

Research and Scanning
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[Comment: This was knocked up at the last minute and I didn't like the outline anyway: choose research and scanning sources both for general subjects and specific topics. The pre-set structure is far too, well, structured for how I organise such things. It repeats itself a lot of what I wrote is nonsense.]

Research

Domain

The Internet

Sources

Books

Burn Rate, Michael Wolff. A description of how Wolff attempted to find funding for his Internet enterprise in the early years of the Web. As vivid a description as one is likely to get of how quickly ideas shift, the attitudes of the industry, and how people have struggled to come to terms with doing business in a completely new form of media.

Neuromancer, William Gibson. Fiction, but essential for an image of a possible future for the Internet. The classic cyberpunk novel, Gibson's descriptions of characters immersing themselves in a shifting world of data colours many people's views of what the Net is and could be.

Snow Crash, Neal Stephenson. Another fictional tale, Stephenson described virtual reality better than anyone. Characters have an alternate existence in the Metaverse where they exist as avatars in a 3D world.

Where Wizards Stay Up Late, Katie Hafner & Matthew Lyon. This book describes the birth of the Internet thirty years ago, and how it all began to come together into the Net we know today. Few people know much of the history beyond a few years ago, but this fills all the gaps.

Journals

Fast Company. A business magazine of the Internet age, it has a strong emphasis on futures material.

Future Survey. A monthly round-up of books oriented to the future. Each month concentrates on one or more fields.

The Futurist. The magazine of the World Future Society, is rarely as interesting as one hopes, considering the potential.

MIT Technology Review. "MIT's Magazine of Innovation" concentrates on new inventions and the development of ideas. Good for seeing technologies make their way slowly into the mainstream.

Wired. The magazine that saw the "digital revolution" coming has lost its edge now that everyone has caught up with it, but still comes up with interesting, in depth articles and

names to watch (even if they're increasingly involved in setting up revolutionary online brokerages).

Indexes

Google. You can search the Web. What more do you want here?!?

AltaVista. ditto.

Hotbot. ditto.

Yahoo! The Web in directory format.

Web gateways/portals

All Net Devices (www.allnetdevices.com). A daily selection of news stories related to anything which can pick up IP tone. From WAP phones to Internet refrigerators.

Moreover (www.moreover.com). A customisable aggregator of news headlines, scanning 1,500 titles in over 170 selectable categories. Set up your own page of headlines, just how you want it.

Scripting News (www.scripting.com). Filter out some of Dave Winer's nonsense and the reports on his company's new products and you have a useful, up-to-the-minute log of Net happenings. If something worthwhile happens, it'll turn up here.

Slashdot (slashdot.org). "News for Nerds. Stuff that Matters." A hugely popular site oriented towards open source software, cryptography, and anything else technology-related. A dozen or so items appear every day, submitted by its faithful readership. Every item has a discussion board attached, and thankfully customisation means you can filter out everything but the comments rated as worthwhile by readers.

Weblogs. A whole slew of weblogs (of which Scripting News and Slashdot could also be examples), sites generally updated at least once a day with interesting links. www.robotwisdom.com was one of the first, and www.eatonweb.com/portal/ lists more than you will ever need.

Web authorities/destinations

Need to Know (www.ntk.net). "*The* weekly high-tech sarcastic update for the UK." Invaluable weekly newsletter and website oriented towards British geeks. News stories, URLs, events, memes, reviews. And it's funny, too.

Risks Digest (catless.ncl.ac.uk/Risks/). Full of reports on the downside of technology, it's a "forum on the risks to the public in computers and related systems." News on bugs, failures, hacks, virii and other such delights.

Tasty Bits from the Technology Front (www.tbtf.com). An irregular email from Keith Dawson, full of Net-oriented news and insightful analysis. He recently gave in to the pressures of timeliness and started a weblog: www.tbtf.com/blog/.

The Well (www.well.com). An old online community based in San Francisco. Full of interesting discussions, pointless arguments, utter nonsense and all the usual Net community phenomena.

Wired News (www.wired.com). Now a different company than its hard-copy relative, this is a regularly updated news site oriented towards all things technology.

