Google Search Mastery Operators

Abstract
In a time when information is so readily available, how is it that high-quality information can be so difficult to find? As it turns out, every 2 days we create as much information as we did from the beginning of time until 2003 (Siegler, 2010). Google operators refine search results to increase quality and relevance. Operators are symbols or words that, when added to search terms, distill the most germane results. Mastery of Google Search operators will empower Extension professionals with a better ability to find information to answer client questions and conduct research.

Introduction
Research has shown there is currently a digital divide stemming from differences in Internet skills rather than access to the Internet as in years past (Steyaert, 2002). Key factors have been identified in this skills divide, such as effective search queries, relevant key search terms, evaluating the found information, and monitoring awareness on performance outcomes (Zhou, 2012; van Deursen, & van Diepen, 2012). Building on the previous article in this series, the need for improved search skills has been established (Hill, MacArthur, & Read, 2014).

Extension personnel are routinely required to locate and make use of content on the Internet to both answer client questions and to review current trends, ideas, and research in journal articles. Disseminating and teaching search skills also present a creative opportunity for Extension professionals to serve a new generation of clients that are increasingly reliant on the Internet while increasing computer skills, self-efficacy, and empathy (Mutchler, Anderson, Taylor, Hamilton, & Mangle, 2006). This article profiles each of Google's search operators so Extension professionals can more acutely filter search results for both professional and personal use.

Google Search Operators
Using search operators is the next step in building on the basics of mastering search. Operators are terms that refine a search. By including one or more of these operators when entering search terms, you gain added control over the results Google returns. The search operators described in Table 1 will help you pinpoint the exact information you are looking for (Search Operators, 2013).
Table 1. Google Search Operators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Operators</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;quotes&quot;</td>
<td>[ &quot;to make the best better&quot; ]</td>
<td>Use &quot;quotes&quot; to search for an exact word or phrase. This is best for literature and music, or if you're looking for a specific word or phrase. Misemploy, and you could exclude helpful results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dash (-)</td>
<td>[ steer nutrition -site:wikipedia.org ]</td>
<td>Use the dash (-) to exclude unwanted words. A dash (-) before a site or word excludes all results that include that word. This can be coupled with other operators to exclude results from a specific site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dashes (-) in between words</td>
<td>[ low-budget film ]</td>
<td>Dashes in between words commonly indicates that words are strongly connected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tilde (~)</td>
<td>[ fuel efficient ~car ] will also search for automobile, vehicle, motorcar etc.</td>
<td>The tilde (<del>) is used to search for similar words. The tilde (</del>) symbol before a search term tells Google to display search results with similar words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asterisk (*)</td>
<td>[ there are * counties in utah ]</td>
<td>The asterisk (*) is treated as a placeholder for 1 or more words within a query. Google fills in the blanks wherever there is an asterisk for any unknown or &quot;wildcard&quot; terms. Use with quotation marks to find variations of that exact phrase or to remember words in the middle of a phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>[ utah population 2012 or 2013 ]</td>
<td>To search for either of the terms use [ or ], the results will contain pages relevant to either year. Without the [ or ] search will look for pages containing both years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(...)</td>
<td>[ inflation 2006..2012 ]</td>
<td>Entering (..) between numbers will return results for numbers in that range.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. terms inside [brackets] indicate search term examples.

Exceptions

Every person searches in a different way, so inconsistencies will prevail. Symbols and punctuation are predominantly ignored, however, as search routines of the public evolve, Google adapts (Punctuation and Symbols in Search, 2013). The Journal of Extension article entitled "Google Search Mastery Basics" (Hill, MacArthur, & Read, 2014) provides explanations and examples regarding how various symbols are recognized.
Application for Extension

Search skills are critical for the 21st century Extension professional. Still, most people using Google Search are not capable of drawing on its full potential. With the overabundance of information that floods the Internet, our clients need a resource to turn for help in finding unbiased, research-based information. Enter Extension. Taking initiative to teach search skills to clients and Extension personnel in face-to-face workshops and conferences or online webinars and interactive video conferences presents a new opportunity for Extension to serve clients more effectively. This initiative is supported by research that found courses, or guided learning, are more effective for Internet users with low skills than trial-and-error practice for learning search skills (Matzat & Sadowski, 2012).

Conclusion

The world’s content is at our fingertips, and online users no longer rely on an expert to give them information face-to-face because the public relies on what is readily available, not what is best. For 100 years Extension has been known for delivering high-quality, research-based, unbiased information and education (Stafne, 2013). Now Extension must proactively teach clients how to discern between high-quality, fact-based information online versus puff pieces, opinion, or propaganda (Diem, Hino, Martin, & Meisenbach, 2011). Mastery of Google Search operators empowers not only Extension professionals but also the clients we serve.

References


