A review of the biggest search engine sites

Science, Computer Science

Search engines, arguably, are one of the most valuable lay-tools on the web. Many take it for granted that one can simply enter a query into a textbox and find the most relevant results of a virtually limitless ocean of information at one's fingertips. Of course, there are many search engines on the Internet – too many to mention here, let alone discuss in depth. However, a brief search on some of the top search engine sites can give some inclination of which search engine's can serve a searcher best, and for what. For the purpose of this critique, Google, Yahoo, and Ask. com were used for the search terms " David Guterson Snow Falling on Cedars" and, simply, " Guterson". These two search terms – one specific and one vague – used on these three major search engine sites serve as the basis of the critique. Below is a list of the findings, pros, and cons of each search engine, followed by a critique of each.

Google

Main findings:

- A range of results on the first page, from Guterson books for sale to a news story about a recent speech
- A small " pop up" window with the book's synopsis, ratings, and links to further information
- No images, apart from a small shot of the cover of the book

Pros:

- No real need to go beyond the first page of results – the top results included a synopsis on Sparknotes, information on Wikipedia, books for sale on Amazon, and commentary on Goodreads
- Easy navigation to the needed information

- A list of related search terms

Cons:
- No complete information on the results page itself – one must look to the provided links
- No specific or academic sources within the top results

Yahoo

Main findings:
- Mostly " for sale" results on Barnes & Noble and Amazon
- Related videos on the first page of results
- Wikipedia page as the first result

Pros:
- Less likely to have results based on Adsense, more on relevancy
- Quick access to the Wikipedia page

Cons:
- Some irrelevant results within the top results
- The page is cluttered by advertisements

Ask. com

Main findings:
- Top of the page is a " Explore Answers About" section
- Before the search results, there is an " Answer" section with basic information about the book and related questions (such as " Who Wrote Snow Falling on Cedars?")
- The following results were different than both Google and Yahoo

Pros:

- If one is in search of simply basic information, Ask. com provides that on top, along with related questions

- Places searches in terms of " questions" rather than " queries", seeking to answer questions directly rather than link to relevant results

Cons:

- Most of the top results were irrelevant, especially compared with Google and Yahoo

- The page is cluttered with advertisements

- A busy front page makes it hard to navigate

Google Critique

Google is, without bias, the best search engine of the three examined – ostensibly, of any available on the web. This, it seems, is for three major reasons. First, Google gives the user a range of results within the top ten to twenty results. When was the last time you went past the first page of results in a Google search? A user is able to find basic information as well as links to more detailed information, products, and discussions if need be. Second, results seem to be based on what is most relevant to the user. Finally, Google is (at least apparently) advertisement free. While the search engine may make up for it in otherwise, the lack of clutter on a search results page makes finding what you need much easier.

Yahoo Critique

Yahoo seemed to return less relevant results than Google, while still landing above Ask. com in terms of the " ease of navigation" category. The results page had some of what was found on Google, yet added seemingly irrelevant

results as well. Additionally, there was a " related videos" section in the middle of the results, which cluttered up the page. Most of the results seemed to be based on revenue rather than relevancy. Finally, unlike Google, Yahoo's results page was cluttered with advertisements.

Ask. com Critique

Despite its aspiration to be a source for answered questions, Ask. com simply falls short. Phrasing search results in terms of an " answer", seemingly, is a great idea. The main result gives some basic answers to those looking for them, but the page is too cluttered and complicated for any further navigation and inquiries. If one were to make it past the clutter and advertisements, most of the top results were irrelevant for a basic query (for example, discussion boards and blogs were among the top results). This was confirmed by searching simply " Guterson", which returned results irrelevant to Snow Falling on Cedars altogether.