

Researching via the internet

Kava's 'Writing for the internet' courses will transform the way your company or organisation presents itself on the web. We can help you hook and hold on to users, drive traffic, sales and awareness.

Both individuals & companies and use the web to generate and research content. There's no doubt the internet is the single most powerful source of information at our disposal. It's also one of the most dangerous.

These ten simple pointers will help you to reap the benefits and avoid many of the pitfalls

1. Trust no one, question everything

The internet is packed with misinformation, propaganda and plain rubbish. Every apparent fact is smudged with refutation and counter claim. Always find out who's responsible for a site and seek out the vested interest. How current is the information? How verifiable?

2. A little knowledge goes a long way

It really does. The internet is most useful when you're looking into a subject you already know something about. It's most dangerous as an introduction to anything.

3. Common sense

Never use the internet as a single or prime source. Verify any information gleaned from the web with at least two other reliable sources.

4. Be methodical

Internet research can be as entertaining and pointless as a shaggy dog story. It's very easy to become distracted, sidetracked or buried beneath conspiracy and gossip. Be clear about your objectives and set yourself time limits.

5. Privileged access

One of the wonders of the internet is that it can facilitate access to sources and expertise you didn't even know existed. Use it to lend credibility and depth to your content. If you find an authoritative and reliable website, email the relevant contact for a quote or even an interview.

6. Branch out

Since it became a household word, Google has become the search engine of choice for armies of researchers. There are thousands of alternatives that offer different and sometimes value-added approaches to the search process - eg, www.alltheweb.com, www.mamma.com, www.search-it-all.com, www.lycos.com, www.altavista.com, www.dogpile.com, www.37.com and www.metacrawler.com

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7. Get logical

Much database searching is based on the principles of Boolean logic. The three Boolean operators are OR, AND, NOT:

- Tweedledum OR Tweedledee will look for pages on which at least one of the two search terms is present.
- Tweedledum AND Tweedledee will look for pages on which both of the search terms are present.
- Tweedledum NOT Tweedledee will look for pages on which only one of the search terms is present.

Used in combination, Boolean operators can be incredibly powerful and save hours of redundant trawling.

8. Quote, unquote

Putting a term in quotes can also speed up research. For example, searching for queen mother's legacy returns all the references to queen, mother's and legacy. "queen mother's legacy" only returns references to that exact phrase. In addition, a device known as a wildcard is also useful. These allow the search for both a root word and all its derivatives. For example angel* will find angels, angelic, Angela - anything beginning with the first five letters. Some search engines use the dollar sign (\$) for the wild card function.

9. Go analogue

Think objectively about the nature of your quest and decide whether or not the web is really the most appropriate solution. This might come as a surprise but often picking up the phone or opening a book is the faster and more reliable solution.

10. Trust no one, question everything

Heard this one before? Well, trust us - where the web is concerned, you can never hear this one enough!

Kava's 'Writing for the Internet' courses are either half day or full day sessions. Our trainers are experienced online journalists and former AOL editors.

Courses can be tailored to address specific objectives and can include an appraisal of existing online resources.

For more information, call Richard Kennedy or Caroline Chapple on 0845 644 5823 or email courseinfo@kavamedia.com