

Title: Keeping Up with the Dark Side of the Web

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Sponsors: Business & Economic Development, College & University Library, Reference & Adult Services Sections

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After listening to Rita Vine speak it will be impossible to view search engines in quite the same manner again. According to Vine, portals don't really matter any more. Search is now the default web portal! The "Search Engine Little Secret" is that search engines aren't really about searching, but rather search engines are advertising machines. The four major search engines (Google, Yahoo, Live(MSN), and ASK) have over 8 billion searches per day. Search engines earn money by bringing ads to the viewer. It is no surprise that with technology enabling better ad tracking including how much time is spent on an ad and where the view went next, that web ads work. Google which uses one of the best relevance algorithms is really an ad monger! Three ingredients comprise "The Magic Potion of Searching" – traffic, relevance, and monetization. Traffic is simply the flow of web users to a search site. Relevance is the ability to deliver satisfying results to the end user accomplished through algorithms and link analysis. Monetization is the conversion of traffic into revenue. As demonstrated by the major search engines, search engines today are either big media companies or owned by big media companies. Due to the tremendous amount of money and planning required to launch a search engine, there are no more overnight sensations. Certainly the \$10.5 billion of Google's \$10.6 billion in revenue coming from ads supports the belief that 99+% of search engine revenues is generated from ads. When using search engines, one needs to be aware that cross promotion partnerships render relevance less relevant when the "best of" results are sponsored! Not only are the displayed results affected by promotional partnerships, but also by where you sit. Because a searcher's geographic IP address is visible to the search engines, the same search executed in Canada and New York produce different results. To keep up with the "Dark Side of the Web", it is necessary to determine "What is this product really?" and to find information on the producer of the search engine. Web producer information to review includes the producer's "about us" files, as well as identifying the parent company, searching the names of principals, and searching investor information if the web producer is publicly traded. Other web producer information might come from the producer's business model, the "advertise with us" link, press releases, and business databases such as ABI/Inform and Investext. Blogs and newsletters for search sleuths which included librarian resources, consumer issues and usage resources, and Business and legal resources were discussed. What will the future bring for search engines? Online advertising will increase. "Communtainment" – the convergence of community, communications, and entertainment – will pull users away from television and other sites. User generated brands will develop as consumers take control of web content. "Easy" is all that matters. Mobile is everywhere from ultra-micro computers to cell phones designed for four-year-olds. Finally, the future for search engines is --- Search is the ONLY portal!