Keeping Up with Google: 
Resources and Strategies 
for Staying Ahead of the Pack

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SUMMARY. Librarians need to be the Google experts in their community since it enables librarians to be more competent in educating users. To keep up with the developments of Google the authors reviewed eleven Web sites and blogs and create a strategy for keeping up using these sites. Three are highly recommended for a keeping-up regimen. The authors also suggest that librarians either use search engine alerting services or RSS technology to deliver news feeds into a news aggregator in their keeping-up regimen. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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All the sites reviewed were accessed during the month of April 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

Librarian perceptions of and attitudes towards Google, the search engine, are as diverse as the ever-growing number of products and services offered by Google, the company. Google-adoring librarians may support the complete and utter “Googlization” of library databases so that every search is a “Google experience.” Other librarians choose to resist “Googlization” and instead favor keeping library database interfaces exactly as they are. However, the vast majority of librarians are schizophrenic about Google and librarians can shift their position on any given day. Because Google is so popular, and because it currently dominates the search engine landscape, the one position that none of us can afford to take is choosing to ignore altogether what Google is doing and plans to do. It is no exaggeration to suggest that librarians need to be Google experts.

Becoming a Google expert requires an appropriate strategy for keeping up with Google. This article examines a collection of resources and strategies that we think will enable any librarian to develop an effective regimen for a “Google Keep Up” strategy. The resources are reviewed, and the goal of this article is to identify the qualities of each so that librarians can choose those that best fit their needs and available time for keeping-up activity. We conclude by recommending a strategy that we believe would provide a good baseline for every librarian who can benefit from doing a better job of keeping up with Google. Of course, we hope many readers will choose to go beyond that level because if nothing else, for the foreseeable future, keeping up with Google is a necessary and fun way to spend a part of each day.

WHY KEEP UP WITH GOOGLE?

Regardless of what position a librarian takes on Google, it certainly is incumbent upon every library professional to achieve as high a level of expertise about Google as is possible. Why is that? We can think of four good reasons:

- To take full advantage of the search system
- To establish a position as campus or community expert
- To help keep colleagues alert to change and improvements
- To keep up with the competition
The more a searcher knows about any search system, the more effective he or she is at obtaining the best possible results. Even though Google is deceptively simple, it offers a range of advanced techniques that can enhance results. While Google adds new search features infrequently, those who follow the Google literature continue to discover previously unknown techniques. Not long ago one of the authors discovered that Google’s search engine allows for a crude form of proximity searching (only up to within three words), a technique that receives no mention in Google’s help page. Experts can pass on to readers of their articles and postings this information.

A January 2005 Pew Internet and American Life report on search engine users provides ample evidence that even though the vast majority of search engine users are naïve about search engines, they also report satisfaction with their search results (Fallows 2005). These findings emphasize the value of establishing oneself as the campus search engine expert, and proactively working to help the user community become more knowledgeable about search engines, Google in particular, and techniques for improving search results. Through our instruction sessions, newsletters, and interpersonal interactions, the library community needs to share information about improving search skills. However, this can be accomplished only if we know more about Google than our users.

Consider the introduction of Google Scholar or a new Google feature such as Desktop Search or Google History. On our campus, we find that faculty and students often fail to discover these new tools and techniques in a timely fashion. As we endeavor to increase awareness of existing features, such as those found on the Google advanced search screen, we also need to alert our colleagues to the new tools that Google introduces. While some, such as Google Scholar, are rarely missed by librarians because they are heavily publicized in our popular professional literature, there are those lesser-known features that librarians will only discover through an organized and systematic keeping-up regimen.

Whether Google represents competition for libraries or is simply a benign information option for our user community, it is incumbent upon our profession to keep up with Google, Inc. as a form of competitive intelligence. We need to know how its products and services compare to our own information resources and services. If our goal is to encourage our user communities to take full advantage of all available information options it is critical to be able to identify which resources do the best job for any given research task. It is important to be able to demonstrate when Google works best, or when a library database is the right choice.
Think of it as being able to show the competitive advantage of using library databases. We have probably all experienced a sales pitch from a library product vendor representative who was unaware that the competition already offers better features. Do we want to be in the same position when we engage in user education? Keeping up is a form of competitive intelligence. Knowing more about Google, especially future innovations and initiatives, simply enables us to be more competent in educating our user community.

