Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Web sites that I have come across and which might appeal to you, and to keep you up to date with news and views on Internet trends, developments and statistics. Essentially, it offers a personal selection rather than comprehensive coverage. Although some sites may not cover products or services available in South Africa, they are included because they may inspire you to either contribute missing data or become an entrepreneur and create a similar local site.

Interactive travel guides

Would it not be great if travel guides had searchable, customizable, updatable content? What if we could bookmark and custom print only those places of interest to us? What if a guide had maps that could interact dynamically with reviews and pictures of sites and attractions, hotels, restaurants, museums ... and came with links to additional content and travel resources on the Internet? How about adding virtual tours for a city or even an island destination – tours that could be played, paused and fast-forwarded, just as easily as using a media player?

After three years in the making, the Schmap Player – a small and easy-to-use piece of freeware – is now a reality and, once installed, you can select from a growing series of interactive Schmap Guides that see new destinations added every week. Currently there are guides for cities in Europe, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Every Schmap Guide comes with dynamic maps, useful links, playable tours, top picks, plus photos and reviews for hundreds of sights and attractions, hotels, restaurants, bars, parks, theatres, galleries, museums and more. This is all due to the support of great content partners, superb photos as well as valuable feedback from users, and input from Schmap team members themselves based in Beijing, Hong Kong, Sydney, Raleigh and Weston-super-Mare.

But there is more, Schmap Local is a clever little browser plug-in that recognizes and saves addresses and phone numbers as you browse the Web, integrates with Skype, links automatically to a map and driving directions for any address you choose, prints and e-mails addresses and phone numbers, or copies them anywhere on your computer, and sends them via SMS text message to your mobile phone, or syncronizes via Outlook with your PDA, iPod or BlackBerry. Before going on your next holiday or business trip abroad, have a look at http://www.schmap.com/.

Update on search engines

PodZinger claims it is the world's most powerful audio and video search engine and on-line advertising network. PodZinger makes it possible for consumers to directly connect to their

passions through multimedia search, lets content creators easily monetize their assets and gives advertisers a uniquely targeted approach for delivering branded messages. Using speech recognition technology, PodZinger searches words within both audio and video, not just the metadata, to classify content based on topic and usage. For consumers, PodZinger is the only search engine that allows users to find audio and video content based on keyword searches and then skims the results for relevance the same way it would for text. Consumers can then 'jump-to' a specific location in the audio and video without fast forwarding or listening to the entire file. For content creators, PodZinger's advertising programme generates revenue for the parent company, while providing their users easier access to topics of interest. Interested? Check it out at http://www.podzinger.com.

Founded by search engine pioneers, **Exalead** is a global provider of software designed to simplify all aspects of information search and retrieval for organizations of all sizes. Based on the first and only unified technology platform for desktop, intranet and Web searching, Exalead claims to offer easier deployment, administration and use than any other enterprise-type search software and conforms to any technology environment. It also adapts to user habits for a uniquely satisfying and efficient search experience. Exalead software is used by leading banking and financial services, media, consumer packaged goods, research, retailing, sports, entertainment and telecommunications companies around the world. Try it for yourself at http://www.exalead.com/search.

Work.com is a new service from Business.com, the largest business-to-business search engine and directory. Business.com and Work.com help small business decision makers solve pressing business problems by making it easier to find the most useful business Web sites, products and services, thus saving users time and money.

Whereas Business.com targets the ready-to-transact business-to-business buyer, Work.com is the entrepreneur owner's manual for where to go, what to know and how to get the most value from the ever-growing array of Web resources for the small business owner/operator. It is comprised of more than 1000 How-to Guides written by business experts. These guides are straightforward, 'quick-read' descriptions of how to get something done, and where the best places on the Web are to help you tick tasks off your to-do list. Work.com is actually a community of small-business owners/operators and users can rate the Guides on their usefulness in helping to solve business tasks and participate in open discussion forums for each Guide, suggest new Guide topics, or write Guides in their areas of expertise. Guide yourself to http://www.work.com.

Trexy is the first search engine to inter-operate with thousands of other search engines to remember and share individual search trails. A search trail is the click path a searcher creates after entering a keyword or phrase into a search engine and browsing the Web for an answer.

Trexy works with Google, Yahoo, AskJeeves and many other engines and enables you to keep a track of your own trails as well as follow other trailblazers. The TrailBar is a free toolbar that enables you to blaze your own search trails through the Internet across different engines.

A new feature enables users to add additional search engines in real time, increasing the number of engines on which search trails can be created. Although Trexy currently works with over 3000 on-line search engines, there are many more and the 'Add Engine' feature is a mechanism for extending the range of search engines that Trexy is able to recognize, thus giving users the power to remember their searches on any engine, no matter how big or small. The feature allows the user to suggest engines individually and add them to Trexy's database by using a simple, two-step on-line form. Trexy has been designed to complement

a user's current searching habits. The more engines the users are connected to, the more search trail information can be created across a broader spectrum of on-line databases to help the users remember and find the most relevant results on-line. For easy access, the 'Add Engine' feature is integrated into the TrailBar, which activates and displays a green light when a user conducts a search on an engine that Trexy can connect to. Become a trail blazer yourself at http://trexy.com.

