answer is yes, they will).

Increasing Productivity with Google Desktop

Google Desktop

- I just installed Google Desktop, and so far I'm impressed. I now have a little search bar in the bottom tray of my screen. I can type in any text and in just a few seconds (as opposed to the minutes it takes XP to search my folders) I get Google-like results from all the content in my computer. It includes Word files, Outlook email, and web history. There are plug-ins you can add to search other file types like PDFs. It is very secure and runs locally on my own machine. I can now find my files based on any phrase I used in the document or I can find entire threads of email containing certain words. I can even respond to the emails right from the Google Desktop window. I predict that this little utility will have a significant impact on my productivity. Being able to quickly find threads of related emails without having to click through Outlook's folders, scroll through its lists, and examine contents by subject line will help a lot!

Google Photos with Picasa and Hello

Google Picasa and Hello - Google Picasa and Hello are both tools for sharing personal photos. Picasa is an efficient way of maintaining, titling, grouping, and sorting folders full of digital pictures. Picasa also provides some basic image improving tools and print utilities. You can set up Picasa to interact with your favorite online photo processor to order professional prints. Hello is another tool that works with Picasa. It's like instant messaging but for photos. Rather than text messaging your buddy list, you can "photo message" them and chat about the photos. Of course anyone involved in the conversation can download, print, or order the photo as well. This is a personal tool more than a business tool, but I bet there's a way of reviewing layouts or project photos using these tools.

Google Labs: Google Video and Suggest

Google Labs: Google Video and Google Suggest - Among the sub sites at Google is "Google Labs." If you go into Labs you'll discover an entirely new list of experimental Google sites and projects. Two that I'm most interested in are Google Video and Google Suggest. Google Video is a search engine that searches the closed caption feeds from various television channels and creates incremental screen grabs from the show being indexed. Coming soon they hope to provide video clips. A possible point of application for PR firms is to search occurrences of a clients name to find out when they are being mentioned in the news or television media.

Google Suggest is an interesting idea. As you type in a search word or phrase into the search box Google provides suggestions in a drop down bar. Type in "oranges" and you'll see, among other recommendations, "oranges nutrition," "oranges calories," etc. Continue to type "oranges f..." and Google, in real time, adjusts the list to provide suggestions with the second word beginning with the letter "f" like "oranges fruit", "oranges facts", "oranges florida," or "oranges fiber." The list is continually refined until you find what you're looking for.

The future of information

This is hardly a comprehensive review of the things that Google is up to. But it does provide an idea of where things are headed as Google strives to fulfill its mission "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." All these capabilities are very new, yet it's amazing how far we've already come. Given the degree of competition and capitalization flowing the into the search engine market, we can expect this to be only the tip of the iceberg.