**RESOURCES FOR KEEPING UP WITH GOOGLE**

There are primarily three types of resources for keeping up with Google. The first type includes electronic newsletters. E-newsletters are characterized by a regular weekly or monthly frequency, a more formal publication and distribution process, and the fact that they are delivered to an e-mail inbox. The second type includes blogs that use RSS (Rich Site Syndication) technology to allow for the distribution of daily or near-daily postings. Blog content is typically characterized by the blogger’s personality and insights, and the reporting and writing styles are less formal than those of an e-newsletter. The third resource consists of news articles from a multitude of sources that are aggregated into a single source. Individuals now have the power to construct such customized searches for themselves using the RSS capabilities embedded in many news sources (e.g., Yahoo, Findory). Our methodology for identifying the best sources for keeping up with Google included our own experience as Google followers, conversations with experts such as Gary Price, and limiting inclusion to only those sources that are frequently (more than once a week) updated. To confirm that we missed nothing essential we consulted the resource lists provided by the various Google bloggers, as well as searching various engines with terms such as “google,” “blogs,” “resources.”

To organize the Google Keep Up resources covered in this article we devised the following four categories as indicators of the quantity or extent of Google reporting:

- **Nothin’ But Google**—those resources that are completely Google-centric.
- **Lotsa’ Google**—those resources that primarily concentrate their content on Google, but are likely to report occasionally on peripheral topics.
• Sorta’ Google—those resources that report on the search engine industry or that provide news and search tips for a broad range of search engines, but that do provide ample news about Google.
• Not-A-Lotta Google—rather than simply discard these sources because they report on Google less frequently than those sources in other categories, we find they have some value because they provide interesting commentary or insights the other sources may miss.

**Nothin’ But Google**

*Google Blog*

<http://www.google.com/googleblog>

Google Blog is the official blog of Google, Inc. Google staff post news, information, and insights about Google. The blog is a fun read. Typical posts include Google Gossip, tips sent in by Google users, and new product announcements. Because Google Blog is clearly the best resource for keeping up with news about and activity at Google, Inc., it is naturally the primary news source for a host of Google bloggers. However, being the voice of Google negates this resource for any critical evaluation of its own products or activities. Think of it as going to a company’s own Web site to get information about the company; you can expect some bias. Like the search engine itself, the blog is clutter free and easy to navigate. Google Blog is necessary in your Google regimen.

*Topix Google News*

<http://www.topix.net/com/google>

Topix, online since 2002, is by design a one-stop source for news and information about specific topics. It is organized into the following five sections: headline news; recent news; press releases; archives; and related news sources. This structure keeps the news about Google, Inc. well organized for rapid accessibility. According to Gary Price, search engine expert and creator of *ResourceShelf*, Topix is the most comprehensive site on the Web today for Google news. Now that Google has gone public, the reporting leans towards news about Google the corporation; expect to wade through stories about Google’s stock performance.

Topix contains items from a broader range of unique source publications than any other Google resource we examined. Users are able to set
up alerts for any new Topix postings containing Google news. From our perspective, the only drawback at Topix is its tendency to focus on the corporate side of Google. It’s understandable, but of little interest to librarians. Even so, we force ourselves to monitor this news owing to its potential to report important advances or news from Google Labs, the research and development division of Google, Inc. News aggregator users will be pleased to know that Topix supplies an RSS feed for the Google, Inc. news page. Because it draws on thousands of sources for Google news, this site rivals Google’s own for news and information, but provides it without any inherent bias.

**UBC Google Scholar Blog**
<http://careo.elearning.ubc.ca/weblogs/googlescholar>

Unlike the previous two resources, this one is a personal blog. Dean Giustini, a reference librarian at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, maintains the University of British Columbia Google Scholar Blog. Online since April 2005, this blog is certainly the newest addition to the genre. Giustini pulls his news postings from the usual variety of sources including professional journals, blogs, newspapers, and resources mentioned elsewhere in this article. The blog is low on clutter, rather easy to navigate, and adds Giustini’s own perspective to the reporting. Interestingly, Giustini promotes his blog as a site where Canadian librarians can keep up with Google Scholar. His postings, however, are primarily drawn from American sources. For that reason, his blog lacks an authentic Canadian perspective on Google. UBC Google Scholar Blog should be considered only a marginal resource for a Google keeping-up regimen.

**Lotsa’ Google**

Google Weblog
<http://google.blogspot.com/>

Aaron Swartz maintains Google Weblog. He is a Stanford University student, and has been tracking Google since March 2002. While this blog primarily covers Google, there are occasional postings about other search engines. Research Buzz, Google Blog, and *The New York Times* look like his most common sources for content. He offers a streamlined blog that is easy to read and navigate. An RSS feed is provided for those desiring to capture the content in their news aggregator. His postings are
usually brief and right to the point, but things can get interesting when he expounds his comments on Google innovations. For example, he offered insightful remarks on Google’s plan to digitize Anglo-American libraries. Google Weblog does tend to duplicate other sources we mention, and as the work of a hobbyist, it will strike the reader as sometimes lacking in professionalism. It also includes advertisements but they are kept out of the way. Still, Google Weblog is worth considering, and we recommend giving it a try for a few months to determine if its occasional insights are of value, or if the news it provides is better obtained elsewhere.

