

Chapter 3

Your Options: Web Search Services

The Web offers both free and paid search services. The commercial search sites are more useful for business establishments, research scientists, and government officials who need serious information.

For the rest of us, the numerous free search sites are a good option.

Based on accessibility, you may choose either of the following types:

- the search facility provided within your browser
- specific Web sites designed for online search

Browser Search

Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer are the two most popular browsers used to access the Web.

Both browsers offer their own search service as an integral part of their browser features (see figures 2-1 and 2-2). Just click the search button on the standard toolbar to come up with the search facility (see Appendix 1 if you are unfamiliar with browser usage).

Netscape takes you to a separate search page and lets you choose from a selected list of search services for matching your query. Since Netscape has only limited access to the database of these search services, the results may not be as effective as those retrieved directly from the actual search site.

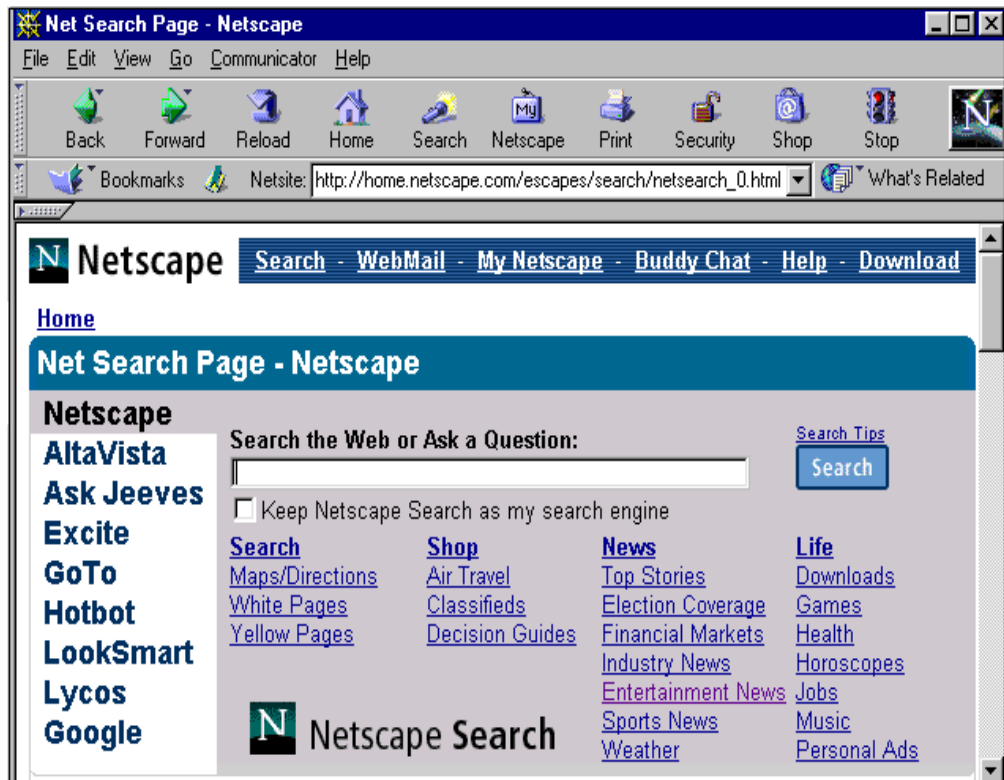


Figure 2-1 The Netscape search button links directly to the Net Search page.

