

working smarter®

ON THE INTERNET

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QUICK HITS

Search advice

Online Magazine

www.onlinemag.net

This print journal describes itself as “the leading magazine for information professionals.” We would not dispute that description: each issue is loaded with advice on search engines, reference resources, and search techniques. The online version contains only about 30% of the print issue, but you’ll still probably find plenty of useful info here.

Most popular web sites

100Hot

www.hot100.com/home.html

Sometimes it pays to go with the crowd. This resource ranks the Top 100 sites on the Web based on frequency of use; there are separate lists with hypertext links for the top 100 sites in specific categories—for example, Business, Technology, News, and Education. Subcategories like Internet, Computing, and Wireless (under Technology, for example) further focus the lists.

The Contest

You’re updating a mailing list, and you need to find the Postal Code for the following Canadian address: 300-1450 Don Mills Road, Don Mills, ON. Which method is fastest: Web, phone, or book? See *The winner* on page 3.

Shopping for office supplies online

While some mourn the loss of the local stationer, many more appreciate the convenience and low prices of the office superstore. The three giants—Staples, Office Depot, and Office Max—all offer online shopping and free delivery for orders above \$50. There are other online office supply stores that enjoy good reputations too.

Note that some office supply sites add on handling charges, so be sure you’re aware of all fees before you buy. Also, always check for sales and close-outs, which can save you a bundle. And if you’re a large and frequent customer, be sure to ask about volume discounts, as well as online purchasing features that can make your life easier.

The three giants

The home page of *Staples* (www.staples.com) presents a complete line of office products and business services, broken down into four categories: office supplies, furniture, technology, and custom printing. You can also search by brand, item number, or keyword. *Staples* has several services to make shopping easier, including personalized lists for re-orders, “favorite aisles,” and e-mail reminders.

The home page at *Office Depot* (www.officedepot.com) greets you with a list of product categories; a search function is also available for finding a

specific product. You can do all your shopping online and then pick up your order at a local branch. If you register, you can store billing information and save product lists for easy ordering.

OfficeMax (www.officemax.com) has the usual breakdown of product links on its home page, and it also promotes several specials. The online help link near the top of the page should answer most of the questions you might have about finding items, placing orders, managing deliveries, and so forth.

Other sites

Viking Office Products (www.vikingop.com) is actually a subsidiary of Office Depot, but it operates as a distinct entity. It offers clearance and overstock items,

rebates, downloadable rebate coupons, and large order discounts. You can also create shopping lists and access your Internet order history. *Viking* offers same-day delivery in 24 large cities. That’s fewer than some other online stores, but there’s free delivery on orders as low as \$25.

Another alternative is *Quill.com*. It’s a smaller outfit, but they’ve been in business for over 40 years, have a complete line of office products, and appear to enjoy a good reputation. Their *On Sale* section lists hundreds of items in many categories.





Nice clip art— but is it legal?

The web contains hundreds, maybe thousands, of sites from which you can download clip art (electronic illustrations to insert into documents). But even though you can download it, you aren't necessarily allowed to use it. Here are some general guidelines about keeping your clip art folder legal:

- Read the terms of usage carefully. These terms are usually available from a link or a FAQ at the site. If there are no terms of usage, e-mail the webmaster and ask for them.
- Be wary of "public domain" clip art. "Public domain" means the clip art is free for any use, and that no terms or conditions are attached. Most of the clip art on the Web is not in the public domain. Many sites advertise their clip art as such, but often they have merely collected the images from other web sites.
- Get the webmaster's permission. E-mail the webmaster each time you download an image from a site and use it. Ask for assurance that the clip art is in the public domain, or request permission to use it. Save the e-mail response.
- Get the artist's permission. Sometimes an artist states that he's placing an image in the public domain, but requests an e-mail about how it's being used. The image is not in the public domain; the artist has placed a condition, and you need to comply.

THE WEBSTER



"I knew I shouldn't have opened the History folder!"

Q Unzip files

I recently received a compressed file with a .zip extension as an e-mail attachment. I've been told that I should extract (i.e., unzip) the compressed files by using a program called WinZip. I've tried using the program, but I found it confusing. Can you help me extract the files?

Using the WinZip interface can be daunting at first, but it's definitely worth the trouble. For now, though, you don't even need to open the program. In recent versions of WinZip (we're using 8.0), you can perform important functions—including file extraction—directly from the Windows Explorer.