Experts

Carl Steadman (www.carlsteadman.com). Carl's your pal. Carl's everyone's pal. Started www.suck.com with Joey Anuff while working at *Wired*, and now writes a column for *The Industry Standard*. You can buy cookies with his face on.

Clay Shirky (www.shirky.com). Always has something interesting to say about everything to do with the Internet, culture, media, you name it.

Nicholas Negroponte (www.media.mit.edu/people/nicholas/). Helped fund *Wired* which entitled him to a back page column every month in which to talk nonsense about tomorrow's technology. Has plenty of interesting ideas but also seems to believe developing countries need satellite networks and paper-thin computers rather than food, water or debt relief.

Philip Greenspun (www.photo.net/philg/). Purveyor of much-needed sense about building websites and how to make things happen on the Net.

Robert Cringely (www.pbs.org/cringely/). Writes a weekly column for PBS which I never get round to reading, but his books and TV shows were fun and informative.

Searching

I don't believe it matters whether your search turns up hundreds of results, as long as the results listed first are relevant. For example, if I'm looking for information about developing content for mobile phones I'll type "wap wml developing" into Google and get back 180 pages, but the first few pages will contain more than enough worthwhile links. On the other hand, entering "+wap +wml +developing" into AltaVista returns only 98 pages, but those listed first aren't all as useful as those returned by Google.

Scanning

Categories

General

There are an infinite number of ways to categorise the world, but I'm not sure of the point in creating yet another means of doing so. I find the STEEP (Sociological, Technological, Economic, Environmental and Political) categories work well for in this field, and creating proprietary methods would only confuse matters.

Were you to expand this further, Yahoo's categories work well (and have the benefit of testing and familiarity):

- Arts & Humanities
- Business & Economy
- Computers & Internet
- Education
- Entertainment
- Government
- Health
- News & Media
- Recreation & Sports

Regional
Science
Social Science
Society & Culture

Personally however, I prefer a modification of the categories I developed for my site (www.haddock.org):

Art & Design
Business & Economy
Computers & Internet
Education
Media
Politics
Recreation
Science & Technology
Society

Internet

Development (html, programming, design, etc.)
Economics (ecommerce, companies, IPOs, etc.)
Media
Networking (back-end hardware and software)
Politics & Law
Society (people, communities, etc.)

Sources scanned regularly

General

BBC News Online (news.bbc.co.uk). Recently re-designed to make it much less attractive, but a good up-to-the-minute coverage of stories, with extra in-depth reporting, audio and video. Generally excellent science and technology section.

EurekaAlert! (www.eurekaalert.org). Press releases from universities and research institutions. A good source of up-to-date progress and ideas.

Flash Art (www.flashartmagazine.com). Monthly fine art magazine.

Graphis (www.graphis.com). Design magazine, from architecture to photography.

MIT Technology Review (www.techreview.com). “MIT’s Magazine of Innovation” concentrates on new inventions and the development of ideas. Good for seeing technologies make their way slowly into the mainstream.

Moreover (www.moreover.com). A customisable aggregator of news headlines, scanning 1,500 titles in over 170 selectable categories. Set up your own page of headlines, just how you want it.

New Statesman (www.newstatesman.co.uk). Left-of-centre weekly British political magazine, although perhaps not as left-of-centre as it might be.

New Scientist (www.newscientist.com). UK science magazine.

News Unlimited (www.newsunlimited.co.uk). The UK *Guardian* and *Observer* website. Takes too many clicks to get to some stories, and you have to filter out the large amount

of worthless lifestyle articles, as with any newspaper, but it has news stories, like any paper.

Salon (www.salon.com). San Francisco-based vaguely alternative magazine. Not as up to the minute as it once was, but still some good writers and in-depth articles. But if there's a good article you'll probably see it linked to from elsewhere.

Weblogs. A whole slew of weblogs (of which Scripting News and Slashdot could also be examples), sites generally updated at least once a day with interesting links. Some which I scan regularly:

- Genehack (www.azstarnet.com/~jacobs/)
- Honeyguide (www.chaparraltree.com/honeyguide/)
- Robot Wisdom (www.robotwisdom.com)
- Kottke.org (www.kottke.org)
- Memepool (www.memepool.com)
- Mike's Weblog (www.larkfarm.com/weblog.asp)
- Peterme.com (www.peterme.com)

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