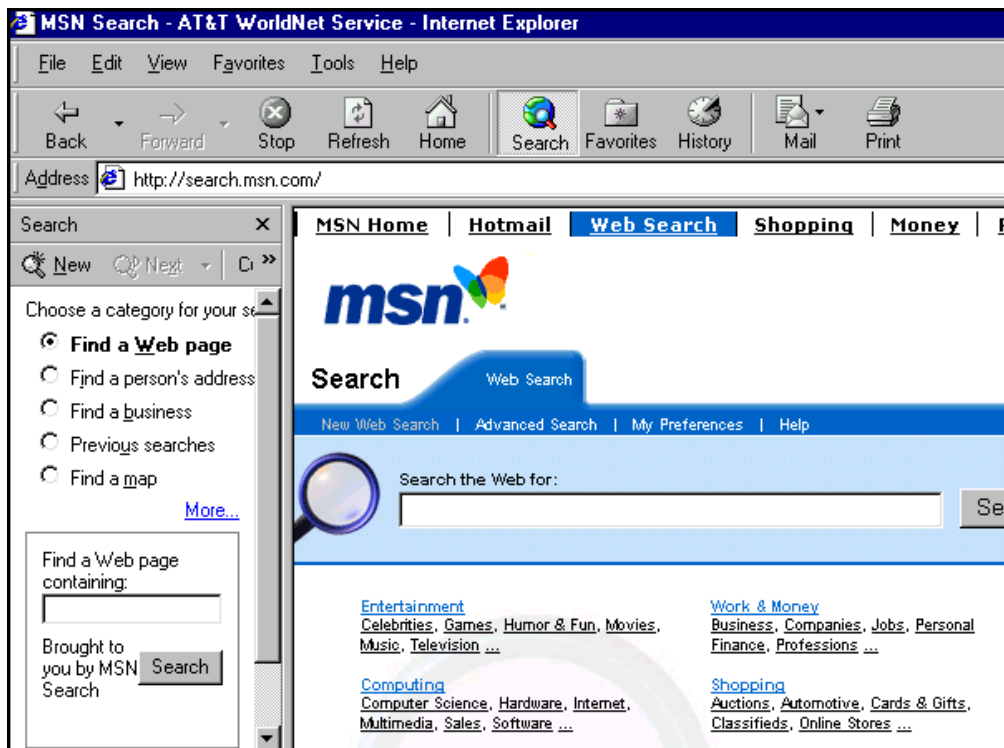


Figure 2-2 The Internet Explorer search button opens a separate window within the browser.

Clicking the Internet Explorer search button, on the other hand, will open up a separate frame to the left of your current browser window.

Internet Explorer lets you categorize your search query as a Web page, a person, a business or a map. You may even choose to have your query matched against previously conducted searches.

An understanding of the browser concepts will enhance your search strategies and help you navigate the Web more easily. (See Chapter 4 and Appendix I for more details)

Web Search Services

While browser-based search can be very convenient, it is by no means the only or most effective option open to you.

Many search sites have been created with focus on specific categories of topics, a particular audience group, or other similar criteria. For a more successful search, you may prefer to use any of the other Web search sites listed below based on their appropriateness for your search topic.

In the following section you will see a categorized list of popular Web search sites. The list (presented alphabetically) is only a starting point, as there are more than 3000 search sites available on the Web today and the number is growing. (Do a search on 'search engines' to see to latest ones.)

Note: I have taken some of this material with permission from 'www.searchenginewatch.com'—a well-respected newsletter and Web site considered to be a leading authority on Web search engines.

Leading Search Engines & Popular Subject Directories

The services below are categorised as 'Major Search Engines' as they are all either well known or are well used. They are also more likely to be well-maintained and upgraded when necessary, to keep pace with the growing Web. For Web searchers, these well-known, commercially backed search engines generally mean more dependable results.



search.aol.com

AOL Search allows its members to search across the web and AOL's own content from one place. The main listings for categories and web sites come from the Open Directory. Inktomi also provides crawler-based results, as backup to the directory information. Before the launch of AOL

Search in October 1999, the AOL search service was Excite-powered AOL NetFind.



www.altavista.com

One of the oldest search engines, **Alta Vista** is consistently ranked as one of the best and the largest too, in terms of pages indexed. Its comprehensive coverage and wide range of power searching commands makes it a particular favorite among researchers.



www.askjeeves.com

Ask Jeeves is a human-powered search service that aims to direct you to the exact page that answers your question. If it fails to find a match within its own database, then it will provide matching web pages from various search engines. Ask Jeeves is very popular among youngsters due to the simplicity of its use.



www.directhit.com

Direct Hit measures what people click on in the search results presented at its own site and at its partner sites, such as HotBot. Sites that are clicked on more than others rise higher in Direct Hit's rankings. Thus, the service dubs itself a "popularity engine." Aside from running its own web site, Direct Hit provides the main results that appear at HotBot and is available as an option to searchers at MSN Search.