Navigate to and open the folder containing the .zip file. Make sure the target folder for the extracted files is visible in Explorer. Right-click the zipped file; hold and drag it onto the target folder. Release, and a menu similar to Figure A appears.

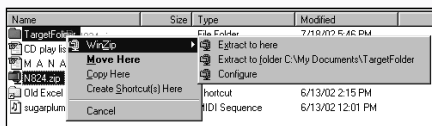


Figure A

You have two main choices for unzipping. If you choose **Extract to here**, the files will extract to the folder you're in. If you choose **Extract to folder C:\...** they will go to that folder.

Here's an alternative: Forget about target folders. Navigate directly to the .zip file; right-click it, and choose **WinZip - Extract to**. Click **I Agree**. The **WinZip Extract** dialog opens. Select a location for the files (it's probably best not to put them in the same folder as the .zip file). Then click the **Create New Folder** button. Type a name for the folder. Finally, click **Extract**. Then, in Explorer, navigate to the folder and open it to see your files.

In Windows 2000 or XP, right-click the .zip file; choose **Extract All...**, then follow the steps in the Extraction Wizard, which by default creates a new folder in which to extract the contents.

Q Search engine keywords

There seem to be so many search engines, and so many ways of using them. I'm especially confused when I want to use more than one keyword in a search. I never know what operators (AND, OR, etc.) to use, or how to use them. Are there any easy rules or tips you can suggest that will work the same in most search engines?

Here are a couple of ideas. First, use plus (+) and minus (-) signs. A plus sign in front of the word means that the word must appear in the search. A minus sign means the word cannot appear in the search. Be careful to leave a space between the operator sign and the previous word when you enter the search term. Also, put quotes around words you want to find together—for example, "travel agent." These are known as text strings.

So, if you wanted to find travel agents in Ohio, but not those in Columbus, you could type: +Ohio -Columbus +"travel agent".

Q Encoding vs. encrypting

I'm having a disagreement with a co-worker. I always thought encoding and encrypting were the same thing; she says they're not. Who's right?

She is. Encoding can have a variety of meanings depending on the context. Often it's used to transfer binary data across the Net. The data is encoded into schemes like MIME and Uuencode so it can be sent across the Net in ASCII (plain-text) format. Upon arrival, it's decoded back into binary format. The purpose of encoding is always simply to get information from one place to another. There is no security element involved.

In contrast, encrypting is used to make sure that data can't be read by anyone other than the intended user, the receiver. Thus, credit card numbers are encrypted when transmitted to ensure they're not stolen.

Helper apps for browsers

One of the most aggravating experiences on the Net is clicking on some cool-looking link and then finding out you have to download another program to handle the file. Why do you need this additional software anyway?

Get plugged in—or not

There are lots of files that your basic browser can't open, including multimedia files like sound, video, and animation. To use them, you need additional software, variously called plug-ins, add-ons, external viewers, and helper applications. (There are differences among them, but we'll call them "helpers" as a group.) Moreover, as technology improves, files that require new helpers, or new versions of old helpers, appear on the Net, making the old software obsolete.

Faced with the prospect of downloading new software, many users say "forget about it!" This is often a wise move. There are hundreds of helpers, and usually it isn't worth the hassle to download and configure a program you rarely use.

But there are exceptions. Programs like Adobe Acrobat (for viewing documents such as tax forms), Real Audio (for listening to sound clips), and some others, can be important for your work. (If you don't have Acrobat Reader or want to upgrade to the most recent version, you can download it for free at www.adobe.com/prodindex/acrobat/readstep.html).

An upgrade in time saves nine

Updating your browser can avoid helper hassles. Newer browser versions provide more features that can eliminate tiresome helper installations. For example, the latest versions of Internet Explorer include Windows Media Player, which often works as an alternative to Real Audio. Moreover, when and if you do have to download helpers, they are easier to install and configure in the latest browser versions.

HOW'S YOUR ONLINE IQ?

Test your knowledge of Internet terms

Many browser commands and options are familiar to you from other Windows applications—Save, Print, etc. But a few are specific to the Internet. For each of the following definitions, write the browser term.

