

Google, the Great Time Saver

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Oh-ho. You thought Google was just a simple search engine. It is! It's a simple and great search engine. But it's also a great timesaver. Through a simple search interface you can perform a variety of quick and common tasks. The next time you're logging on to the Internet for the day, keep Google in mind for more than search topics.

Google it more than a search engine...

1. It's a phone book and map generator!

Google actually has two different kinds of phone book lookup. One is for plain lookups of phone numbers and one is for finding businesses in different areas.



a) Looking up phone numbers -- To look up phone numbers use the phonebook: syntax with a first name (optional) last name (necessary), and state, city/state, or even area code. For example, for finding John Doe in the 415 area code, you'd use this search:

phonebook:John Doe 415

The same search works on businesses. If you wanted to find banks in San Diego, this search works fine:

phonebook:bank San Diego CA

Each phone book listing generated by using the phonebook: syntax includes links to the address via Yahoo Maps and MapQuest. So if you're looking for driving directions start your search here.

b) Looking up local businesses -- Google is testing a new feature called Google Local, available at <http://local.google.com/>. Enter the name of the business you're looking for, and a city and state.

Looking for banks in this interface finds something quite a bit different. You can choose results by radius (1, 5, 15, or 45 miles -- 45 is the default). Links to MapQuest directions are included as well as links to sites which list/refer to the result. Finally there's a map which shows the position of all search results on a page.

2. It's a dictionary!

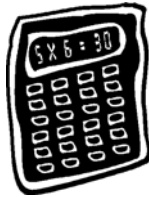
Google's a dictionary in a couple of different ways. First way to do word lookups is just search for them. If you search for epiphany, for example, you'll see at the top of your search result a link called "[definition]". Click on that and you'll go to a dictionary.com result for epiphany. (You'll also get spelling suggestions if you're not quite sure how to spell it and you get the spelling wrong.)

The other way to do word lookups is via the define: syntax. Simply type define: and then the name you're looking. Searching for define:epiphany gathers definitions from all over the Web. Please note that as these are from all over the

Web and not from a reference site like dictionary.com, you may find a few non-credible results here, or some odd results. Generally there are enough good results that it's worth skipping the poor ones.

3. It's a calculator!

Google can also function as a calculator and a converter. For a calculator, simply enter the problem you're trying to solve.



2+2
will get you a result of 4. And you can do more:

$2(2+2) + 150000 / 351$

Google's calculator can also function as a converter, providing conversions between most common measurements (not between currency, though.) I could ask:

six months in milliseconds

and get the answer six months =
 1.5778463×10^{10} milliseconds.
The format is [thing to convert] in
[conversion measurement].

4. It's a translator!

Not every page on the Internet is in English, you know. It might even be, at this point, that most pages on the Internet aren't in English. But that's okay; Google's got you covered with a translator tool.

Google's language tools are available at http://www.google.com/language_tools?hl=en. You have the option of translating entire Web pages or just translating snippets. I usually translate snippets as

it's faster. Note that Google's translator is a machine translator, which means sometimes the translations are going to be completely nonsensical. Use it for the gist, not for exact translations.

If you need a lot of translating done, you might want to keep a translating tool handy in your browser. I find bookmarklets (small JavaScripts kept in bookmark format) to be handy for translating pages on the fly. You can get a list of them (for Google AND AltaVista) at http://www.joemaller.com/translation_bookmarklets.shtml.

5. It's a thesaurus!

I don't think Google had a thesaurus in mind when they set up Google Labs, but they have managed to make available a very nice thesaurus tool via Google Sets.

Google Sets is at <http://labs.google.com/sets>. You're asked to enter in a couple of similar words, and Google will come up with a set of words for you. Say I want words similar to brown. I go to Google Sets and search for cocoa and tan. Google Sets thinks about it a moment and gives me a list including taupe and black. Okay, it's not perfect, but when you need to find that extra word it's a handy tool.

A quick hint for quick Google searches.

One final hint for making the most out of Google and quick searching. If you're doing searching for small snippets of information that you don't have to do additional searching on -- a quote, for example, or a name -- trying viewing the cache of a Google page instead of the page itself. I find that viewing Google's cache is much faster than trying to load a

page from a random place on the Internet.

You may find that you often use Google for extensive searches, or for larger projects. But I think you'll find that Google's equally useful as a handy reference tool and quick searcher. Give it a try!

