

# *Information Technology*

## **The Shredded Encyclopedia**

I was finishing an installation at a client when a staff member asked me, “Are you familiar with the Internet?” “Familiar” covers a lot of territory, so I asked what she was trying to do. “I’m trying to find the Nurse Practice Act for New York State. I’ve been wandering the state’s web site for an hour.”

Imagine that some vandal has torn the pages out of several encyclopedias in a library, dumped them in a heap on the floor and destroyed the index. That’s the Internet. Here’s my subjective opinion on finding business information on the ‘net.

The major tools for finding information are *search engines* and *portals*. A search engine (Alta Vista, Northern Light, Ask Jeeves, etc.) takes words you enter, matches them against its list of sites and key words and shows you the results in order of relevance. The only search engine I use now is Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)); it’s amazingly fast and excellent at filtering out irrelevant material. Google has many features you can use to make results more relevant or to find specific information. There are articles and books on how to use it effectively. Google Hacks and Google: The Missing Manual, both from O’Reilly, are good guides to the search engine’s features, obvious and subtle.

A portal has links to sites of topical interest, such as weather, shopping, news, etc., as well as a search engine. Yahoo ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)), MSN, AOL, Prodigy, etc. are all portals, but not specific to business. I find it useful to distinguish local portals from national ones; good portals for local business information include the RBA ([www.rocklandbusiness.org](http://www.rocklandbusiness.org)), the REDC ([www.redc.org](http://www.redc.org)), with links to towns, villages and agencies, and the Journal News ([www.thejournalnews.com](http://www.thejournalnews.com)). Some local companies have links to sites of general and business interest; Provident Bank ([www.providentbanking.com](http://www.providentbanking.com)) is a notable example.

A useful portal for national and international business information is [www.ceoexpress.com](http://www.ceoexpress.com). CEO Express has links to business publications, major national and international newspapers, research services, sites relevant to small business, health, travel, reference and, inevitably, sports, weather, entertainment and shopping.

And the Nurse Practice Act? I went to Google and searched. It was about 8 screens down. If I’d included “New York” it would have been the top result.

*This column by Denis Williamson of MacLamor Computer Consulting aims to help businesses maximize the value of information technology. (Suggestions for future topics are welcome: e-mail Denis at [denis@maclamor.com](mailto:denis@maclamor.com) or call 845-357-1877.)*