cyberText Newsletter

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Making technical information understandable

Welcome!

Welcome to the 22nd issue of the quarterly CyberText newsletter. As usual, there are lots of tips and snippets of information that I hope will make your life easier, and some interesting websites for you to view.

Featured this quarter are quite a few Google tips.

Finally, we've moved to the country! The new contact details are on our website and at the end of this newsletter. Please update your address books accordingly. (Email and web addresses, and mobile/cell phone number remain the same.)

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Humour: Emergency signs

Some very funny explanations for some very serious warning and safety signs: http://www.safenow.org

Word: Random text generator

Problem: You need to populate a Word document with a lot of 'dummy' text very quickly - and you don't care what the text is.

Solution: Use Word's random text generator:

1. Open a new, blank Word document.

2. Type **= rand (5,2)** in the first line then press Enter.

What you get: Five paragraphs filled with two repeated sentences. If you want more, change the numeric values for the number of paragraphs and the number of sentences per paragraph. For example, **= rand (10,8)** creates ten paragraphs, each containing the same sentence eight times.

Find duplicate files

We all have duplicate data files such as pictures on our computers, even if we try really hard not to. So, how do you find, identify, and delete those duplicates that are just taking up space?

One solution is some software from Germany called DoubleKiller. DoubleKiller finds all duplicate files on your system (you can tell it to ignore system files), then you get options to move the duplicates to another folder, send them to the recycle bin, delete them, etc. DoubleKiller searches your files and folders and checks them byte-for-byte to make sure they really are duplicates, and can dig inside the file looking for common information. If you were trying to do this manually, you could only check them by file name and date and a few other attributes, none of which confirm that one file is EXACTLY the same as another.

When I tried the 'light' version of DoubleKiller, it found some 21,000 duplicate files just in one (large) directory)! DoubleKiller is a very small application (about 1MB) and doesn't install anything on your system, so you can run it from a thumb drive.

The 'light' version is free, and the Pro version is $19.95 US; available from http://www.bigbangenterprises.de

Google tips

Do you get hundreds of thousands - even millions - of hits when you use Google to search for something? Do you want to be more effective and efficient in your searching, just getting the results you can actually use? Then here are some strategies that can help you.

Michael Miller lists his top ten Google tips in this article: http://tinyurl.com/y3ok26, then expands on each one, giving you practical and useful advice for targetting your searches. Here's a summary of his top ten tips - go to the website for full details on how to get the most out of each of these:

1. Use the correct methodology
2. Conduct an "Either/Or" search
3. Include or exclude words in your search
4. Search for similar words
5. Search for an exact phrase
6. List similar pages
7. Fine-tune your search with other operators
8. Search for specific facts
9. Search the Google directory
10. Use Google's other specialized searches

(Thanks for this contribution, Khadijah)

Another great Google tip was posted by Tom Johnson in his "I'd rather be writing" blog. This tip is particularly useful for those people who want to search specific forums, bulletin boards, knowledge bases, support centres etc. Tom uses Wordpress for his blog (as do I), and he enters this *site:wordpress.org/support <keyword>* into Google to search for particular keywords in the Wordpress.org forums.

(This tip was listed in Tom's "Ten Tips for Problem Solving and Troubleshooting" blog entry for January 17, 2007 [http://www.idratherbewriting.com])

Google Maps for Australia!

Google Maps is now available for locations in Australia. While we've all had Google Earth for some time, only recently has Google Maps updated their database to include most of Australia. You can now get driving directions and decent street maps to and from most Australian places (I can't say "all places" as I haven't tested all places!). This includes regional towns as well as the major cities.

To test it out for yourself, enter an Australian street or town/suburb address at: http://maps.google.com.au

New Google search site

Google has a new search site (http://www.searchmash.com) that adds results for images, blogs, videos, and Wikipedia entries in the sidebar of your standard Google search results. Pretty neat!

Were you born before 1960?

... then you'll probably relate to many of these (source unknown):

First, we survived being born to mothers who smoked and/or drank while they were pregnant. They took aspirin, ate blue cheese dressing, tuna from a can, and didn't get tested for diabetes.

