



Searching for information on the Internet

One of the best ways to find information on the Internet is to use search engines. In this column, CMA librarian Shona Lam explains their use.

Search engines are programs that search their own database of Internet sites. There are many different engines, but none covers the entire Internet. To be thorough, make sure you run your search on more than one system.

Each search engine has its own Internet address. Some of the more popular ones are:

AltaVista www.altavista.digital.com
Excite www.excite.com
HotBot www.hotbot.com
Infoseek www.infoseek.com

Tips and tricks

CMA Online has developed a checklist of Internet search tips and tricks. Since not all search engines have the capabilities listed below, remember to check each system's "Help" screen.

- Use unique terms or synonyms. For instance, use "myocardial infarction" instead of "heart attack."
- If you are searching for a proper name, such as an organization or a disease, use a case-sensitive search engine such as AltaVista. (If a case-sensitive engine was asked to find "Turkey," it will just retrieve that — not "turkey", "TURKEY" or "turKEY.")
- Check your spelling. Since the Internet is international in scope, search for spelling variations such as tumour or tumor.
- To search for phrases — "hepatitis C" is a phrase — use a system that lets you do so. Not all will, and search engines vary in how they deal with phrases.
- Try limiting your search terms to

Cool site

www.newcomm.net/fpage

The Family Physician Asthma Group of Canada, which is dedicated to helping family physicians improve their skills assisting patients with asthma, has an attractive new Web site. In addition to describing the group's mission and projects, the site presents an online newsletter that consists of short articles dealing with practical issues in patient management, along with a question-and-answer section.

specific fields. A Web page is divided into different components. Refine your query by asking the system to retrieve a search term only when it appears in a particular field, such as a title or url (uniform resource locator). For example, if you enter 'title: "Canadian Medical Association"' in Infoseek, it retrieves documents with Canadian Medical Association in the title.

- Search for singular and plural variations. If it is available, use the wild-card symbol (which can be *, \$ or ?, depending on the system). This symbol can be placed at the end of a term to signify various endings for your search term or embedded within the word. For instance, pediatric* will retrieve pediatrician and pediatrics; wom*n will retrieve women and woman. When you use the wild-card symbol, be careful not to make the root word too small, because you will end up retrieving a number of irrelevant terms. For instance, gene* will retrieve gene, genes, genetics, genealogy, general and more.
- Combine terms using AND, OR and NOT to limit or expand your search. Use parentheses when combining these operators.

AND (some sites use +) — Using AND between your search terms will retrieve only the records that have all the search terms (e.g., apples AND oranges).

OR (some sites use -) — Using OR between your search terms will retrieve any records containing either or both of the terms. Use OR to include synonyms in your search (apples OR oranges).

NOT (some sites use NOT or AND NOT) — Using NOT between your search term will exclude terms from your results. The NOT operator will decrease the number of records you retrieve (apples NOT oranges).

NEAR — Using NEAR will retrieve records when the search terms are close together. For instance, if you enter 'apples NEAR oranges' in AltaVista, it retrieves documents with apples and oranges within 10 words of one another in any order.

Always ask yourself if you are looking in the right place for information, since what you are seeking might not be available on the Web.

Remember, if you don't succeed, try, try again!

Highlights from *CMA Online*

The CMA is trying to ensure that health care is a top priority in the upcoming federal election. "Election '97" (www.cma.ca/news/felect97 and www.cma.ca/news/felect97/index_f.htm [French]) was created to update physicians and the public about election issues. It includes information on how to get involved and highlights from *CMA News*.