www.excite.com

Excite is one of the more popular search services on the web. It offers a fairly large index and integrates non-web material such as company information and sports scores into its results, when appropriate. Excite was launched in late 1995. It grew quickly in prominence and consumed two of its competitors, Magellan in July 1996, and WebCrawler in November 1996. These continue to run as separate services.



www.alltheweb.com

Formerly called All The Web, **FAST Search** aims to index the entire web. It was the first search engine to break the 200 million web page index milestone and consistently has one of the largest indexes of the web. The Norwegian company behind **FAST Search** also powers some of the results that appear at Lycos.



www.go.com

Go is a portal site produced by Infoseek and Disney. It offers portal features such as personalization and free e-mail, plus the search capabilities of the former Infoseek search service, which has now been folded into Go. Searchers will find that Go consistently provides quality results in response to various general and broad searches. It also has an impressive human-compiled directory of web sites.



www.goto.com

Unlike the other major search engines, **GoTo** sells its main listings (paid or commercial search service). Companies can pay money to be placed higher in the search results, which GoTo feels improves relevancy. Non-paid results come from Inktomi. GoTo is not related to Go (Infoseek).



www.google.com

Google is a search engine that makes heavy use of link popularity as a primary way to rank web sites. This can be especially helpful in finding good sites in response to general searches such as "cars" and "travel," because users across the web have in essence voted for good sites by linking to them. The system works so well that Google has gained widespread praise for its high relevancy. Google also has a huge index of the web and provides some results to Yahoo and Netscape Search.



hotbot.lycos.com

HotBot is a favorite among researchers due to its many power searching features. In most cases, HotBot's first page of results comes from the Direct Hit service, and then secondary results come from the Inktomi search engine, which is also used by other services. It gets its directory information from the Open Directory project.



www.iwon.com

Backed by US television network CBS, **iWon** has a directory of web sites generated automatically by Inktomi, which also provides its more traditional crawler-based results. iWon gives away daily, weekly and monthly prizes in a marketing model unique among the major services. It launched in Fall 1999.



www.inktomi.com

Originally, there was an **Inktomi** search engine at UC Berkeley. The creators then formed their own company with the same name and created a new Inktomi index, which was first used to power HotBot. Now the Inktomi index also powers several other services. All of them tap into the same index, though results may be slightly different. This is because Inktomi provides ways for its partners to use a common index yet distinguish themselves. There is no way to query the Inktomi index directly, as it is only made available through Inktomi's partners with whatever filters and ranking tweaks they may apply.



www.looksmart.com

LookSmart is a human-compiled directory of web sites. In addition to being a stand-alone service, LookSmart provides directory results to MSN Search, Excite and many other partners. Inktomi provides LookSmart with search results when a search fails to find a match from among LookSmart's reviews.



www.lycos.com

Lycos started out as a search engine, depending on listings that came from spidering the web. In April 1999, it shifted to a directory model similar to Yahoo. Its main listings come from the Open Directory project, and then secondary results come from the FAST Search engine. Some Direct Hit results are also used.



magellan.excite.com

From Excite, **Magellan** offers the ability to search only kid-safe "Green Light" sites via an option which appears below the search box, on the home page.



search.msn.com

MSN Search by Microsoft is a LookSmart-powered directory of web sites, with secondary results that come from Inktomi. RealNames and Direct Hit data is also made available. MSN Search also offers a unique way for Internet Explorer 5 users to save past searches.



www.nbc.com

NBCi (previously, **Snap!**) is a human-compiled directory of web sites, supplemented by search results from Inktomi. Like LookSmart, it aims to challenge Yahoo as the champion of categorizing the web.



