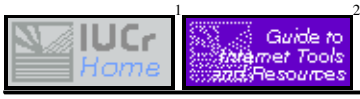

AltaVista[3] – Non–Fiction Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

A vision! Found at *About AltaVista*[4]:

Like its figurative cousin, the cyberspace of the Internet is vast; but unlike the world of Voyager and Magellan, the Internet is finite. And while the Internet remains essentially unstructured, it is possible ––– with enough sophistication and power ––– to catalogue the connected realm. To index every word on every page of every available Web site. To bring order and meaning to an otherwise unwieldy behemoth.

This nice paragraph is unfortunately no longer found on the *About AltaVista*[5] page.

What does it mean, *every page of every available Web site*? –– As of today, the answer as found on *The Internet's Home Page*[6] (self–proclaimed) is:

AltaVista gives you access to the largest Web index: 30 million pages found on 225,000 servers...

Quite a few pages! What does *gives you access to* mean? –– Let us give it a try. Entering "`crystallography`" in the input field on the *AltaVista* Home page[7] and clicking on the button produces a new page which starts with:

Documents 1–10 of about 20000 matching some of the query terms, in no particular order.

If you are just looking for entry points to surf the crystallographic net, you may gleefully click away by hitting on any of the first ten links listed on the page. However, getting *about 20000* matches does not really *bring order and meaning to an otherwise unwieldy behemoth*.

To see the real strength of *AltaVista*, you have to know what specifically you are looking for in the first place, and you also have to switch to the Advanced Search[8] by clicking on the corresponding icon at the top of the *AltaVista* Home page.

Assume that we are interested in the relationship of Crystallography and Broccoli. You think there is no relationship? You are wrong! –– Enter "`Crystallography and Broccoli`" in the *Selection Criteria* input field, leave the other input fields blank and hit the button. You should get (at least):

Documents 1–2 of 2 matching some of the query terms, in no particular order.

HIERARCHY INDEX[9]
HIERARCHY INDEX. This listing provides an alphabetical list of headings

[1] http://www.iucr.ac.uk/iucr–top/welcome.html
[2] int.index.html
[3] http://altavista.digital.com/
[4] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=about
[5] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=about
[6] http://altavista.digital.com/
[7] http://altavista.digital.com/
[8] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=aq
[9] http://info.cas.org/PRINTED/CASINDEX/hierind.html

available in the CA index. This list is designed only for your information. The...
http://info.cas.org/PRINTED/CASINDEX/hierind.html[10] *– size 224K – 24 Oct 95*

LBL Currents –– April 1, 1994[11]
LBL Currents –– April 1, 1994. Chemists develop environmentally friendly catalysis technique. By Lynn Yarris, LCYarris@lbl.gov. Red light could turn...
http://ux9.lbl.gov/Publications/Currents/Archive/April–1–1994.html[12] *– size 41K – 21 Apr 96*

It is impressive enough that there are two matches, but a look at the Web page explaining the Advanced Search syntax[13] quickly reveals that using upper–case letters in our query was not the best idea, since this enforces a case–sensitive search for the keywords with upper–case letters. Trying again with "`crystallography and broccoli`" (case–insensitive search) produces a list with 47 Web pages! –– It is left up to you to find out about the actual nature of the relationship between Crystallography and Broccoli.

Surfing the Web makes one hungry! What about composing a menu with the help of *AltaVista*? Forced by my food–search instincts, I enter "`recipe and`[14] `broccoli and`[15] `(rice or`[16][17] `noodles)`[18] `and`[19] `(beef or`[20][21] `chicken)`[22] `and`[23] `not`[24] `garlic`". Instantaneously there are *about 400* links presenting the World Wide Cuisine based on my preferred ingredients. –– Try yours!

Searching Names and E–mail Addresses with *AltaVista*

Of course, *AltaVista* also offers the opportunity to search for names and e–mail addresses. For example, a search for "`howard near`[25] `flack`" produces a list with some 120 links. That is of course too long a list, but searching for "`howard near flack and mail and telephone`" reduces the number of links to just 12, which are quickly scanned to find his personal Home page.

This means, any person with a personal Home page is quite easily located. However, for certain names you have to be quite specific in order to reduce the number of matches. For example, it needs as much as "`smith near (josef or joseph) and mail and (tel or telephone or fax) and crystallography`" to reduce *about 400000 matches* for "`smith`" to just five. –– In this case, after all the effort, there is still not the desired information.

Continue with *WhoWhere?*,[26] the specialized e–mail search.

[Index][27] [Search Engines Introduction][28] [Yahoo!][29] [WhoWhere?][30]

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[10] http://info.cas.org/PRINTED/CASINDEX/hierind.html
[11] http://ux9.lbl.gov/Publications/Currents/Archive/April–1–1994.html
[12] http://ux9.lbl.gov/Publications/Currents/Archive/April–1–1994.html
[13] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[14] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[15] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[16] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[17] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[18] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[19] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[20] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[21] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[22] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[23] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[24] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[25] http://altavista.digital.com/cgi–bin/query?pg=ah
[26] int.whowhere.html
[27] int.index.html
[28] int.search.engines.html
[29] int.yahoo.html
[30] int.whowhere.html
[31] http://xplor.csb.yale.edu/~rwgk/

without permission – Author's current manuscript[32]

[32] http://xplor.csb.yale.edu/~rwgk/scnet/altavista.html