



Power Searching: Alternate Search Engines

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Introduction

Google, Bing, and Yahoo are three of the most popular search engines used. Regardless of which one you prefer, there will be information that cannot be found in these traditional sources. Luckily, we do have other options, from Alternate search engines, to subject directories, and social media.

Alternate / Specialized Search Engines

Alternate and specialized search engines are tools that differ from the popular search engines we familiar with. Some of their differences are the ability to search across multiple engines, privacy policies, and family friendly features.

When to search an alternate / specialized search engine:

- You want to protect your privacy
- You have a very specific question and you cannot find an appropriate forum.
- You need the information that is vetted

Dogpile.com

Dogpile is a metasearch engine that allows you to search across Google and Yahoo at the same time. You enter your query and Dogpile takes the results from the search engines, and filters the results for relevancy, eliminating duplicates. It has the capability to limit searches for images, video, news, local, shopping, and white pages, as well as use advanced search operators such as Boolean. You can also filter out potentially explicit content from search results in the preference settings.

Pros:

- Saves time by searching multiple engines
- Eliminates duplicate results
- Can handle advanced search operators
- Cleaner interface

Cons:

- Ads are more difficult to recognize

Startpage.com

Startpage is a site that prides itself on protecting people's privacy. It is powered by Google, but all identifying information from your query, such as IP addresses, search history, and tracking cookies, are removed before your query gets sent to the Google servers. It looks and functions like the popular engines with a few exceptions. Though it has an advanced search page, it lacks Google's calculator, conversion tool, and the other intuitive features.

Pros:

- Protects privacy
- Fewer shopping sites appear in search results
- It has an advanced search page
- Search operators work
- Has customizable search settings and filters
- Has search help & tips page

Cons:

- There are sponsored ads
- Unlike Dogpile, it only searches Google.
- Does not have Google's intuitive search features (i.e. calculator, time, weather)

Yippy.com

Yippy is a family friendly metasearch engine. Instead of searching google and Bing, however, Yippy retrieves results from Ask, Open Directory, Gigablast, and various other sites. Like Startpage, Yippy also does not track user information. What sets it apart from those other alternate search engines is its censorship of search results. It strips out sites containing pornographic and sexually explicit sites, as well as those pertaining to gambling or otherwise inappropriate for children. It also provides a menu of tabs that can be used to filter results by type of site (.com, .org, etc.), source, year, and "Cloud", which allows you to access similar search topics. Yippy can be used on a PC, tablet, or smartphone.

Pros:

- Protects privacy
- Search operators work
- It has an advanced search page
- Quick access to filters
- You can customize search preferences
- It has formats for PC, Tablet, and Smartphone screens

Cons:

- There are sponsored ads
- Shopping sites are not filtered out
- The queries take longer to process
- It doesn't have intuitive search features (Calculator, Time, Weather)
- The interface is busier

Subject Directories

A subject directory is a list of web pages that has been organized into categories or groups according to a particular subject. These subject directories differ from the more popular search engines in that they are compiled and vetted by people, as opposed to spiders or web crawlers. Because subject directories have been culled by people, they can be particularly useful as research guides or library pathfinders. Subject directories provide quality over quantity when it comes to retrieving information.

When to use a Subject Directory:

- When you have a general question or are browsing for a term-paper topic (i.e. coffee and health)
- When you want to avoid ads and shopping sites in your results
- When you want vetted sites

Pros:

- Few sponsored ads (if any at all).
- Vetted and organized by people.
- Results are limited to a specific list of sites.

Cons:

- Limited number of sites.
- Quality of links depends on the person doing the vetting.
- Results might be too technical or scientific for general purposes.

Social Media

Social Media sites are web services that allow people to interact on a more personal level than typical static web pages. Sites like Facebook and Twitter have had a major impact on the way information is shared. News organizations now use Twitter to track breaking news. Even politicians, police departments, stores, and the Center for Disease Control have adopted Social Media to share information.

Each Social Media site has their own search features built in. Facebook allows you to search for people, pages, and interests within Facebook, but also uses Bing for web searches. You can also search via Google & Bing, or use a specialized service like SocialMention.com which is designed specifically for finding information in social media networks.

When to search Social Media:

- You need quick information on a breaking / current event (look at what is trending)
- You need a specific photo from a specific time period (Vatican City during conclave)
- You want to know what people think of your library

Pros:

- Content is the most current than you will find anywhere.
- Great for finding quotes for celebrities and politicians.
- Great for finding breaking news.
- You can use search engines to search Facebook & Twitter without an account.
- Flickr has better advanced search options for images than typical search engines.

Cons:

- It is difficult to verify authenticity of posts.
- Unless you use search operators or alternate / specialized search engines, you need to search in each social network separately.

Forums

Forums are similar to directories in that they are subject specific. They are online bulletin boards that allow users to login in and discuss or ask a question about a particular topic. Each question is referred to as a “Thread”. Anyone logged in can answer your question and provide links or sometimes images to the discussion board. Forums are great for questions on troubleshooting computers, cars, gardening, and health.

When to use a Forum:

- When you have a very specific or detailed question (Where do I attach a CB radio ground on a Jeep Wrangler?)

Pros:

- You can ask very specific questions, i.e. “I get a profile error message when I open Firefox, how do I fix it?”
- The answers you receive are current. They are date and time stamped.
- If more information is needed, you can continue to ask further questions in the same thread, similar to a reference interview.
- Depending on the forum, you get feedback from multiple people.
- People can supply links to helpful sites or instructions.