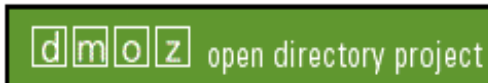
search.netscape.com

The **Netscape Search** results come primarily from the Open Directory and Netscape's own "Smart Browsing" database, which does an excellent job of listing "official" web sites. Secondary results come from Google. At the Netscape Netcenter portal site, other search engines are also featured.



www.northernlight.com

Northern Light is another favorite search engine among researchers. It features a large index of the web, along with the ability to cluster documents by topic. Northern Light also has a set of "special collection" documents that are not readily accessible to search engine spiders. There are documents from thousands of sources, including newswires, magazines and databases. Searching these documents is free, but there is a charge of up to \$4 to view them. There is no charge to view documents on the public web -- only for those within the special collection.



directory.mozilla.org

The **Open Directory** uses volunteer editors to catalog the web. Formerly known as NewHoo, Lycos and AOL Search also make heavy use of Open Directory data, while AltaVista and HotBot prominently feature Open Directory categories within their results pages.



ragingsearch.altavista.com

Operated by AltaVista, Raging Search uses the same core index as AltaVista and virtually the same ranking algorithms. Why use it? AltaVista offers it for those who want fast search results, with no portal features getting in the way.



web.realnames.com

The **RealNames** system is meant to be an easier-to-use alternative to the current web site addressing system. Those with RealNames-enabled browsers can enter a word like "Nike" to reach the Nike web site. To date, RealNames has had its biggest success through search engine partnerships.



www.webcrawler.com

WebCrawler has the smallest index of any major search engine on the web - think of it as Excite Lite. The small index means WebCrawler is not the place to go when seeking obscure or unusual material. However, some people may feel that by having indexed fewer pages, WebCrawler provides less overwhelming results in response to general searches.



www.yahoo.com

Yahoo! is the web's most popular search service and has a well-deserved reputation for helping people find information easily. The secret to Yahoo's success is human beings. It is the largest human-compiled guide to the web, employing about 150 editors in an effort to categorize the web. Yahoo has over 1 million sites listed. Yahoo also supplements its results with those from Google. If a search fails to find a match within Yahoo's own listings, then matches from Google are displayed. Google matches also appear after all Yahoo matches have first been shown. Yahoo is the oldest major web site directory, having launched in late 1994.



www.webtop.com

WebTop is a crawler-based search engine that claims an extremely large index. In addition to listing web pages, WebTop also provides information from news sources, company information and WAP-related content in its search results. The company also offers the WebCheck tool (formerly called k-check), which is an Alexa-like search and discovery tool. WebTop is backed by Bright Station, the company that acquired some search technology and other resources from the former Dialog Corporation. The Dialog search service itself is now owned by a different company, the Thomson Corporation.

Powerful Meta Search Engines



www.bighub.com

BigHub lets you search a huge number of specialty sites, all from the same place. It also lets you meta search some major search engines, though the default is to hit only search engines with paid listings. Formerly the Internet Sleuth (iSleuth.com).



www.dogpile.com

A popular metasearch site that sends a search to a customizable list of search engines, directories and specialty search sites, then displays results from each search engine individually. Owned by Go2Net, which also owns MetaCrawler.



www.profusion.com

A customizable search service with broken link detection and search tracking available. Formerly based at the University of Kansas.



www.mamma.com

Sends search requests to major search services, with results a bit heavy from search engines that sell listings.



www.webinfosearch.com

Sends your search to an extremely large list of search engines.



www.metacrawler.com

One of the oldest meta search services, **MetaCrawler** began in July 1995 at the University of Washington. MetaCrawler was purchased by Go2Net, an online content provider, in Feb. 97. The commercial backing has helped improve the responsiveness of the service. MetaCrawler now also powers searches at the Go2Net portal site.



www.infind.com

An alternative to typical metacrawlers, **Inference Find** lists results grouped by subject, rather than by search engine or in one giant list. For example, a search for "Uma Thurman" groups results into "Uma Thurman" and "Pulp Fiction," among other categories. The service began in May 1995, moving to its present domain in Oct. 1996.



www.invisibleweb.com

From Intelliseek, the makers of the BullsEye meta search software, InvisibleWeb.com catalogs searchable resources across the web.



www.infozoid.com

Query the major search engines, choose to see results integrated or sorted by engine. Specialty meta search also available.



www.supercrawler.com

Searches the major search engines, removes duplicate results, sorts by confidence and displays matching results.

