Book review

Searching 2.0
Michael P. Sauers,
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Adding to the growing bookshelf of ' …2.0' titles, Michael P. Sauers' Searching 2.0 sets out to inform readers about the range of tools available for searching information beyond the standard search engines with which we're all familiar. The preface suggests that there's a little something for everyone in the book – those unfamiliar with web 2.0 searching tools should close its covers having gained confidence in their use, while those already familiar with web 2.0 searching should pick up new tips and ways of passing on their knowledge. So, how does the book that follows shape up?

After an initial chapter outlining the basic characteristics of the web 2.0 environment (with a special focus on tagging and folksonomies), each chapter looks in turn either at a range of resource types (multimedia search engines, tools for finding local information, desktop search, etc.) or specific resources (e.g. chapters dedicated entirely to social bookmarking tool Delicious and to Wikipedia). In each chapter Sauers talks the reader through a long list (sometimes numbingly long) of the features of each resource, providing step-by-step, click-by-click instructions in their use. These are accompanied by a very large number of screenshots – usually one per click and sometimes superfluous (do we genuinely need a screenshot of the Google homepage?). This leads to a lot of awkward flicking backwards and forwards between the text and the relevant screenshot. Each chapter ends with a list of suggested activities to help readers actively engage with the resources.

How useful readers will find this approach will depend a great deal on their familiarity (or otherwise) with web 2.0 tools. Some may appreciate the hand-holding on offer, while others may find the step-by-step approach a little patronising. My belief is that this approach will severely shorten the book's useful lifespan – already many of the resources being described have changed a great deal since the book's publication in April 2009, having dropped some of the features being described in such minute detail, added new features, or developed a very different interface or terminology. For example, the chapter on print search, focusing on Google Books and Amazon, features 70 screenshots, most of which are quite different to how those services appear today. How useful are step-by-step, screen-by-screen instructions when one of the characteristics of the web 2.0 environment is constant change (something, incidentally, barely touched on in the text)?

Sauers keeps his focus on a small number of resources, thus preventing the book from becoming an unreadable resources list, and not intimidating newer web 2.0 users. However, sometimes this can feel a bit limiting – there are social bookmarking sites other than Delicious, for example, though web 2.0 newcomers wouldn't know it from this book. The writing style is also straightforward and easy to follow, Sauers keeping a light but neutral tone that keeps the focus firmly on the resources.

This is a book with the practical aim of getting people to use a wider range of searching tools – there is no future-gazing or theoretical discussion, just plenty of 'how to …' instructions to help readers get to grips with the new tools at their disposal, along with the suggested activities. The constant change in the world of web resources inevitably means that a title such as this will quickly become out of date, as suggested above (for instance, Twitter is mentioned just once, and then only as the data source for a screenshot demonstrating data visualisation), and it's doubtful that £44.95 represents good value for money for what is, essentially, a book of annotated screenshots.

If you or your staff are taking first, tentative steps into the world of web 2.0 this might be the book for you, but others may prefer to go to the book's accompanying list of bookmarks on Delicious (search for the tag *searching2.0*) and instead dive straight into an updated list of resources.