

# SEARCH ENGINE TRENDS: YELLOW PAGES BECOME HIGH CHAIRS

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Where do you go when you need to look up a phone number, choose or new dentist, or find the nearest Starbucks? Based on recent trends, chances are you go to your computer. Yellow Pages, though still classic and dependable, are finding themselves used more and more as high chairs for visiting toddlers rather than to look up Ernie's House of Ballpoint Pens.

Indeed, the trend appears to be away from paper-based directories towards Internet directories such as Whitepages.com and Google. Google, a humorously named search engine, is so popular that it has become its own verb: "to Google someone" is to type his or her (or your) name into the search field and see what shows up on the World Wide Web. "Gee, I Googled my new boyfriend yesterday and found out he used to win tap dancing competitions under the name Hooffin' Harry."

But the allure is not only in finding out embarrassing things about your friends and co-workers. Searching for answers on the Internet is easy and quick, and you can do multiple searches in seconds, rather than flipping through page after page. Playing around on Google has become something of a pastime, just type in anything random you are interested in and see what you get. People are especially more likely to use a search engine if they are looking for something very specific, not just "slippers" but "armadillo-shaped slippers."

The respected Nielsen Ratings, most well-known for their analysis of television ratings, is also known as one of the leading Internet media analysts, Nielsen NetRatings. In a February 23, 2004 article on SearchEngineWatch.com, it is reported that for January 2004, there were an estimated 151 million active Internet users in the US. Of these, 76 percent used a search engine at least once during the month. On average, each user spent nearly 40 minutes searching.

The following chart demonstrates the ratings of each of the most popular search engines. 60,000 people were polled, and since people can visit more than one search engine, the numbers add up to more than 100 percent.

Top 5 Search Engines  
Home & Work Users, January 2004

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 Top 5 Search Engines Chart

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KEY: GG=Google, YH=Yahoo, MSN=MSN, AOL=AOL, AJ=Ask Jeeves  
For links, see the Major Search Engines page.

Back in 2001 NetRatings announced that Americans' 3 favorite types of websites were search engines, portals, and community sites. NetRatings Vice President of eCommerce Sean Kaldor said: "These sites have established themselves as a mandatory part of every surfer's online habits." At the end of 2003's third quarter, AOL, just one of the many Internet service providers available, had 24.7 million subscribers. That is a lot of people with a lot of queries, and these days they are taking those queries to the Internet more and more.

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