

Beyond Google

Greg Downey

University of Wisconsin-Madison

School of Library & Information Studies

School of Journalism & Mass Communication

Is Google making us stupid?

- August 2008 article in the *Atlantic* by Nicholas Carr
- “For me, as for others, the Net is becoming a universal medium, the conduit for most of the information that flows through my eyes and ears and into my mind.”
- But: “My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski.”



- Sergey Brin and Larry Page
- “Google’s mission is to make the world’s information universally accessible and useful.”
- 112 languages, tens of billions of web pages, hundreds of millions of queries each day
- “The perfect search engine would understand exactly what you mean and give back exactly what you want.”
- Both automation and augmentation for the “free marketplace of ideas”

how Google works

- search box is free, uncluttered, ubiquitous
- split between “organic” and paid results (“ad words” and “ad sense”)
- ranks “value” of pages based on links (“Democracy on the web works.”)
- only searches the “visible” web
- spin-off searches for images, weblogs, books
- not just indexing content, but aggregating (News), digitizing (Newspapers), generating (YouTube), and geocoding

some quick search examples

- cities which are similar to Madison, WI?

Google's headaches

- from one simple PageRank to over 200 “signals” (constant “arms race” with SEO firms)
- “freshness” vs. “test of time” dilemma (QDF)
- geographically local vs. globally universal results
- the way we search affects the way Google responds (“thousands of experiments a day”)
- who we are affects what search results we get
- my marketplace of ideas today may be very different from your marketplace of ideas tomorrow

smarter Google searches

- search only the terms you want: “” or ~
- search only the files you want: filetype:pdf
- search only the Web you want: site:org
- exclude results you don't want: -amazon.com
- search context of a site: related: or link:
- set up alerts for an RSS clipping service
- go beyond Google to the “invisible web”
(see www.badgerlink.net)

using Google as a *first* step

- locate individual researchers
- locate research organizations
- locate published research reports
- locate primary research data

Wisconsin web sites to use with Google

- UW-Madison - www.wisc.edu
- UW System - www.wisconsin.edu
- UW Extension - www.uwex.edu
- UW Digital Collections - uwdc.library.wisc.edu
- UW Population Health Institute - www.pophealth.wisc.edu/uwphi/
- COWS - www.cows.org
- THRIVE - www.thrivehere.org

how can we do better?

- what kinds of information do you need (and how do you use it)?
- how might we best make that information available (both findable and usable)?
- how can we make our web presence known to you and your constituents?