

Being digital

Finding hidden information online

1: Introduction

Search engines, like **Google**, index a huge number of pages. However, there are places where they can't go. Some examples are password-protected areas, commercial data collections, or valuable copyrighted content such as academic journal databases.

This means that there is valuable information out there. It's just 'hidden' and won't come up as a result in a search. The information is available, if you know how to find it.

Learning outcome

By the end of this activity, you should be able to understand how to access online information that may not be listed with search engines.

2: Paywalls and subscriptions

Some content providers protect information by using a 'paywall'. This ensures that access is restricted to users who have paid to subscribe to the site.

In order to allow people to find the information, content providers reveal limited details to search engines that the rest of us cannot see. So, even though you might find something in a search, you may need to register or subscribe to view it.

If you are a member of a local public, college or university library, you will most likely have access to some subscription-based information. For example, the Open University Library provides a rich collection of online resources. This includes, not only journal articles and databases, but also ebooks, images, videos and sound recordings.

It's worth checking to see what you have access to.

3: Your information environment

Specialist search engines can help you to find information that might be 'hidden'. They can also narrow down your search to specific databases or online resources. Examples include collections and databases from universities, libraries, institutions, organisations, government agencies and specialist archives.

Specialised searches can be extremely useful if you are looking for academic, official or subject-specific information.

Have a look at the search engines listed below, and try them out. Remember to make a note of any you think might be useful in the future.

[Infomine](#)

[OAIster](#)

[The Internet Archive](#)

[Who's Talkin](#)

[NoodleTools](#)

4: A changing picture

An increasing amount of information is now being stored on social media. Examples include **Twitter** and **Facebook**.

You may want to search for people's opinions on a topical issue, person or event. There are a number of ways you can do this. For instance, you could search on **Google Blogs** or **Google Discussions**.

Alternatively, you could find more up-to-date comments by using a specialist search tool like **Whos Talkin**, which was mentioned earlier.

5: Summary

In order to find the most useful information for your needs, you may need to use several approaches when you conduct your online search.

Google and other mainstream search engines find an increasingly large part of the content on the web, even if you can't always view it freely.

Specialised search sites will make it easier to find 'hidden' information. They can also narrow down a search to include only specialist collections or databases. Some of these will provide a means to search social networking sites.

Think about what you have learned by doing this activity, that you didn't know before. Do you think you are likely to use any of the search tools mentioned in the future?

Explore the wide range of information resources available to you, if you are a student at the Open University, by visiting the [Explore library resources](#) website.

References

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