

07 00 2008 - 5 Things You Didn't Know Google Could Do

Chances are, Google has been your friend for quite some time now. It's no doubt one of the most used words in the English language and it might even be your homepage. But, despite your familiarity with the simple search-engine you know and love, you probably aren't taking advantage of everything Google can do for you.



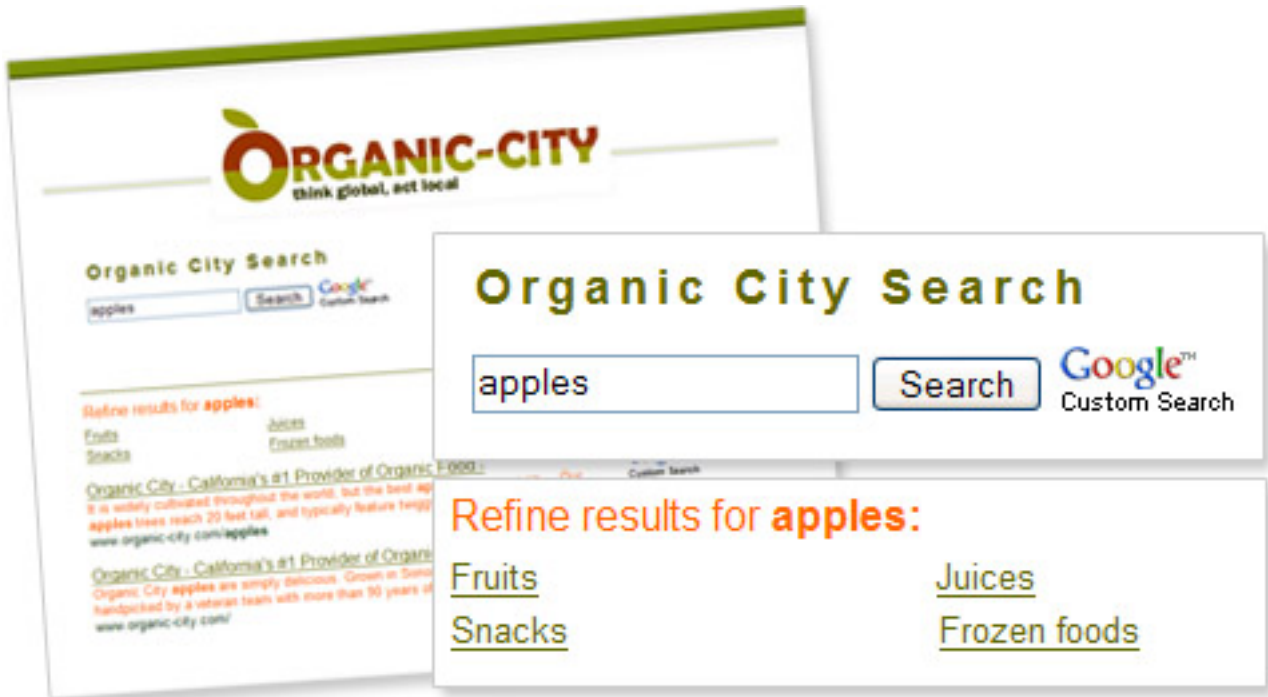
Google™

Take the company's Transit application, for instance. Using Google Transit, you can get step-by-step directions from one location to another solely via public transportation. Though the service isn't available in every metropolitan area as of yet, it is available in some 52 cities nationwide and an additional 17 worldwide - with more soon to follow.

In their efforts to further assist your life on-the-go, Google's SMS and GOOG-411 services can help you locate a nearby restaurant, find a phone number, or provide simple answers to basic questions. While neither service is entirely new, both are worth looking into if you haven't yet hopped on to the Smart Phone bandwagon. To use Google SMS, simply text a phrase describing what you're looking for (Ex. Stock AAPL, Weather San Francisco, Pizza 90234) to "466453" or "Google." If pushing buttons isn't your favorite pass time, Google's 411 service works equally well. Just dial 1-800-GOOG-411, say your location, and then say what you're looking for. You'll be given a list of options and, after choosing the one you were looking for, connected for free to your business of choice.

Beyond productivity boosters, the company has also launched a few other new services with extended functionality that can potentially make your life a little less hectic. Google's new Health service allows you to create and manage your own personal health profile - complete with current medications, medical history, and other medical records that can be easily shared with your doctor(s) at the touch of a button. You can also search for new or current doctors, connect to online medical advice, and look up health conditions from a growing list of everything from simple to more complex conditions and diseases.

Also new to the Google family is the addition of Custom Search Functionality. While this isn't something that most users will be clamoring to use, it is a great idea for anyone with a website. Using a number of parameters that the web master defines, Custom Search tailors Google's search engine to search only for specific things. An animal site dedicated to information on different kinds of dogs, for example, could utilize Custom Search to create a search engine that only returned results relating to dogs. Even searching for simple things like "shirts" would return only shirts designed with dogs in



If you follow the news regularly, you might have noticed a bit of controversy developing around Google's new Maps extension, Street View. Despite the slightly exaggerated fear of privacy concerns, Street View is a very cool tool that is just now becoming useful. Over the past several months, an army of Google vans and hybrids have been scouring the streets of the United States and France (part of Google's special first-person follow-along during the Tour De France) grabbing 360° views of storefronts, avenues, and intersections. As of this writing, Google has already indexed quite a bit of the country (including my house), with more photos being added almost daily as their mobile fleet continues its mission across the country. If you're in need of a little entertainment for the rest of the day, give Google Street View a quick Google to see some of the comical things that have been accidentally captured by the company's recorders including a variety of accidents, arguments, and other encounters.



To see what else Google's hiding beyond its simple search box, check out its archive of applications along with the now famous Labs section.