AlltheWeb Livesearch Beta is a product that analyses your search in real-time and instantly provides Web results with alternate search queries as you type. These suggested queries are based on what other people have searched for. Livesearch makes searching the Web faster and easier by predicting what you are searching for, suggesting alternate search queries as you type that help you focus your search, and providing relevant results in real-time. It is reckoned to be a big improvement on having to type one search after another to get the results you want. To deliver the Livesearch experience, the engine looks at things such as your typing speed and spaces between search words to know when to ask Livesearch for an answer. With some behind-the-scenes processing, it can suggest likely queries and the most relevant search results. As you continue to type, giving Livesearch more information with each letter and word, the suggestions and Web results are updated in real-time. AlltheWeb currently indexes the full text of millions of PDF, plain text, Word, Excel and Powerpoint files and it is possible to refine your search to only these file types if you wish. Experience telepathic searching at http://livesearch.alltheweb.com/.

If you are a **Yahoo!** Fan, then you might like to be aware of what they have in the pipeline. Yahoo! Next showcases some of Yahoo!'s newest and coolest projects – the cutting edge of what Yahoo! is doing today and is working on for tomorrow. Check out the new version of Yahoo! Go for TV Beta. View your personal Flickr photostreams, get movie recommendations or search for video clips. The new version is compatible with all of the most popular tuner cards. Want to instantly find and preview email, files, images and music on your computer? Do it with Yahoo Desktop Search. Do you like to get e-mail, IM or mobile updates when your favourite Web content changes? Then take a look at Yahoo! Feed/Blogs Alert Beta. In fact just check out http://labs.yahoo.com/.

Google Government

Work in government and want to know what's happening with Google? The Google Government (GG) Report is a must read for you. The purpose of the publication is to provide a convenient source of ideas, information and insight about Google, specifically for the Federal government professional. Google is becoming ubiquitous in government circles and is capturing customers in dozens of states. Information about this aspect of Google remains hard to find, so GGReport will try to fill this void. A government employee or a department can subscribe to 17 issues (roughly one PDF report every 17 days) for $50. Non-government subscriptions are $375.

The new GGReport.com Web site provides a summary of the features in the for-fee service. The site includes a daily summary of news about Google, links to Web sites that do a good job of reporting on Google and the headlines and abstracts of the content in the for-fee service. See http://www.ggreport.com/.

Flying with a crystal ball

Farecast.com is the first airfare prediction Web site and can help on-line travel shoppers save money by answering the question: should you buy now or wait? In the beta version, airfare predictions from over 75 U.S. departure cities to top domestic destinations are offered.

Forecast.com notes that it is different from other on-line travel agencies, such as Orbitz, Travelocity and Expedia, because their airfare prediction shows if fares are rising or dropping. Based on the prediction, they provide a recommendation to buy now or buy later.

Forecast.com also predicts where fares are going and show where they have been – thus a fare prediction shows if the lowest fare is rising or dropping over the next seven days for the specific dates and cities searched. Each prediction includes:

- an indication of whether the lowest fare is rising, dropping, or staying the same;
- a confidence percentage based on their track record for similar predictions for the market searched;
- an amount reflecting the average fare change recorded when similar predictions were correct for the market; and
- the buying tip – a recommendation based on the prediction information.

Fare history charts the lowest fare for your trip, observed each day for the past 90 days. In other words, it is as if you were to have searched for your trip every day and plotted the lowest fare actually available. To provide the airfare history, Forecast.com has made more than 90 billion, and counting, airfare observations based on real pricing and availability. Get your prediction at http://www.farecast.com/.

Get real with Zillow

Zillow.com is an on-line real estate service dedicated to helping you get an edge in real estate by providing you with valuable tools and information whether you are a buyer or a seller. The Zestimate home valuation is Zillow's estimated market value for a home, computed using a proprietary formula. It is not an appraisal. It is a starting point and can be used with a tool called 'My Estimator' so you can create your own estimate based on the knowledge you have about a home. The Zestimate is a starting point to help a consumer figure out the true value of a home. Working with the Zestimate, consumers can create their own estimate using the My Estimator tool, adding things they may know about the home but we don't, such as remodelling information. Company data, compiled from public records, show us that the vast majority of Zestimates are within 10% of the selling price of the home. Other tools include: maps that enable you to compare neighbourhood home values to see where you can afford to buy; lists of recently sold homes to get a sense of neighbourhood trends; comparisons of the home's estimated value to the asking price; tracking the current estimated market value and other data about your home and so on. See what is on offer at http://www.zillow.com/.

About the author
Dr David Raitt is senior technology transfer officer with the European Space Agency in the Netherlands. His work involves finding applications for space technologies in non-space sectors, particularly those useful for improving everyday life. An information scientist by education and training, David is also editor of *The Electronic Library* and chairman of the Internet Librarian International conferences.

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