# Anything but Google: Top Tips

## Karen Blakeman, RBA Information Services

karen.blakeman@rba.co.uk

The Google alternatives workshop is a regular on the UKeiG training calendar. We don't guarantee that you will be weaned off Google by the end of the day but we do try and highlight other search engines and tools that might be better for certain types of information. At the end of the workshops the participants pull together a list of Top Tips. These could be a tool or website they have just discovered, a search command, or a general approach or strategy to searching. The tips below are a combined list from two workshops attended by people from all sectors and types of company, and even included a couple of self-employed researchers. The sessions covered both general search tools and specialist services, and the Top Tips is an interesting mix of strategy and specific sites. But first a few comments about Bing.

### Try Bing

A question I always ask at the start of the workshop is "Does anyone use Bing?" There are often a couple of nods from the group but then someone will say, "But I only use it by accident because it is the default search option in the browser." Several will say that they "don't like it" but find it difficult to explain why. After some thought and discussion the reasons put forward tend to be that Bing does not offer such a wide range of types of information on the results page as Google does, and that it seems to be more consumer rather than "research" focused.

It is a mistake to dismiss Bing altogether because it does sometimes come up with documents that Google has not indexed, or which Google buries at the bottom of its results. You do, though, need to use Bing's advanced search commands to get the best out of it. (There is no advanced search screen) and some of these are the same as Google's. There is a summary and comparison chart on my web site at http://www.rba.co.uk/search/compare.shtml and the full list of Bing's commands can be found at http://msdn.microsoft.com/en-us/library/ff795620.aspx

To see if Bing really is so poor at search have a go at Bingiton (http://www.bingiton.com/). This is a tool from Bing that lets you compare Bing and Google results side by side and decide which set is best. (Note that Bingiton is only available in the US and the UK). You run a search and Bingiton presents you with anonymised results. You choose which set is the best or "I can't decide, it's a draw." After you have run five searches Bing tells you which search engine came out on top.

The feedback from people who tried Bingiton during the workshops is that Bing comes out on top for a few very specific types of search:

- Tourist attractions and holiday destinations

- Shopping
- People search. Bing came up with a better selection of profiles from social and professional networks
- Spare parts for a classic car. An unusual search and so specific (we even had the part numbers) that we were surprised how badly Google seriously lost the plot on this one. Bing won every time

## Top Tips

### 1. Get to know the advanced search commands and options
Google is not the only search tool that uses them and they can help focus your search, especially when using general search tools such as Bing.

### 2. If you are conducting serious research don't stop with the first few reasonable looking results
Information of dubious quality can infiltrate even the most well respected of specialist websites. Put on your "sceptical goggles" as one delegate said! There are plenty of alternative tools and resources out there so get some corroboration before acting on the information you find.

### 3. Allocate time for your search
If you are carrying out in-depth research don't leave it to the last minute. You will probably need to tweak your strategy and try different search tools to ensure that you are retrieving the best information. It sometimes takes longer than you anticipate.

### 4. Plan your strategy
Think about the type of search you want to conduct and the type of information you are looking for. For example, if you are carrying out a systematic review and want to use Boolean operators forget about Google; head for Bing instead. And if you need official statistics or company information go straight to specialist sites that provide that data.

### 5. Country versions of search tools
Many search tools offer country versions that give priority to the country's local content, although that might be in the local language. This is a useful strategy when searching for industries, companies and people that are active in a particular country.

