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Harnessing the Power of the Internet: Three Simple Tips to Becoming a Better Internet Searcher

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Many search engines use complicated relevance ranking algorithms to return results based on the word or words placed in the search box. These algorithms are designed to accommodate one or two word searches, which are typical of the majority of internet searches. The order of the results displayed is determined by a relevance rank in the most popular search engines. Relevance rankings consider many factors and may "include the popularity of the page, the position and size of the search terms within the page, and the proximity of the search terms to one another within the page."¹ Understanding relevancy ranking will explain why web pages on point on a searched subject may not appear in the first 10, 20 or even 50 results returned.

There are three simple tips that will help even the novice internet researcher become an expert. One does not need to know commands or complicated BOOLEAN search logic terms and connectors that were popular in the 1990s, nor does one need to use every search engine, index, or directory available. By simply using familiar words and symbols, multiple descriptive words or terms of art, and advanced options (where available), one will see an increase in relevant results returned by one's search engine of preference.

1) Know the search box default – AND or OR.

Many search engines have a built-in default for treating the spaces between multiple words in the search box. Knowing how one's search engine of preference treats multiple words, with a default AND or a default OR, will enable searches to produce more effective results. GOOGLE™, Ask.com™, and Yahoo!® treat the spaces between multiple words in the search box as a default AND. Using multiple words will narrow search results to web pages that contain all or many of the words searched.

The next two tips will be applied to information that can be very difficult to find on the internet, jury verdicts. Jury verdicts are reported in many different publications and generally require a subscription, license, or access to a pay-per-use service. For the purpose of this article, the tips below will be compared and applied in GOOGLE™, Ask.com™, and Yahoo!® to identify jury verdicts in California in which a defense verdict was rendered in a class action wage and hour case involving issues of overtime. It should be noted that jury verdicts found on the internet will generally appear in law firm websites or attorney biographies and serve as a marketing or client development tool. The first 20 results will be reviewed for each of the three search engines. The first jury verdict on point not appearing in an attorney biography will be reported in the order it appeared in the search engine's results, for example, "GOOGLE™=6, Ask.com™=4, and Yahoo!®=7."

2) Use more words to refine search results.

Using multiple, descriptive words. When searching for legal documents, articles or web pages on a specific subject, it is helpful to list several of the key words that may appear in the page text, for example, *jury verdict wage hour class action California labor overtime defendant*. No connector is needed unless the search engine of preference treats multiple words with a default OR. If that is the case, then use the word AND between each word. GOOGLE™=8, Ask.com™=not in the first 20, and Yahoo!®=17.

Phrase searching. Phrase searching simply means putting words that follow each other logically between quotations. Phrase searching further refines the proximity search of multiple words by requiring that the words appear in the exact order as stated, for example, *"jury verdict" "wage-hour" "class action" California labor overtime defendant*. GOOGLE™=3, Ask.com™=not in the first 20, and Yahoo!®=4.

Using the OR connector. When words or terms of art may be used interchangeably, list all applicable terms and separate terms with the OR connector, for example, *"defense verdict" OR defendant "jury verdict" "wage-hour" "class action" California labor overtime*. GOOGLE™=3, Ask.com™=not in the first 20, and Yahoo!®=2.

3) Use "Advanced Search" option.

GOOGLE™ offers an "Advanced Search" option to create elegant and efficient search constructs without using quotation marks or connectors as demonstrated above. "Advanced Search" is located to the right of the search box on GOOGLE™'s home page. It should be noted that Ask.com™ and Yahoo!® do not offer an advanced searching option. While GOOGLE™ provides many advanced search options, the two this author finds to be the most helpful are highlighted below. GOOGLE™=4.

Find Results. The most popular search-refining options are provided as clearly labeled text boxes. It should be noted that the advanced search option is designed for simple constructs.

with **all** of the words: GOOGLE™ treats multiple words listed in this text box with the default AND connector between words, for example, *California labor overtime wage-hour class action*.

with the **exact phrase**: This option provides phrase searching and GOOGLE™ will insert quotes around the words listed in the text box. A noted limitation is that all words listed here are treated as one phrase. For example, *"jury verdict"*.

with **at least one** of the words: GOOGLE™ will insert OR between each word listed in this text box. Phrases may not be used here. For example, *defense OR defendant*.

without the words: This option specifies that the word or words should not appear in the web page results. GOOGLE™ will insert a minus sign (-) in front of each word listed in this text box.

Domain type. Domain is defined as "a group of computers and devices on a network that are administered as a unit with common rules and procedures" and are defined by their IP address.² Limiting results by domain type may help refine search results.³ For example, *.gov, .edu*.

.com or .us – commercial

.net – networks

.edu – US higher education

.org – organizations

.mil – US military

.gov – US federal government

.int – international organizations established by treaties

.state.XX.us – US State governments (US postal abbreviations are used

Become a better internet searcher by using familiar words and symbols, multiple descriptive words or terms of art, and advanced options. Incorporate these three simple tips into your internet search strategy and see both an improvement in relevant search results and more efficient use of time spent searching.

For more information, try an internet tutorial, read more about search engines, or ask a librarian.

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