

Guide to selecting a Web search tool and strategy

Search engines are:

- compiled by computers, Web robots or spiders.
- indexed Web sites and pages using criteria such as titles, authors, and keywords.
- full-text snapshots of the Web page content.
- searchable.

Directories are:

- compiled by humans.
- Indexed Web sites and pages using criteria such as titles, authors, and keywords.
- hierarchical categorization of Web sites and pages by subject.
- browsable.
- searchable.

The biggest difference between a search engine and a directory is the ability to browse. Deciding which tool to use depends primarily on how much a user knows about the topic and what type of information about that topic the user needs.

When to use a search engine vs. a directory:

It is best to use a search engine when the user:

- knows a great deal about the topic.
- can narrow the topic to a specific sub-field or concept.
- Can identify specific words or phrases within the scope of the topic.

It is best to use a directory when the user:

- knows very little about the topic.
- cannot narrow the topic to specific sub-fields or concepts.
- Cannot identify specific keywords or phrases within the scope of the topic.

Answering the following questions can help you define your search strategy:

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| For what am I looking? | |
| Are there any aspects of this topic that are particularly relevant for my search? | |
| What words or phrases would I expect to find in Web documents that contain the information for which I am looking? | |
| Are there any synonymous or equivalent words for the topic / sub-topic / concept / aspect of topic for which I am looking? | |

