



# Searching the Internet

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# Searching the Internet

The amount of information available online is simply enormous. There are approximately 45 billion web pages<sup>1</sup> - the equivalent of 6 pages for every human being on the planet!

Needless to say - the internet is **full** of information. This means that finding a specific piece of information can be quite challenging. In this quick guide, you will learn some tips on how to make finding useful information a little easier.

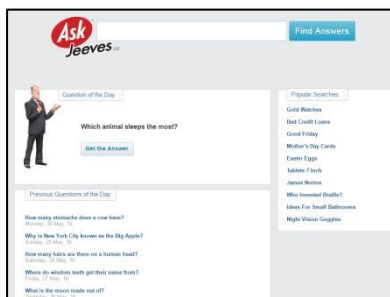
## 1. Search Engines

A search engine is a tool that aims to index the internet by reading web pages and saving information about them. When you tell a search engine what you are looking for, it will show you the pages that it thinks are relevant to your search.

There are many search engines available – but with an estimated 1.5 billion unique users each month<sup>2</sup> – by far the most popular is Google.



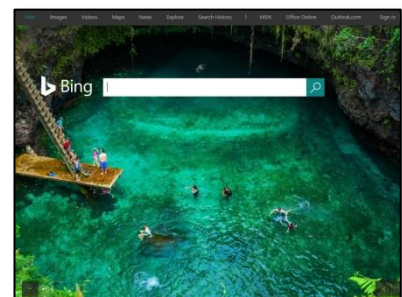
Comparison of home pages for various search engines



[uk.ask.com](http://uk.ask.com)



[www.google.co.uk](http://www.google.co.uk)



[www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com)

Due to its huge popularity - this guide will use Google to demonstrate the process of searching the internet. Google will work on any internet browser.

<sup>1</sup>[www.worldwidewebsize.com](http://www.worldwidewebsize.com) [accessed 31/05/2016]

<sup>2</sup>[www.ebizma.com](http://www.ebizma.com) [accessed 31/05/2016]

## 2. Performing a search



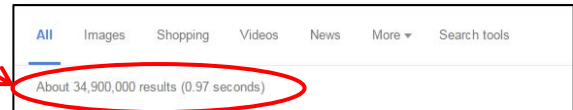
All search engines offer a text box where you can type in your search. Let's do a search for the world's largest cat – and see what we find...

### **An example search:**

### **The World's Largest Cat**

In the Google text box, simply type the words – the world's largest cat.

The first thing you should note is that Google has found almost 35 million web pages in less than a second.

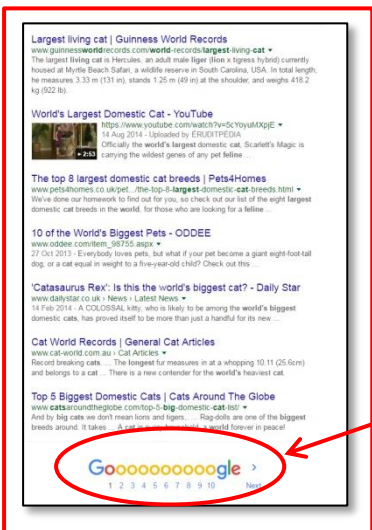
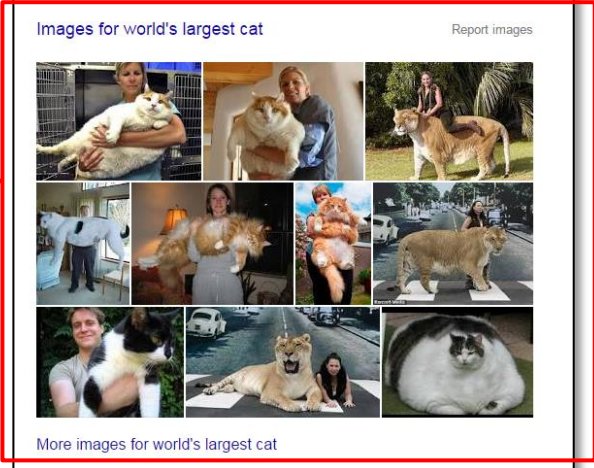


**Optional exercise**  
Try doing the same search on another site (such as Bing or Ask) and see how it

In terms of actual results, the first thing that Google wants you to see is an extract from a web page that it has indexed – called “largest-living-cat” on the Guinness World Records website.



Next, Google offers you some individual images of cats (*they can't all be the world's largest cat, can they?*).



Google then offers you a list of web pages that it thinks you will find relevant.

The results are organised into pages (*imagine how many pages of results there will be if Google has found **35 million** web pages!*).

### 3. Understanding your search results

Now that we have performed a search, it is important to think about what the search engine has done for us.

First of all, Google has assumed some facts based on our question. The extract to the Guinness World Record page demonstrates that it knows we are looking for a unique answer to the question – “what is the world’s largest cat?”

However, Google then also brings us some random images of various cats. Clearly, they can’t all be the largest. The images show domestic cats, as well as “big cats” such as lions and tigers.

One of the possible reasons for the photographs appearing is that the picture itself is called “the world’s largest cat” – even though it clearly isn’t. The internet is so full of information, that it isn’t always very easy to find out the answer to a specific question.

The main thing to remember is that when you ask a question of a search engine – you aren’t asking someone to bring you the correct answer. You are asking a question of the entire internet, and then browsing anything which the search engine thinks is relevant.

### 4. Search page rankings

One final thing to note about a search engine is that you should always be a little wary about what it is they are showing you.

Search engines use “page rankings” to determine the order that results should appear. This can include things like authority and popularity – for example a BBC webpage about diet will score much higher than a page created by an individual writing about their own diet.

Be aware that the results of a search may not exactly match the original question, and that a lot of information on the internet is factually incorrect. Finally, take note that a search engine may well give extra priority to sources which provide revenue – such “sponsored results” may well appear much higher up in the results list than the source you would find most helpful.