InsideGoogle
<http://google.blognewschannel.com>

InsideGoogle is a part of the Blog News Channel maintained by Nathan Weinberg. Google is the focus of the blog, but as with some of these other resources, news about other engines creeps in as well. Unlike some of the other resources, Weinberg makes it a habit to cite the source of his information. The majority of his posts come from Searchenginewatch and even though he pulls heavily from it, he organizes the content well and adds original content about Google’s latest activities. That is why InsideGoogle is more than a rehashing of Searchenginewatch news. InsideGoogle makes for worthwhile reading, but even more interesting is the extensive list of blogs Weinberg assembles concerning Microsoft, Google, Search Engines, Tech News, Non-English blogs, and blogs by Microsoft and Google employees. Check this list for additional blogs that can supplement what is covered in this article. We think this site can be effective for a keeping-up regimen that seeks an international perspective; others might find it marginal.

On Google Scholar
<http://schoogle.blogspot.com/>

T. J. Sonderman, a research and instruction librarian in Newton, MA, maintains On Google Scholar. On Google Scholar is an expansive resource for keeping up with Google. Sonderman writes “Wherein a librarian tracks a paradigm shift. Love it or hate it, the effect will be profound.” Sondermann is right on target; Google is here to stay and librarians have a responsibility to keep up with it. He pulls information from a variety of sources including library professional journals and newsletters, blogs, and Google itself. But Sonderman can be less up-to-
date than we like. A story about Peter Jacso’s “Side-by-Side” search engine that compares Google Scholar to native publisher search engines was posted on April 19, 2005, but there were multiple stories about Jacso’s engine months before that in a variety of sources. Sondermann doesn’t hesitate to add an opinion to Google developments. The commentary is almost exclusively about Google, but at times goes generic when blogging about non-Google library issues. The blog is updated regularly. While less up-to-date, comprehensive, and informative than our highly recommended sites, there may be some interest in On Google Scholar for its library perspective.

**Sorta’ Google**

*Search Engine Report*

<http://searchenginewatch.com/sereport/>

Search Engine Report is an e-mail newsletter form Searchenginewatch.com. The newsletter is all encompassing, covering Yahoo, Google, Lycos, Ask Jeeves, and more. If something is new in the search engine world or causing news, then Search Engine Report has the story. The news items come primarily from two sources, Search Engine Watch (a blog) and SearchDay. While it would be interesting to have the news arranged by search engine or degree of importance, Search Engine Report uses just common chronological order to organize the news. Each posting provides a brief summary of why the news matters. Some of Search Engine Report’s full content is available only to subscribers of Searchenginewatch.com. If you are serious about keeping up with Google, someone in your library should subscribe. If price is an issue, do not fret. The Search Engine Report tends to be the main source of Google information for some of the other blogs so some of the fee-based content may turn up elsewhere. While librarians are encouraged to use the free version of the Search Engine Report, we think the fee-based version of the service is highly worthwhile.

*ResearchBuzz*

<http://www.researchbuzz.com/>

ResearchBuzz, online since 1998, written and edited by Tara Calishain, is among the oldest sites on the Web dedicated to keeping up with search engines. Like Searchengineblog, it has free and fee versions. Since ResearchBuzz is all-encompassing, like Searchengineblog, the authors
suggest use of the category “search engines” to limit searching and information to just about Google. The reader is taken to a page with Google entries back to 1999 in order by date. Clicking on any of the entries will take the reader to expanded entries. A Google entry is added almost every other day. There are some similarities in the types of Google news covered between Searchenginewatch and ResearchBuzz. While its news about Google is somewhat limited and may be slightly out of date, Calishain provides some useful tips that should benefit any librarian. It is not for serious Google Watching, but valuable for its tips about Google tools and search technique.

SearchengineBlog
<http://www.searchengineblog.com/>

Peter Da Vanzo, a search engine marketing strategist and industry commentator in Wellington, New Zealand, writes Searchengineblog, online since 2002. His blog is crisp and clutter-free. He pulls materials from a variety of American and European sources. He makes note of search engine events relevant to Australia and New Zealand. For example, he mentions an April 1, 2005 incident when Google dropped the google.com.au domain for several hours. This story was missed by many of the sites covered in this article. Recently, Peter Da Vanzo reported that he was going on vacation, and that Searchengine Blog would be left static for a while. Since the blog will not be updated for an undetermined period, we think it can be skipped.

