

Assignment #4

1. In class we talked about how search engines can exercise explicit control over what you find. In this exercise we'll look at a more subtle form of control.

Using three major search engines: www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, and www.ask.com, do several searches and compare the results. There are a number of tools available on the web that will help, but you can get a very good idea of the differences simply by looking at what you see on the first page or two. Since users rarely get past the first page, being there matters.

2. Much of the power of search technology to influence users comes from presenting results in an ordered list. Users often attribute unwarranted significance to where in the results a particular item falls, assuming that the ones on top are somehow "better." There are, however, alternatives to presenting results in a simple list.

Take a look at several of the alternatives and share your thoughts and observations. Some examples – you can find lots more.

www.kartoo.com

www.searchme.com

www.quintura.com

www.viewzi.com

3. Search engines start with a simple list of key words. Semantic search engines try to go further by understanding the meaning of the question. Recently, Microsoft purchased Powerset for \$100million, indicating their interest in semantic search technology.

Powerset limits its search to Wikipedia.

Compare Powerset (www.powerset.com) and Google. To do this you need to pose questions as sentences and, at Google, limit the search to Wikipedia by including "site:Wikipedia.org" in your query.

4. Google tracks everything that everyone queries. Privacy issues aside, the results are fascinating. You can find them at www.google.com/trends.

You can look at trends by region. Search for "obama,McCain" limiting your search to 2008, and the United States. Look at the sub-region data, ranking first by one then the other. What conclusions do you draw?

While you are there, pick some other topic of interest to you and explore the power of Google trends to reveal society's interests.

5. FOR Distance Learners who didn't watch live:

Semantic search requires much more processing power. According to the Powerset's CEO, it needs about 10X the computing horsepower for equivalent performance. Assuming Moore's law holds and computing power doubles every 18 months, when will we be able to expect semantic search to be as fast as key word search is today?

What if it needs 20X, 30X, 40X?