

# **TRAINING INTERNET END USERS: FROM SURFING TO RESEARCHING**

## **INTRODUCTION**

We started doing Internet training, because our role changed from information provider and custodian to pathfinder and facilitator. Our clients needed training and coaching to become information literate users of online sources of information, including the Internet. We did a survey to establish the level of proficiency of our clients when they do searches on the Internet. The results of the survey will be outlined in this paper. Very positive feedback from end users showed evident advantages from the training and these will be discussed. We have experienced certain advantages for the Tech-Know Link since we started with the training. Pitfalls to be aware of and tips when doing Internet training will be presented. During the Internet training sessions, we were able to identify the level of information literacy of the end users and we could identify their needs for follow-up training sessions.

### **1. WHY TRAIN END USERS TO SEARCH THE INTERNET?**

#### **1.1 Survey results**

We conducted a survey amongst our technical clients (engineers and researchers) to establish how and when they use the Internet and how they feel about it. The survey was sent out to about 300 clients and the response rate was 35,8%. It revealed that 25% of respondents often find work related information on the Internet and 47% sometimes do. Sixty percent said that they enjoy searching the Internet, although only 40% find the information that they are looking for in less than 30 minutes. A surprising 44% said that they use the advanced search options of the search engines, but during the training we found that they don't know how to use them effectively. Not surprisingly, Google was the favourite search engine (16%), Yahoo followed with 9% and Ananzi with 9%. Sixty-seven respondents (59%) had no favourite. The common complaint was that it is very time consuming to search the Internet and they get frustrated and disappointed when they find thousands of hits.

#### **1.2 End users' knowledge of the Internet**

Prior to the training, the engineers and researchers who are attending the training did not know that there are differences between search engines and directories. Many used Yahoo, for example, thinking that it was a search engine when it was still a directory only. They also tended to use only one search engine and didn't realise that the search engines are not all the same. They didn't know that search engines build their own databases and that you're not searching the web "live". Not one person who attended the training had heard of the invisible web.

## 2. **Content of the training course**

Our aim is to help end users to spend less time finding work related information on the Internet, hence the title "From surfing to researching". We thought that the level would be for beginners, but we have had people who thought they were experienced Internet users, and even they told us that they had learnt a lot. We normally have a mix of people who have done Internet searching before and those who have never been on the Internet, but the level and content of the course satisfy everyone's needs.

The course content includes search tools, i.e. search engines and metasearch engines, directories and the deep web. We look at how they work, when to use them and some features of the major tools. We emphasise that whichever search engine or directory it is that they prefer to use, they have to get to know it very well. They must also have more than one favourite.

The last part of the course is devoted to search strategies for search engines, starting with a simple search to find the website of a research organisation and progressing to a complex search where they have to make full use of the advanced search options. We do examples of narrowing and broadening a search. The idea of analysing a query before you start searching is new to the end users. We teach them to identify the main facets of the query, then to decide what kind of information they are looking for and then to choose the search tool to use. The course is designed to be "hands-on" and a lot of exercises are done to demonstrate the use of the advanced searching. We don't teach Boolean searching in this course. We found that people don't immediately grasp the meaning of "and" and "or" in a search strategy and we have to explain very carefully what it means to use the search boxes for "any of these words" and "all of these words" and "do not include these words".

At the start of the course we make a few cautionary statements about the Internet:

"Don't use the Internet to do a database service's work"

"Know when to stop searching and pick up the phone"

"Treat information found on the Internet as secondary information and always evaluate and verify this information"

## 3. **ADVANTAGES**

### **3.1 FOR END USERS**

- Time saving:  
Some have reported that they now spend up to 50% less time to find information on the Internet.
- More confidence:  
When people know about the different search tools on the Internet and how and when to use them, they feel a lot more confident when they have to start with a search.
- Accuracy:  
They are most impressed when they find less than 100 hits, as opposed to thousands before they attended the training. More than once have we heard: “I wish I knew how to use the advanced search options when I was studying”.

### **3.2 FOR THE TECH-KNOW LINK**

- Because the training has been so successful, we are seen as information specialists when it comes to information retrieval from online sources.
- Anglo’s Technical Division made it compulsory for new employees to attend the training, which gives us the opportunity to “win” them as clients.
- The training is helping us to enforce our role as facilitators to information sources.
- It is helping to break down clients’ resistance to retrieve their own information from available online sources.
- We see this as our first step to developing information literate clients.

## **4. PITFALLS AND TIPS**

- Do thorough research before you start with the training and attend other training courses. Your clients are smart people and they’ll quickly pick it up if you are not as knowledgeable as you should be.
- Choose your examples carefully and make sure they work, so that you do not get caught out on your own examples.
- Check your examples and exercises before each session – results change, especially when it comes to invisible web content retrieved by search engines.
- Stay up to date with changes and new features of the different search tools – read the journals and [Searchenginewatch.com](http://Searchenginewatch.com) or other sources with news about developments.

- Don't assume that end users know what "and" and "or" mean in a search strategy – most of them don't have a clue.

## 5. **WHAT NEXT?**

- We are designing an advanced searching course where we'll concentrate on the process of finding information, i.e. analysing the search query and deciding which information sources to use.
- We are going to put an Internet searching tutorial on our intranet, so that clients in remote locations can access it – we might have it translated in other languages for overseas clients.
- The tutorial will become part of the e-learning programme in Anglo.
- We're involved in the design of the websites of the Anglo Technical Division Centres of Excellence – amongst other things we designed a page with search tips.

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