### 6. DuckDuckGo http://www.duckduckgo.com/
This was recommended for its clean, straightforward layout and the range of resources it offers on a topic. A school librarian commented that the pupils at her school loved it. The interface was recently given a makeover so if haven't used it for a while give it another go.
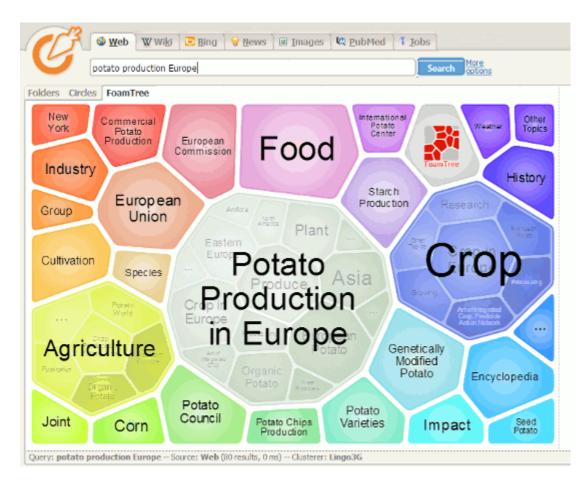
### 7. MillionShort http://www.millionshort.com/
If you are fed up with seeing the same results from Google again and again try MillionShort. MillionShort enables you to remove the most popular web sites from the results. Originally, as its name suggests, it removed the top 1 million but you can change the number that you want omitted. The page that best answers your question might not

be well optimised for search engines or might cover a topic that is so "niche" that it never makes it into the top results in Google or Bing.

**8. Carrot Search** http://carrotsearch.com/



Carrot Search foam tree

This was recommended for its clustering of results and also the visualisations of terms and concepts via the circles and "foam tree". There is a link to the live web demo on the left hand side of the home page. The direct link is http://search.carrot2.org/stable/search

**9. Microsoft Academic Search – charts** http://academic.research.microsoft.com/
This is a direct competitor to Google Scholar. The site can be slow to load and it sometimes assigns authors to the wrong institution. Nevertheless, the visualisations such as the co-author and citation maps can be useful in identifying who else is working in a particular area of research. The visualisations can be accessed by clicking on the Citation Graph image to the left of the search results or an author profile.

**10. Creative Commons and public domain images**
Use the Bing license option (US version only) to search for images with creative commons or public domain licenses, but do go to the original webpage and check that the license is indeed associated with the image you want to use. Alternatively use one of the following:

Flickr Creative Commons https://www.flickr.com/creativecommons
http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons
Flickr The Commons https://www.flickr.com/commons
Wikimedia Commons http://commons.wikimedia.org/
MorgueFile.com http://www.morguefile.com/
Geograph http://www.geograph.org.uk/
Nasa http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/

**11. Tineye Multicolr** http://labs.tineye.com/multicolr/
Search "20 million Creative commons Flickr images by colour." You can choose up to five colours and move the dividing bar between them to increase/decrease their prominence within the image. Click through to the original Flickr image to double check the license.

**12. Company Check** http://www.companycheck.co.uk/
Company Check is one of many websites that repackage Companies House data. It provides 5 years of accounts, and graphs for some financials free of charge. It also lists the directors of a company. Click on a director's name and you can view other current and past directorships for that person. It provides more free information than Companies House but you have to register (free) to gain full access. Additional information such as credit risk, CCJs, credit reports, and many Companies House documents are priced or available as part of a subscription.

**13. Guardian Data Store** http://www.theguardian.com/data
Excellent for datasets and visualisations relating to stories currently in the news. As well as the graphs and interactive maps the source of the data is always given and there are links to the original datasets that are used in the articles.

**14. Zanran** http://zanran.com/
This is a search tool for searching information contained in charts, graphs and tables of data and within formatted documents such as PDFs, Excel spreadsheets and images. Enter your search terms and optionally limit your search by date and/or format type. One delegate said, "It has changed my life!" (We think/hope she meant her working life.)

**15. Keep up to date**
Keep up to date with what the search engines are up to, changes to key resources and new sites. Identify blogs and commentators that are relevant to your research interests and subject areas, and follow them using RSS or email alerts.

The following blogs and newsletters provide news on what the search engines are up to. The first three are aimed at search engine optimisation but are very quick in identifying changes in the way the major search engines work.

Search Engine Land http://searchengineland.com/
Search Engine Watch http://searchenginewatch.com/
Search Engine Roundtable http://www.seroundtable.com/
Karen Blakeman's Blog http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/
Phil Bradley's weblog http://philbradley.typepad.com/

I want to – Phil Bradley  http://www.philbradley.typepad.com/i_want_to/