

Online Engineering Resources – Part I: Product and Service Related Search Engines

Where would we be without the internet? I'm always astounded when I meet someone who says he doesn't really use the internet. How can that be? It is such a valuable productivity tool. I can't imagine doing what I do without it. I thought I'd talk a little this month about some of the tools I use on the "net". There are many basic categories of online resources, including search engines, communities and technology sites. Here is Part I of a three part series on internet resources discussing a few of my favorite search engines. In future articles, I'll talk about online communities and technology sites.

www.google.com - In the area of search, the main player is, of course Google. I don't think a day goes by that I don't use Google. I have the Google desktop toolbar installed so I can quickly look up something – anything – without even having a browser open. I use it for product searches, technical information searches, to find the URL of a company. And you can use it for more than just web searches, you can define words, do price comparisons, search groups (more on that next month) and more. I could devote this whole article to Google, but I won't. The biggest weakness of Google is its strength. It finds too much stuff. If you are looking for something a little out of the ordinary or too ordinary, it can consume a lot of time trying to sort through the thousands of "hits" Google returns. To help through that problem, here are some other search engines worth a try.

www.globalspec.com – GlobalSpec bills itself as "The Engineering Search Engine". It is a good place to start a technical search. The search results can still be overwhelming, but with a little practice, you can narrow in on a product supplier or service reasonably quickly. It also offers the ability to search for standards and patents. Though if you know you are looking for an ASME (www.ASME.org) or ASHRAE (www.ASHRAE.org) or similar standard for example, you might as well go directly to their sites. But if you are not sure of the issuing organization this is a good place to start. As for patents I always go to www.uspto.gov to search and download patents. It's free if you have the right image reading software. Check out the "Engineering Tools and Useful Links" area on GlobalSpec. It has a wealth of connections to calculators, equations, theorems and formulas, sizes and specifications, etc. All in all a very handy technical site.

www.ThomasNet.com – If you have been around engineering very long, you are familiar with Thomas Catalog. ThomasNet.com is the online version. Like Google, the search results can be overwhelming. But on the flip side it is thorough and can be very helpful in identifying service and product suppliers. I generally save this one as a last resort. It just always seems to take me a long time to find what I'm looking for at this site.

www.Kelleysearch.com – "The global business search". It seems to me that Kelly isn't as large as the others I've mentioned above. But it is well organized and can be a real time saver if you find the product or supplier you are looking for here first.

www.MotionNET.com – an online engineering directory. I deal a lot in thermal and fluid issues and as such I haven't found this site to be all that helpful in finding service and product providers. But it does seem to have a lot of useful information

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and links to other resources. Check it out; maybe it will better suit your area of expertise.

The above links are several links that I have found useful when searching for product, service, or supplier information. Just for the fun of it, I searched in Google for “engineering search engines” and here is one of the interesting finds:

<http://www.searchengineguide.com/pages/Business/Engineering/>

If you have some favorite search engine or engineering related technical site please let me know.

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