

Radio Days – 2013-11-02

Discussion – Searching Near & Far

One thing that many people often do during the week is to search for something. That *something* could be a file on their hard disc or some information which lives in the internet. This talk is about ways that you can employ to make your searching more efficient and effective.

Searching Near

You will find, if you are anything like me, that you will often search for a file on your hard disc. You will be surprised to see just how far away that file is from the location where you expected to find it.

You may not know that you can look for a file by its name, or by part of its name or by a word inside the file. This is where a little knowledge can be of great assistance. Windows does give you a way to search files by their name or contents but Windows' way is slow and unreliable compared to the programs which I mention here.

Searching for Files by Name

There are two programs which I use when searching for files using part or all of a file's name. These two programs are *Search Everything* and *UltraSearch*, and both of them are free. Both programs are easy to use: start the program then type part of the name of the file that you are looking for. Both programs take a short time to find all the files which match the letters that you type.

Having found all the files which match the name that you entered you can then sort the list by clicking on the title of the column that you want to sort by. This sorting of the results can make it easier to find a file. The column titles are:

- Name
- Path
- Size
- Modified
- File Type (*UltraSearch* only)

Once you have located your file you can then double-click it to open or run the file, or right-click on the file name to see a list of actions which can be performed on that file.

Searching for Files by Contents

Another way to find a file is to look for the words which it contains. Obviously, this will only work for files which have text in them. Files types which have text contents include Word and Excel documents, saved web pages, PowerPoint presentations and all other file types which store text as text, not as images. This means that a photograph of a sign containing words will not show up in a content search because the text is in an image, not in words which the indexing program can see.

The only free program which I know of which does this is *Copernic Desktop Search* (CDS). CDS searches all the files on your computer which contain text, then indexes all the text in those files to allow you to search for any word. This first indexing task takes some time, as you can imagine, because the program has to search every document on your hard disc and read, then index, each word. After the initial indexing operation, every time you save a file containing text CDS adds all the text in that new file to its index of words. This is much quicker than the first indexing operation because only the new file has to have its contents indexed.

Once the indexing has been completed searching for a word is very quick.

Another Interesting Program

There is another program which I use quite often when I have an unusual task to perform. Older readers may remember an excellent, and very useful, DOS program called XTree. There is now a clone of XTree called *ZTreeWin* (ZTW). This program does amazing things with files, both with file names and file contents.

You can use ZTW to find files with any pattern of characters in their name, find files with any extension or find files with any given text in them. You can restrict a search to a particular area of your hard disc.

This is achieved by selecting a range of files. This range can be by date, by type, by name or by the containing folder. The flexibility of this program is limited, as far as I can see, by your imagination. It does take some getting used to its quirks but, once mastered, it can save you a lot of time if you use it well.

Searching Far

Searching the internet is something of a black art. There are people who can just start typing and the results that they want just seem to appear on their screen as if by magic. To help you reach this sort of proficiency there are a few little tricks and tips that you will find almost magical in their effect. Let's look at some of these tips and tricks.

Search Engines

The simplest searches are those where you just type your search terms into the address bar of a modern web browser. The latest version of all the web browsers that I know all allow you to do this type of search. Apart from the basic browser which comes with Windows (Internet Explorer) there are three other main browsers:

- Chrome
- Firefox
- Opera

My favourite of these for general use is Opera, and Chrome is the browser which I use when I am searching. I use Chrome for searching because it allows you to peel pages off one group to create a new group or to attach a page to another group. This is very useful when searching because it allows you to group related searches so that you can check them easily.

All of these browsers allow you to search by typing into the address bar at the top of the page. This will use that browser's default search engine to return as many results as possible, plus some advertisements because these make money for the search engine company. You just need to search: this is the easiest way to find some information, but the information only comes from one search engine.

More Effective Searching

You can expand your searches by making them more effective. There are several techniques:

- **Quotation marks** To find the author of a quotation use quote marks around the search text: *"to be or not to be"*
- **Dashes** If you want to exclude some of the results from your search use a dash: *jaguar -animal*
- **Use tilde** Use a tilde before a term to include results together with its synonyms: *christmas ~desserts*
- **Site: query** Use *site:* to search within a specific website: *site: nytimes.com*
- **Link: query** Use *link:* to search for sites linking to the given url: *link: nytimes.com*
- **Two dots** use two dots between two numbers to express ranges of dates, sizes or numbers, etc: *movies 1950..1970*

Meta-Search Engines

Meta-search engines are search engines which combine the results of other search engines. There are many meta-search engines: use a search to find one which suits you. You can also download and install *Copernic Agent*: a local meta-search engine. This means that the program lives on your computer and searches the internet like any other meta-search engine.

The advantages of a meta-search engine, whether on your computer or through the internet, are that you get a more comprehensive result with fewer advertisements and other waffle. This is especially useful if you want more in-depth searching. A meta-search engine returns fewer, but hopefully more useful, results.

I suggest that you just try a meta-search engine next time you are looking for something on the net.

Further Information

Search Everything	www.voidtools.com
UltraSearch	www.jam-software.de
Copernic Desktop Search	www.copernic.com
Chrome	www.google.com/chrome
Firefox	www.mozilla.org/firefox
Opera	www.opera.com
Copernic Agent	www.copernic.com