

# 2010 Search Engine Wars: Let battle commence

**Karen Blakeman**

RBA Information Services, Reading UK

[Karen.blakeman@rba.co.uk](mailto:Karen.blakeman@rba.co.uk)

INFORUM 2010: 16th Conference on Professional Information Resources  
Prague, May 25-27, 2010

## Abstract

2010 in the Chinese calendar is the year of the tiger tempered by the element metal: incredibly brave, undying courage, willingness to engage in battle. "Tigers born in the Metal year are assertive and competitive, determine their goals and do anything necessary to achieve them." The Microsoft Bing-Yahoo search engine collaboration has been agreed in 2010. Yahoo will use Bing's search engine and database for its web search and will act as the exclusive global sales force for Bing-Yahoo search advertisers. Yahoo says that it will "still be innovating on top of the Bing results" and both companies are rolling out new search features and real-time search. Google is rolling out search options that include social media results from Twitter and Facebook and yet more advanced search options. But while Bing-Yahoo and Google battle for users and market share, specialist tools such as Chemspider, Healthmash and Biznar are building tools for the serious researcher. This presentation will look at what Bing, Yahoo and Google have to offer us and the usefulness of their new search features. It will also review some of the specialist tools that are now being made available.

## What are the big three offering?

Microsoft Bing is going all out to increase its market share of the search engine market. As part of its campaign Microsoft has entered into an agreement with Yahoo whereby Yahoo will use Microsoft's new Bing search engine on its sites and provide Bing with a global sales force for premium search advertisers. Yahoo says that it will "still be innovating on top of the Bing results" so it is uncertain at this point if results in Bing and Yahoo will be ranked in the same way. Some country versions of Yahoo are already using Bing web search and the rest will follow throughout the year. Google, meanwhile, has been adding new search features to its standard results pages. Bing, Yahoo and Google are now all including social media in their results, for example Twitter, blogs, Facebook, Myspace, discussion forums and the interfaces of all three are continually changing and features often vary depending on the country version of the search engine.

Yahoo's results page now typically includes in a menu on the left hand side of the screen specific sites that may be of interest. These are determined by the nature of the search. If a story is being actively covered by the news media you will be offered news sites such as CNN and the BBC. If you conduct a search on a person, social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter may be suggested. If your search is a "hot topic" social media real-time

results are inserted at the top of the page and include options for news, photos, video and Twitter.

Bing (formerly Live) describes itself as a “decision engine” and is aiming very much for the mass consumer market. Results tend to be more consumer oriented, vary considerably depending on the country version, and most features are only available in the US version. Real time, social media results are being incorporated in the main search results page with an option to “See recent tweets”

Google has introduced several major changes this year. The first is that web history is now automatically switched on regardless of whether or not you are signed in to a Google account. Google records your searches and sites that you access on your computer and adjusts your search results according to what you have clicked on in the past. This can be switched off by clicking on the Web History link that appears in the top right hand corner of the results page. See: Personalized Search for everyone <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/personalized-search-for-everyone.html> and Karen Blakeman's Blog - Your Google results are about to get weirder <http://www.rba.co.uk/wordpress/2009/12/17/your-google-results-are-about-to-get-weirder/>

The second major change is the inclusion of a greater variety of media throughout the first page results: Google News, blogs, images, Wikipedia, videos and a box containing a rolling feed of the latest headlines from Twitter, blogs and discussions. In addition, if you have added details of your social and professional networks to your Google profile and you are signed in to that account, you will also see results from your “social circle” at the bottom of the page. This could include results from your Twitter network, RSS feeds, FriendFeed, Google Buzz and Wave contacts.

The consequence for many of us is that Google results pages appear busy and messy and may not list the format and type of information we really want. This is where the third significant Google development is useful. Additional search options now appear in a menu on the left hand side of the results page. These were previously hidden under “Show options” but are now automatically displayed. They include options to restrict your search to blogs, news, videos, Twitter (called Updates in the menu), books, maps and by date. There are also time lines that illustrate the frequency of results over time and a “Wonderwheel” that extracts terms and phrases from the top results presents them as spokes of a wheel. Clicking on one of the spokes generates a second wheel and is sometimes a useful way of expanding or narrowing down your search.

Do all these changes in Bing, Yahoo and Google work and give us more relevant results? That is debatable. Results now often seem more confused and messy, especially in Google. It is not always clear how social media results are selected and they are not always comprehensive. Google’s results page in particular sometimes provides too much variety of information types and the danger is that one only gets a very selective and superficial overview of a topic. Researchers are increasingly having to go several steps further to focus a search, are searching separately for news, videos, photo and social media, and looking at alternative specialised search tools.

