Google Search Secrets

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Google Search Secrets

Christa Burns and Michael P. Sauers

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For Cordwainer Bird
—*Michael*

For John. He knows why.
—*Christa*

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introduction

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

—Google's mission statement (http://www.google.com/about/company)

If you're a librarian reading this (or not) you may remember a time when we didn't have Google to help us find what we were looking for. From a perspective of a new librarian working a reference desk, those times probably seem like the dark ages. A time when we had to walk from one end of the building to another, find the right book, consult an index, and hope the volume contained the needed information. Granted, we still do that, but not nearly as often as we used to.

If you're not a librarian, please don't think that Google will answer all your questions. Trust us—we know this for a fact.

Regardless of all this, chances are you're a daily Google user. As Michael's step daughters are fond of saying, "Just ask the almighty Google machine." Google isn't just a company name, it's a verb. How's that for having an impact?

In 2008 Michael wrote, and Neal-Schuman published, *Searching 2.0*, a guide to searching not only some of Google's (then) lesser-known interfaces, but many other search engines that gave us access to the new types of information available online. In 2011, he was asked to write a follow-up and suggested that maybe this time he would be willing, with Christa's help, to focus just on Google. You're holding the result in your hands right now.

Google has fingers in many different pies, from cars to computer operating systems. But at its heart is search, and search is what we've focused on in this book.

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In chapter 1 we take you through a brief history of Google and talk about some of those other pies we just mentioned. The bulk of chapter 1, however, covers the common features of Google search that apply across the rest of the search services covered in this book.

Chapter 2 dives into Google's web search, the default search interface that is found at google.com. Here we introduce Google Search's general look and feel and how web results are presented, along with your first set of search filters for narrowing your results.

From this point forward chapters 3 through 10 all follow the same pattern of introducing you to a different search interface that focuses results on a different type of information. From there we cover the basic and advanced search interfaces, the results, and search filters for each of the topics covered by that search. These chapters cover Google Images, Google News, Google Videos, Google Maps, Google Blog Search, Google Scholar, Google Patents, and Google Books accordingly.

With chapter 11 we take a slightly different approach and introduce you to the Google Alerts service. Simply put, Google Alerts allows you to automate your searching and have the results delivered to you automatically. If you're someone who searches for new content on a single subject with any regularity, this is the chapter for you.

Finally, in chapter 12, we end with what are known as search features. Hidden within Google are many different search types that won't just find a page on the web that has your answer, but will give you the answer directly. Here we cover those types of searches.

You don't necessarily need to read these chapters in order, but we highly recommend that you at least read chapter 1 first since that will cover a lot of common material that applies to the rest of the chapters in the book.

Naturally, Google services and features are constantly evolving. To assist you in keeping up with the changing world of Google, we have set up a website where we will be posting updates after the publication of this book (http://googlesearchsecretsbook.blogspot.com).

One last note: even though the writing of the chapters in this book were evenly divided between us, we decided not to specify who wrote which. Therefore we decided to phrase most of the text in the first-person plural unless specifically referring to something one of us has done outside of this book. In those cases we referred to ourselves in the third person.

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chapter 1

Welcome to Google

It's Google's world; we're just living in it.

THAT'S NOT ENTIRELY true, but it can oftentimes feel that way. With products and services and research and innovation, Google has ingrained itself into many parts of our lives. And it's likely to remain that way for the foreseeable future. Google's mission is "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." With all the different ways that Google has developed to search the Internet, this is becoming closer to reality. Harnessing this accessibility and usefulness via Google's various search options is the purpose of our book.

A Very Brief History of Google

Google was born in 1996. Originally called BackRub, it was the creation of Stanford University students Larry Page and Sergey Brin as a better way to organize and search the growing web. Rather than ranking results by counting how many times search terms appeared on a page, as other search engines at the time did, they created a search engine that determined a website's relevance by counting the number of pages, and the importance of those pages, that linked back to the original site.[1]

Before incorporating in 1998, the name was changed to Google, a misspelling of *googol*, the mathematical term for a 1 followed by one hundred 0s.