Then after that trauma, we were put to sleep on our tummies in baby cribs covered with bright colored lead-based paints.

We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors or cabinets and when we rode our bikes, we had no helmets, not to mention the risks we took hitchhiking.

As infants and children, we would ride in cars with no car seats, booster seats, seat belts or air bags. Riding in the back of a pick up on a warm day was always a special treat.

We drank water from the garden hose and NOT from a bottle. We shared one soft drink with four friends, from one bottle and NO ONE actually died from this.

We ate cupcakes, white bread and real butter and drank koolade made with sugar, but we weren't overweight because WE WERE ALWAYS OUTSIDE PLAYING !

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day. And we were OK.

We would spend hours building our go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes. After running into the bushes a few times, we learned to solve the problem.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendos, X-boxes, or video games, no 150 channels on cable, no video movies or DVDs, no surround-sound or CDs, no cell phones, no personal computers, no Internet or chat rooms... we had FRIENDS and we went outside and found them!

We fell out of trees, got cut, broke bones and teeth and there were no lawsuits from these accidents.

We ate worms and mud pies made from dirt, and the worms did not live in us forever.

We were given BB guns for our 10th birthdays, made up games with sticks and tennis balls and, although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes.

We rode bikes or walked to a friend's house and knocked on the door or rang the bell, or just walked in and talked to them!

Little League had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't had to learn to deal with disappointment. Imagine that!!

The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke the law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law!

These (baby boomer) generations have produced some of the best risk-takers, problem solvers and inventors ever! The past 50 years have been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all!

If YOU are one of them... CONGRATULATIONS! You might want to share this with others who have had the luck to grow up as kids, before the lawyers and the government regulated so much of our lives for our own good And while you are at it, forward it to your kids so they will know how brave (and lucky) their parents were.

Kind of makes you want to run through the house with scissors, doesn't it?!

Interesting websites

Some readers have shared some interesting websites with me in the past few months, and I've discovered a few of my own that I'd like to share with you. Enjoy!

- Want to amuse yourself or your kids for a while? Then make as many face combinations as you want with real people's faces at this site: http://www.mono-1.com/monoface/main.html Wait until the site has loaded, then follow the information in the "What do I do?" link and you're off and running!

- Can 20 questions really identify what object you're thinking about? You'd think not. Wrong! Go take some of the tests at http://www.20q.net - it's uncannily accurate.

- US residents only: Have you ever been hassled for your phone number? Don't want to give out your real number, but can't think of a fake number to use? Then this site has an answer for you: http://notmynumber.com. Judge for yourself whether this site fits with your values...

Open Culture podcast directory

Most podcast directories have some good stuff in them, but you've got to either know what you're looking for, or you have to sift through a lot of irrelevant and sometimes inappropriate content to find the gems.

If you want to find quality podcasts all the time, then try Open Culture (http://www.oculture.com/weblog/). In their own words they "... explore cultural and educational media (podcasts, videos, online courses, etc.) that help make learning dynamic and fun... We sift through all the media, highlight the good and jettison the bad, and centralize it in one place. Trust us, you'll find engaging content here that will keep you learning and sharp. And you will find it much more efficiently than if you spend your time searching with Google, Yahoo or iTunes."

They link to podcasts from sites such as National Geographic, Harvard University, NPR, New Scientist, etc.

"Be nice. Say thank you."

Larry Winget, in his "Change This" manifesto, had this to say about customer service: "Instead of (reading) 500 books about the secrets of customer service, try this: Be nice. Say thank you…" Read Larry's manifesto at http://www.changethis.com/30.02.YouAreBeingLiedTo. While you're there check out some of the others (some of my favourites are those by Barry Schwartz and Stacy Mitchell).

News

We've moved! The big news this issue is that our Perth house is now sold. We moved our lives and business to Bridgetown in the southwest of Western Australia in late February. Working remotely is going well so far - after just one week, I can highly recommend it. We'll see how enthused I am by it after a few more months... Stay tuned!