



Local Search Engines for Local Queries

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ABSTRACT

Students use search engines to find resources for assignments in modules within CIT's Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) degree. How does a lecturer recommend a search engine? Are local search engines better for answering local enquiries?

Within Information Retrieval two measures are used to indicate the ability of a search tool, precision and recall. Recall is the ability of the search engine to find pages on the web, while precision refers to the likelihood that any returned page will be relevant to the user. This paper looks at precision for ten search engines that are available via the World Wide Web (WWW), five general search engines, and five New Zealand based search engines

This study found that the recall of the search engines varied greatly, and the issue of local compared to general search engines is only one part of the picture. My recommendation is to use a combination of local and general search engines when searching for local information.

Keywords

Internet, search engines, precision, recall.

1. Introduction

Previous studies (Leighton 1995, 1997) have looked at the precision of Infoseek, Lycos and in 1995 WWWorm and WebCrawler and in 1997 AltaVista, Hotbot and Excite. This study used three of the search engines tested in the 1997 study. These were chosen

to give this study a point of comparison with the previous studies. Northern Light and Fast were added because these were at the start of the study the largest on the web (Sullivan, 2000). Australasian search engines were compared with general engines (Smith, 1999) and this paper is designed to narrow that focus further to New Zealand topic.

The search engines used were

General: Northern Light, Fast, Alta Vista, Infoseek, Excite

New Zealand: Anzwers, SearchNZ, Nzsearch, Access New Zealand, NZExplorer

2. Results

The general search engines as a group outperformed the local search engines. The local search engines performed poorly on general queries. For local queries the local search engines performed better. Within each group some search engines were clearly better than the average. In some cases the local search engines missed relevant sites because there were not in the nz domain. The general search engines gave orders of magnitude more hits but many of these were of little or no relevance.

3. References

Leighton, R.E. (1995) "Performance of four World Wide Web (WWW) index services: Infoseek, Lycos, WebCrawler, and WWWorm", Accessed Nov 24, 1999. <<http://www.wiaona.msus.edu/is-f/library-f/webind.htm>>

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