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It was chosen as the new name to reflect their desire to index the immense amount of data on the Internet. Since its incorporation, Google has expanded its offerings beyond the original search engine. The company has developed its own products and has acquired other products, further expanding the Google empire.

Other Google Products and Services

This book will focus on searching Google, but there's much more that Google does. Here are just a few examples.

- *Android*
  Linux-based operating system for mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers. http://www.android.com

- *Gmail*
  Free webmail IMAP and POP e-mail service provided by Google, known for its abundant storage, intuitive search-based interface and elasticity. It was first released in an invitation-only form on April 1, 2004. http://mail.google.com

- *Google Chrome and Google Chrome OS/Chromebook*
  Google Chrome is Google's web browser and Chrome OS is a computer operating system based on the Chrome browser. In a few cases we'll be mentioning Google search features that are only available if you're using one of these platforms. (Don't worry, it's just one or two items.) http://www.google.com/chrome and http://www.google.com/chromebook

- *Google Glass*
  Head-mounted wearable computer, similar to eyeglasses but with a heads-up display instead of traditional lenses. www.google.com/glass

- *Google Driverless Car*
  Experimental project that involves developing technology for driverless cars. The system combines information gathered from Google Street View with artificial intelligence software that combines input from video cameras inside the car and sensors on the outside. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_driverless_car

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Common Search Elements

A note before we get started: unless otherwise stated, for all of our examples you do not need to be logged into a Google account.

There are some features of Google searching that apply to all the different search interfaces we'll be covering. Features specific to a type of search will be covered in the relevant chapter.

- *Autocomplete*
  As you type within the search box on Google, the autocomplete algorithm offers searches that might be similar to the one you're typing. The algorithm predicts and displays search queries based on other users' search activities and the contents of web pages indexed by Google (figure 1.1).

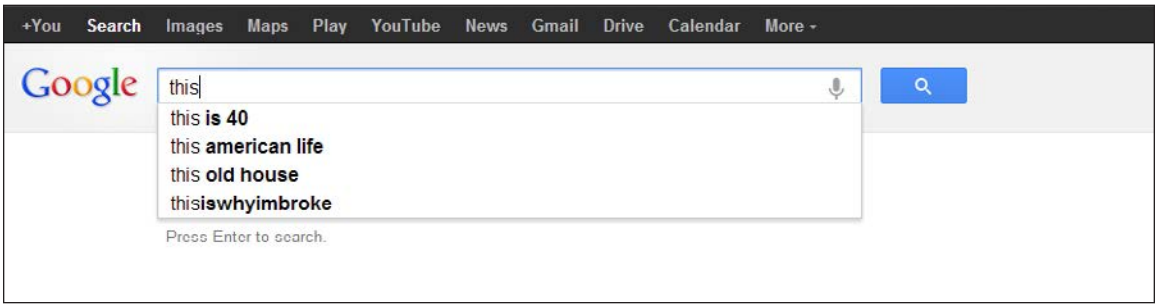

Figure 1.1 Autocomplete example

- *Search as you type*
  In 2010, Google introduced Google Instant, a search enhancement that shows results as you type. As soon as you start typing your search terms into the search box, Google brings up possible results based upon the first letters you type, as shown in figure 1.2. As you type more, the results will change to match what you've now typed. Once you see results that match what you need, you can stop typing and start browsing your results. Basically, Google Instant speeds up your search time and gets you your results a few seconds quicker. If you don't want to use Google Instant, you can turn it off. After you have your search results, click the gear icon in the upper right corner of the results and choose "Search Settings." You can choose to show Google Instant predictions "only when your computer is fast enough," "always show Instant results," or "never show Instant results."