Google Blogoscoped
<http://blog.outer-court.com/>

Phillip Lennsen, a Web designer in Stuttgart, Germany, maintains Google Blogoscoped. Google Blogoscoped is the most unusual site explored for this article owing to its clever forum features and added value utilities. While the postings are mainly about Google, the blogger also provides interesting posts about aspects of Web design and important news about other search engines. One good example of the utilities Lennsen creates are his quick search tools that run Google in the background. For example, he developed a tool called “Actors.” It quickly identifies the roles played by any actor. One of the authors queried Harrison Ford, and quickly obtained a comprehensive list of his acting roles. The tools may be perceived as more for amusement than research, but we think researchers will find them of value. The forum (discussion
board) feature on Google Blogoscoped is highly active. Because the forum content comes from individual readers it can offer a valuable method to obtain news and updates about Google not found elsewhere. We don’t recommend it for regular reading; however Google Blogoscoped is certainly worth a look from time to time.

Not-A-Lotta’ Google

Phil Bradley’s Blog
<http://www.philb.com/blog/blogger.html>

Phil Bradley’s Blog has been online since 1998. His blog is designed to allow one to keep up on search engines, Internet searching, Web page design, and new Web features for librarians. He updates his page regularly, sometimes up to three times a day, and his posts are short and concise with a library focus. Phil Bradley takes from a variety of American and European sources including the professional literature. Google is reasonably covered. It’s not highly recommended for developing or maintaining Google expertise, but librarians may want to consider Phil Bradley’s Blog as a more generic way to keep up on topics of interest to information professionals.

CUSTOMIZING GOOGLE KEEP UP

Based on our experience, regularly reviewing a mix of these publications will effectively ensure that almost any article, newsletter, or blog post published about Google will become a part of one’s personal Google universe. But we also know that even these hard working followers of Google are likely to occasionally miss an interesting story or two. There are times when a librarian or researcher wants to be alerted to stories about some specific aspect of Google. For example, a researcher may wish to learn how high school students are using Google for identifying prospective colleges. How about locating articles that focus on academic or public libraries using Google? These are good examples of when it is appropriate to customize a search for the Google keeping-up regimen.

We recommend two options for customizing Google watching. The first option is to take advantage of the alert services offered by search engines. Google and Yahoo both offer easy-to-use alerting systems. Setting up an alert varies only slightly in each. In Yahoo,
any search results in an option to create an alert for that search statement. In Google, one needs to go into the alerts service to establish an alert based on a search statement. Alerts in either system require the establishment of an account, so this does call for the provision of some personal information. Once an alert is established, whenever either engine indexes a story containing the search terms, or it could be a Web site containing information related to the topic, the alert owner receives an e-mail message with a link to the article or Web site. One drawback of alerts is that they can easily, if not carefully prepared, result in the forwarding of too much information that is often irrelevant.

The other option is to make use of the RSS technology offered by a variety of search engines and news outlets. RSS technology makes virtually any news story a “feed” that can be automatically deliverable to a news aggregator such as Bloglines. A good example is provided by the news source called Findory.com that covers thousands of news sources and blogs. Any search results in the delivery of a unique RSS feed for that exact search. When one subscribes to the feed with his or her news aggregator, any time a new story related to that search query is published it is delivered to the aggregator. Both methods offer great convenience, but sometimes at the risk of being overwhelmed if the search statement is too broad. However, the RSS feed can be deleted and a new one constructed. Our personal preference is to use the RSS method because it is ultimately more convenient to capture the feeds in an aggregator for once-a-day review rather than having them come intermittently into an e-mail inbox. In addition, the RSS feed approach requires no registration with any engine or news source.

**CONCLUSION**

So, what do we recommend? What is the best strategy for keeping up with Google? The answer depends on each individual’s needs and interests. It is likely that true Googleholics will want to take advantage of the full gamut of resources we identify. That will inevitably lead to receiving a fair amount of duplicate information but there are some slight variations, such as a particular blogger’s perspective, that an enthusiast will find salient. For everyone else, we think a mix of selected resources will suffice for a robust regimen for keeping up with Google. Table 1 provides a chart that compares a variety of features for each resource. While any and all of these sources have some merit, only three received our “highly recommended” rating. We believe that librarians should
routinely follow all three of these resources to effectively keep up with Google, both the engine and corporation. Beyond those three, each individual may choose to add one, two, or more resources as time and preferences allow. While a resource may be marginal in terms of the new or additional news it can add to one’s personal Google universe, the style of a particular blogger, the frequency of the news, or the particular spin put on the story can all add to the experience of keeping up. In addition, we think it is a good idea to consider developing a customized search or two that can be tracked as an alert or RSS feed.

Keeping up is all about time, or more often, our lack of it. The number one reason librarians fail to keep up effectively is insufficient time. But time is our most precious resource, and it is incumbent upon us to keep up as efficiently as possible so we maximize our available time. Think of keeping up with Google as an investment of time. Like most investments, there is risk. Keeping up will sometimes yield little news or information of value, but without fail, those who keep up conscientiously will be rewarded with a gem of information that is the return on the investment. Granted, if something as significant as GooglePrint happens we all hear about it in a short time. But the reality is that Google is now a news machine, constantly generating stories both significant and minor. Which are the ones we can afford to miss?

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