Cons:

- Anyone can post regardless of their level of expertise.
- If the forum isn’t popular, you may not get a response to your question.
- Links provided in an answer may be carrying a virus or malware.

Evaluating Information

Use many of the same methods to evaluate information found in directories, social media, forums, and alternate engines as you would with any other type of site.

- Is the spelling accurate?
- Who sponsors the forum?
- Is the information in the page cited?
- What kind of links are provided within the page?
- When the page was last updated or the answer posted?
- Are there many comments?
- Are the comments positive or negative regarding the information found?
- Has the author posted many answers?
- Has the author earned any badges, rank, or is a moderator?
- Is the forum busy with many members, discussions or threads?

Safe Searching

Searching the Internet can be very risky, opening your computer to malware and viruses. It is important to follow Internet security practices:

- Be leery of items from unknown sources or even suspicious links from trusted sources. (SourceForge, for example).
- Look at the Browser's address bar for the site's Validation certificate. The site could be an imposter.
- Don't click on links in twitter, Facebook, and forum comments, without doing the following:
 - Roll the mouse pointer over a link to reveal its actual destination, displayed in the bottom left corner of the browser. In Microsoft Outlook it is displayed above the link.
 - Expand shortened links with tools or plug-ins:
 - "Where Does This Link Go?" <http://wheredoesthislinkgo.com/>
 - "LongURL" <http://longurl.org/>
 - URL X-Ray: <http://urlxray.com/>
 - LinkPeelr: <http://linkpeelr.appspot.com/> This is also a google Chrome add-on
- Look at the Browser's address bar for the site's Validation certificate. The site could be an imposter.
- Be suspicious of any odd search engine results. Google searches can get hijacked. This is when you enter a search in Google, but your query results in your being directed to bogus sites. If the results look odd.
- Be careful of clicking on links for searches on:
 - Current events (bin laden death, amy winehouse death)
 - Any search with the words: Lyrics, Free, Web, Gear, Games, Gadgets, Olympics, Music, Videos increases your risk of coming upon an infected site.
- Use the latest version of your browser.

This chart from McAfee's report "The Web's Most Dangerous Search Terms" shows the riskiest words to use in a search query.

Category-specific risk summary findings in the United States

| Category | Maximum Risk (Average) | Category Risk (Average) |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lyrics | 26.3% | 5.1% |
| Free | 21.3% | 7.3% |
| Web | 13.9% | 2.1% |
| Gear, Gadgets and Games | 12.5% | 2.7% |
| Olympics | 12.4% | 2.1% |
| Videos | 12.3% | 1.7% |
| Celebrities | 10.7% | 1.4% |
| Music | 10.7% | 1.7% |
| News | 8.6% | 1.3% |
| Miscellaneous | 8.3% | 1.1% |
| Travel | 7.4% | 1.2% |
| Food and Drink | 7.2% | 0.7% |
| Showbiz | 7.1% | 1.1% |
| Election 08 | 6.9% | 0.5% |
| Shopping | 6.8% | 0.7% |
| How Do I? | 6.5% | 1.0% |
| Astrology | 5.4% | 0.4% |
| Sports | 5.3% | 0.6% |
| Destinations | 5.1% | 0.8% |
| Health | 4.0% | 0.4% |
| Economic Crisis | 3.5% | 0.5% |

Below are a few samples of the many directories and alternate search engines available.

| DIRECTORIES | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Name | Subject | URL | Comments |
| About | General | About.com | Articles written by "guides" |
| Beaucoup | General | Beaucoup.com | Maintained by "Teri" |
| Best History Web Sites | History | Besthistorysites.net | Created by Teacher Tom Daccord |
| Best of the Web | General | Botw.org | Maintained by a team of editors |
| Cyndi's List | Genealogy | Cyndislist.com | Created by Genealogist Cyndi Howells |
| Delicious | General | delicious.com | Social Bookmarking |
| HofTopics | Current Events | libguides.sau.edu/hottopics | Created by St. Ambrose University |
| Internet Public Library (IPL2) | General | Ipl.org | Maintained by Multiple Academic Libraries |
| Open Directory Project | General | Dmoz.org | Maintained globally by volunteer editors |
| Pinterest | General | Pinterest.com | Social Bookmarking |
| Political Resources on the Net | Politics | Politicalresources.net | Edited by Roberto Cicciomessere |
| RefDesk | General | Refdesk.com | Created by Bob Drudge (Matt Drudge's Father) |
| Science | U.S. Science Publications | Science.gov | Maintained by CENDI.gov |
| Science Research | Science | Scienceresearch.com | Maintained by Deep Web Technologies |
| WWW Virtual Library | General | Vlib.org | Founded by Timer Berners-Lee, now run by a confederation of volunteers |
| Yahoo Business Directory | General / Business | Business.yahoo.com | Maintained by Yahoo |

| ALTERNATE SEARCH ENGINES | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Name | Style | URL | Comments |
| Dogpile | Metasearch | Dogpile.com | Searches Google & Yahoo |
| DuckDuckGo | Metasearch | Duckduckgo.com | Privacy |
| QuinturaKids | Tag / Cloud search | Quinturakids.com | Scroll over tag to see related sites |
| Quora | Q&A | Quora.com | Ask a question for members to answer |
| Socialmention | Search engine | Socialmention.com | Focuses on social media |
| Startpage | Search engine | Startpage.com | Privacy |
| SweetSearch | Search Engine | sweetsearch.com | Vetted for students |
| Yippy | Search engine | New2.yippy.com | Family friendly & private searches |