1. The main page, usually the opening page, of a web site.

2. A method of saving the address of a web page for future retrieval.

3. Rectangular sections that sub-divide a web page.

4. A folder that automatically stores the location of recently visited web pages.

5. Programming language used to write applets (small web programs that run things like calculators, and open pop-up windows).

6. Updating the currently displayed web page by re-accessing the server.

7. A bit of data on your hard drive that identifies your computer to a web site.

8. Technical term for a web site address.

Answers

1-Home page 2-Bookmark 3-Frames 4-History 5-Java
6-Refreshing (in Explorer) or Reload (in Navigator)
7-Cookie 8-URL (Uniform Resource Locator)

The winner.

A ZIP in time saves nine

The Links to Postcode Pages (www.grcdi.nl/linkspc.htm) offers access to postal code lookup pages in dozens of countries. Scroll down the home page to reach the *General* section. Click **C** to go to the *Canada* area. Click **Canadian Postcodes - Search Engine (in English) - from Westminster**. At the Westminster site, scroll down the page and click **FREE Postal Code and Zip Code Lookup**. Type the address in the appropriate boxes and leave the Postal Code box blank. Click **lookup this address**. The complete address includes the code: M3B 3R5.

Not all of the country pages at *Links to Postcode Pages* work this smoothly, and some require knowledge of other languages. Still, no offline resource compares.

KartOO is an inventive, intriguing metasearch engine

Many searches require just entering a couple of keywords in the Google search box and clicking **Search**. A few great sites appear at the top of the results and your work is done.

But other searches are much less straightforward. They require you to think of the ways keywords relate to one other, and how to combine them to generate the results you need.

One approach to tough searches is to use “maps.” These two-dimensional, spatial representations can be more robust than the linear, one-site-after-another listings used by all the popular search engines. But it’s also possible that mapped results will merely confuse the heck out of you.

Kartoo is a new megasearch engine that illustrates both the bad and the good of the map approach. (As a metasearch engine, its results are based on analyzing the results of other search engines.)

Kartoo certainly takes some getting used to; even after working with the site for a while, we’re not exactly sure how everything works—and its *Help* section isn’t all that helpful. At the least, however, Kartoo can give you some good ideas about which keywords to use for your search.

Two notes: Kartoo is still a work in progress, so you may find some features and options to be slightly different than those described here. Also, it’s Flash-based, which may cause problems for older browsers.

Do a search

Go to Kartoo now. In the lower left-hand corner of the home page, click the half-American/half UK flag to be

sure you’re using the English-language version. Click in the search box above the flashing cursor and type “quality control”. Since the words are enclosed in quotation marks, Kartoo will search for the expression as one term. Click **OK**.

Kartoo creates a map of your results. It includes sites, which are recognizable as URLs, as well as “topics,” which are common associated keywords. The most relevant sites are identified by the largest “balls.” Move your cursor over a site. At left, you’ll see a description of the site. Above the description, you’ll see the names of search engines where the site is listed. You can click on the site to open it.

You can easily add additional topics to your search. For example, when we did our search, *testing* was given as an additional topic. If you move the cursor over this topic (or any other) and click the plus sign, it will be added to the keywords in the search box.

Click **OK** and Kartoo will run a new search that includes *quality control* and *testing*. The new map has an entirely new set of sites and keywords (e.g., *industry, regulatory, materials*).

Another standpoint

A key feature of Kartoo is that it offers many sets of results—i.e., many maps—for each set of keywords. If the first map doesn’t approach your search from the right standpoint, you can view succeeding maps that might



Figure A

To view additional maps, at the lower-right of the page, click **map nb 2**. Using the same three keywords, this map offers another set of results, web sites, and keywords. Click the lower-right link **map nb 3**, **map nb 4**, etc. to view more maps.

Advanced features

Kartoo certainly has an original way of presenting its advanced search features. Even if you never actually use any of them, it’s a great device for learning about search options that exist in most engines.

On the Kartoo menu, click **Options - Advanced search**. Drag your pointer to **Title**, the first item on the list. The balloon above on the left describes what a title search does. The balloon on the right tells you that the title is displayed at the top of the browser window; below, *Title* flashes in the image. Drag your pointer over any term in the list that you’re unsure of to find out what it does (Figure A).

Let’s try one. Click on **Site** and type `www.cnn.com`. Kartoo searches for the terms within the CNN site. You get the same scheme as before, but now, all the web pages are from the CNN site.