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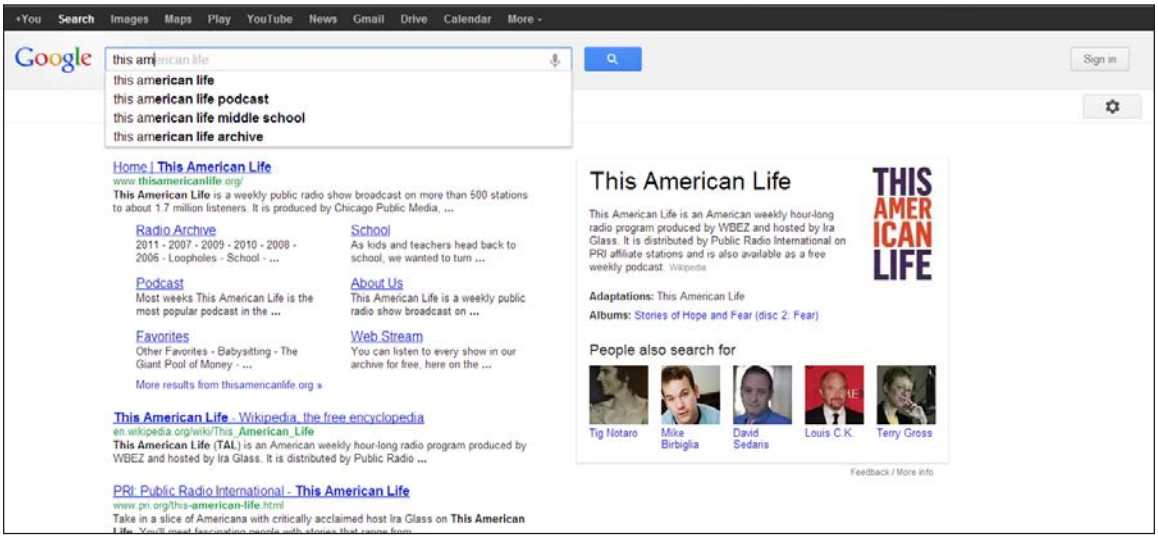

Figure 1.2 Search as you type

- *Voice search*
  With an attached microphone, you can speak your search, rather than typing it. Click the mic icon in the Google Chrome search bar and start talking (figure 1.3). This is one of those features that's available only when you're using the Google Chrome browser.

- *Next/Previous page*
  If the web page or information you're looking for is not on the first page of search results, you can click "Next" at the bottom of the page to see more results (figure 1.4). Remember, the further into the results pages you get, the less relevant the results may become.

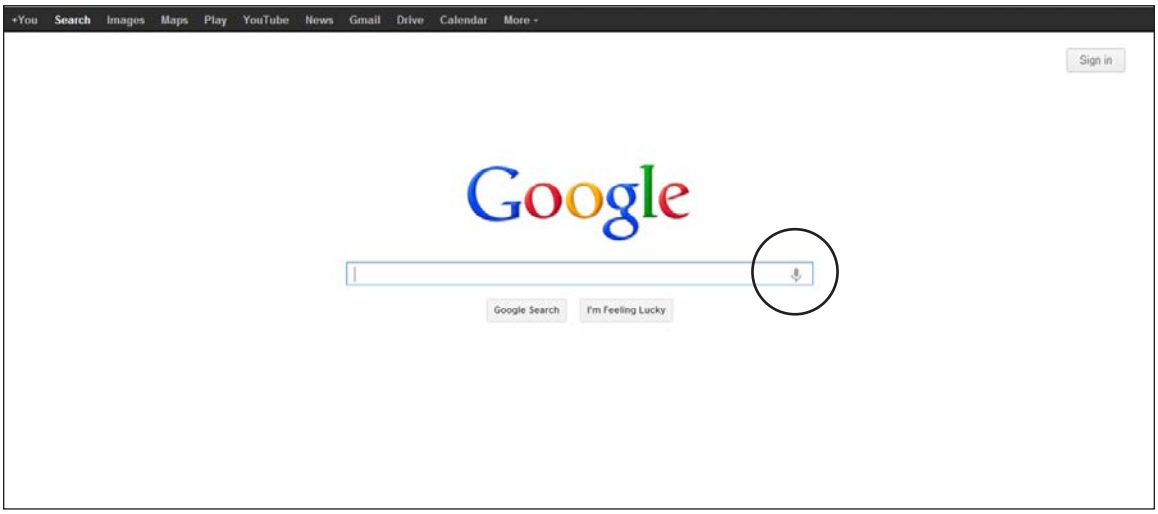

Figure 1.3 Speak your search in Chrome

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Figure 1.4 Next/Previous page links