## A few interesting alternatives

### **iSEEK**

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

At first this looks like a standard search engine but it also clusters results into folders on the left hand side of the results page: topics, people, places, organisations, date and time. These can be very helpful in suggesting ways of narrowing down the search or focussing on a specific aspect of the subject. The “Education” tab changes the results so that they include more research oriented pages.

### **Biznar**

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

Biznar is a real time federated search of selected business resources, some of them “hidden web” or “deep web”. (Click on Advanced Search to see a list of the sources). Biznar carries out your search in real time so you that you retrieve the latest information from the web sites and databases. This does make it a bit slower than the standard search engines. Like iSEEK it organises results into folders on the left hand side of the screen.

### **Search4oil**

<http://www.search4oil.com>

This is a very new search tool and covers information on oil and gas exploration. It provides a variety of ways in which you can search and refine the data. Searching is free but most articles are priced. There is a free rolling news feed.

### **Chemspider**

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

Produced by the Royal Society of Chemistry, this is “a chemistry search engine aggregating & indexing chemical structures and their associated information into a single, free of charge, searchable repository”. The data is gathered from multiple sources such as peer reviewed journals, patents, the FDA all of which may have errors so users are encouraged to correct these. For further information see “Does ChemSpider Have Millions of Errors?”

<http://www.chemspider.com/blog/does-chemspider-have-millions-of-errors.html>

### **Healthmash**

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

This is a new search tool covering health information and which “combines Web 2.0 universal search and discovery technology with Semantic Web Concepts”. You can concentrate your search on Trusted Health Information (some would query the inclusion of Wikipedia in this category!), news, videos, images, substances, clinical trials, web pages, books, blogs and Twitter.

### **The Guardian World Government Data**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world-government-data>

This is an interesting development from the UK Guardian newspaper. At present it searches government data from the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand but more are planned. The results are often better and easier to refine than those obtained by going direct to the original data source!

## **Silobreaker**

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

This site has been around for a few years but is still not widely known. It covers news in all forms: news, blogs, video, tweets, social media and real time information. Information can be browsed by category and topic or you can carry out a keyword search. Information from all the resources is pulled together into a single page and from there you can explore a story in more depth. You can also view the geographical location of stories, easily identify people mentioned in the articles, and view links between people and organisations in the network map.

## **Twitter: [search.twitter.com](http://search.twitter.com) and [twazzup.com](http://twazzup.com)**

Twitter is often the first to break news on major disasters. (See Phil Bradley's blog posting [Earthquake: Twitter trounces traditional news sources again!](http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2010/04/earthquake-twitter-trounces-traditional-news-sources-again.html)

[http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil\\_bradleys\\_weblog/2010/04/earthquake-twitter-trounces-traditional-news-sources-again.html](http://philbradley.typepad.com/phil_bradleys_weblog/2010/04/earthquake-twitter-trounces-traditional-news-sources-again.html)). Most social media search tools cover Twitter but if you want to search just Twitter then Twitter Search (<http://search.twitter.com/>) and Twazzup (<http://www.twazzup.com/>) are two good tools to start with. Results from Twitter Search are a straightforward list but there is an advanced search that enables you to limit your search to tweets from a particular person, by date, or with a positive or negative attitude for example. Twazzup includes a list of top links that have been tweeted and identifies the main contributors on your topic.

## **Search tools for social media**

Phil Bradley gave an excellent presentation on search tools for social tools at the recent Liver and Mash event in Liverpool (<http://mashlib2010.wordpress.com/>). His presentation covers "20 search engines that each add something into social media search, and they're all worth exploring in some detail" and is available at <http://www.slideshare.net/Philbradley/social-media-search-engines> My two personal favourites from his list are <http://www.icerocket.com/> and <http://www.addictomatic.com/>.

## **Who is winning the war?**

Bing's market share is slowly increasing in the US (Top U.S. Search Sites for April 2010 [http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online\\_mobile/top-u-s-search-sites-for-april-2010/](http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/online_mobile/top-u-s-search-sites-for-april-2010/)) and is now second to Google in the UK (Bing takes second place in the UK search market | Search Engine Marketing News <http://www.vertical-leap.co.uk/news/bing-takes-second-place-in-the-uk-search-market/>) In most European countries Bing is increasing its share and Yahoo's is falling, but Google is still way ahead. Either Bing will have to do something spectacular or Google will have to do something very stupid for that to change. But social media and real time search tools are becoming more popular, and for serious research the specialist search tools are more widely known, recommended and used.