

10.21.03, Investor's Business Daily IBD'S 10 SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Investor's Business Daily has spent years analyzing leaders and successful people in all walks of life. Most have 10 traits that, when combined, can turn dreams into reality. Each day, we highlight one.

7 FOCUS YOUR TIME AND MONEY: Don't let other people or things distract you.

Hone Your Search Skills

7 The Internet is supposed to be the ultimate productivity tool. But for many people, it doesn't quite deliver.

Take Internet searches. There's a world of information at your fingertips, but it can be frustrating to find the specific data you need.

Some Web users can search for hours and not get the right result—even when they know for sure it's out there somewhere.

In addition, unwanted marketing pitches can clutter up the search. As you search for the one thing you really need, you'll likely get hit with tons of offers for things you don't. The result is a huge waste of time and money.

But there are plenty of ways to hone your Internet searches, experts say. With the right approach, you can find anything quickly and then get back to work.

Get Specific

First and foremost, Internet users should be precise when searching.

"The biggest stumbling block is that they don't focus their search," said Lee Roberts, president of Rose Rock Design Inc., a Web design company.

When you go to a search engine and type in a query, don't start out with a single word—unless that word is specific. Use a phrase instead.

You might want to try some of the natural-language search engines, such as teoma.com and askjeeves.com. They let you type in a question, rather than just search terms.

For most Internet searches, you can't go wrong with google.com, Roberts says.

"Google is probably the best general search engine that you'll ever find," he said.

But Google's enormous scope can

be a curse. Because it has 3 billion Web pages, you have to narrow down your searches, Roberts says.

Users should think of the Web as a giant library, he urges. It takes skills to find the right documents. Instead, people think they're going to find the right info immediately.

Google does have a feature called "I feel lucky," which tries to help you do just that. But it's often ineffective, Roberts says. The feature takes you automatically to the first Web page that turns up in a search, which can be like pulling the arm of a slot machine.

Avoid Off-Target Pitches

As you're searching, it's important to avoid "bad marketing," said Dave Schrader, director of strategy and marketing for Teradata Corp.'s applications solutions unit.

Bad marketing is any sort of pitch that doesn't fit what you're looking for. If you're searching for socks, and a banner ad for a car pops up, that's bad marketing.

Beware that many search results are paid results. That means an advertiser paid a fee to have them listed when a certain term was entered.

These results can still be useful, but sometimes they don't correlate well with your search.

Companies with good marketing will contact you only when they can offer something relevant, Schrader says. And they'll time their pitches just right.

That can pre-empt the need for a Web search. Travelocity.com, for instance, will send out an e-mail to customers a week before they're due to go on vacation. These "Bon Voyage" e-mails might contain tips for a specific destination or rental car information, Schrader notes.

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