

Search website offers a visual alternative

January 7 2009, By Craig Crossman

Like most everyone these days, when you need to search the Internet for just about anything, you use Google. Let's face it. Google is the undisputed champion when it comes to Internet searching. It's become so mainstream that the name itself has become synonymous with searching the Internet. It's actually listed as a verb in some dictionaries. "I Googled it" or "I Googled him" means you went online and searched for information relevant to that item or person.

There are many reasons why Google has become the 800-pound gorilla in the search engine arena but the most important one is most likely its phenomenal accuracy when it comes to finding the very thing you're trying to locate. When you enter a word or phrase that describes what you're trying to find, Google typically displays what you are looking for within the first page of listings, many times within the first five items. It's almost spooky how accurate it has become over the years. And while some other search sites have tried to compete using alternative and creatively clever methods to enhance the searching experience, it's difficult to compete with speed and highly accurate return results. Still there's always something new out there in the wings and I recently came across a search engine that's come up with something different.

When you use Google, the results are pages and pages of text. Each page displays around 10 links along with brief descriptions that attempt to describe what you'll see if you click on the link. If you don't like what you see after clicking the link, you have to hit the back arrow, close the tab or close the child window depending on how you have your browser configured to go back to the Google results listing to try another link. It's

a bit tedious at best and hopefully your broadband connection lets you move right along with all that clicking. But what if you could actually SEE all those pages the links are pointing to without having to click on any of the links? That's exactly what happens when you use Searchme, the visual search engine.

On the Searchme home page, you have the typical area into which you begin to type your search words. As you type, little icons with category names begin to appear. For example, when I typed the word "Apple" the relevant categories "Computer Hardware, Movies, Software and Music" appeared. You can choose to select any of those or just hit the Enter or Return key. What appears next is a horizontally split screen which you can easily resize. The bottom half displays the typical text hyperlinks and descriptions. But the top half shows an animated display of the actual web pages with a slider underneath. Dragging the slider left and right causes the web pages to flip in the corresponding direction. The closest thing I've seen to this kind of display is Apple's three-dimensional Cover Flow that displays album covers within iTunes and as a View option in Apple's Leopard, its latest iteration of OS X.

There's a lot more here to help you find the pages you want. When you have a page of interest in Searchme's foreground, you can click on a magnify icon to more closely inspect the page's details. It opens a magnifying window which you can move over the website page. If it's the page you want, just click on the page and you'll be taken to it. Other options let you create "Stacks" of pages which are little visual renderings of pages you wish to associate to each other for later reference.

After using Searchme for a while, I found its ability to rapidly scroll through miniature web pages helped me to more quickly and accurately find the correct website as opposed to just clicking back and forth on text links. You just have to try it for yourself and see what I mean. Searchme is totally free and there's even a free toolbar you can download

that makes searching even easier. At the very least, search me why you wouldn't give it a try.

On the web: www.searchme.com

(Craig Crossman is a national newspaper columnist writing about computers and technology. He also hosts the No. 1 daily national computer radio talk show, Computer America, heard on the Business TalkRadio Network and the Lifestyle TalkRadio Network - Monday through Friday, 10 p.m.-midnight ET. For more information, visit his web site at computeramerica.com.)

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