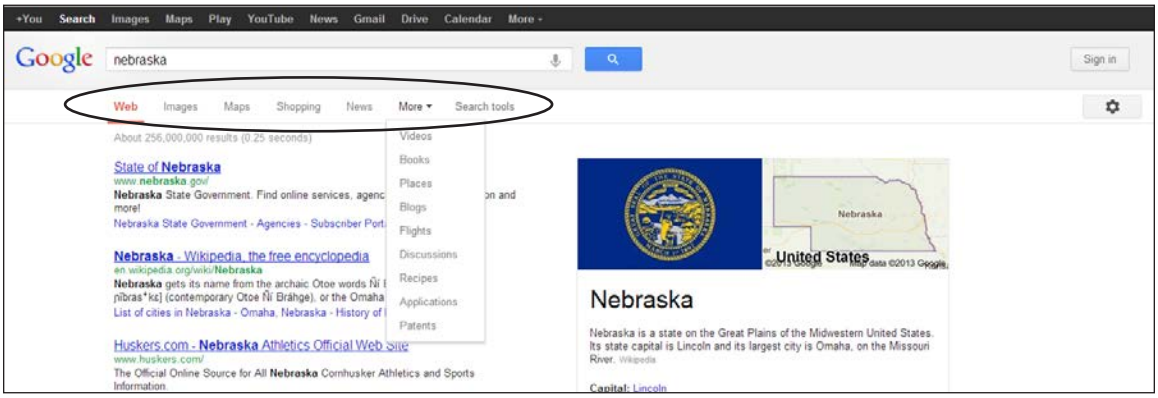

Figure 1.5 Search by result type links

- *Result types*
  You can limit your search results to a particular type of content on the top above your search results: Web, Images, Maps, Shipping, Books, and so on. Click "More" to see additional types (figure 1.5).

- *Searching Google+*
  In the past you would use a + before a keyword word to require it. Today, all keywords are automatically considered required. Only use a + sign when you want to search for content within Google+ (figure 1.6).

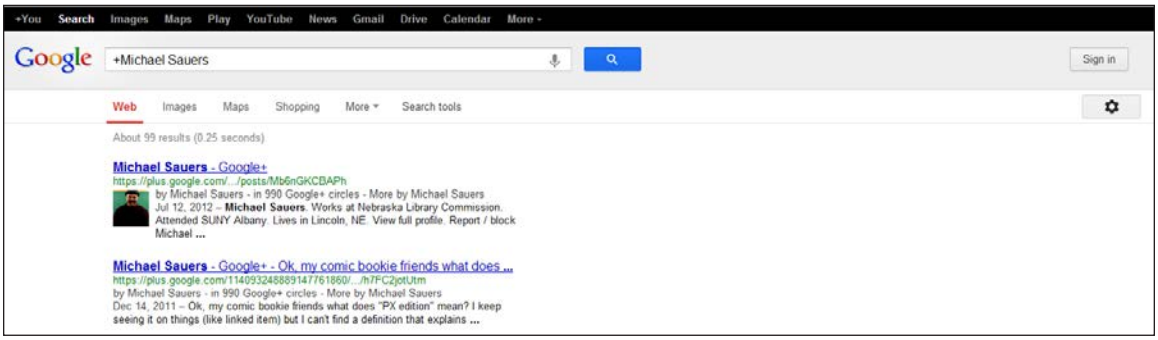

Figure 1.6 A search for *+Michael Sauers*

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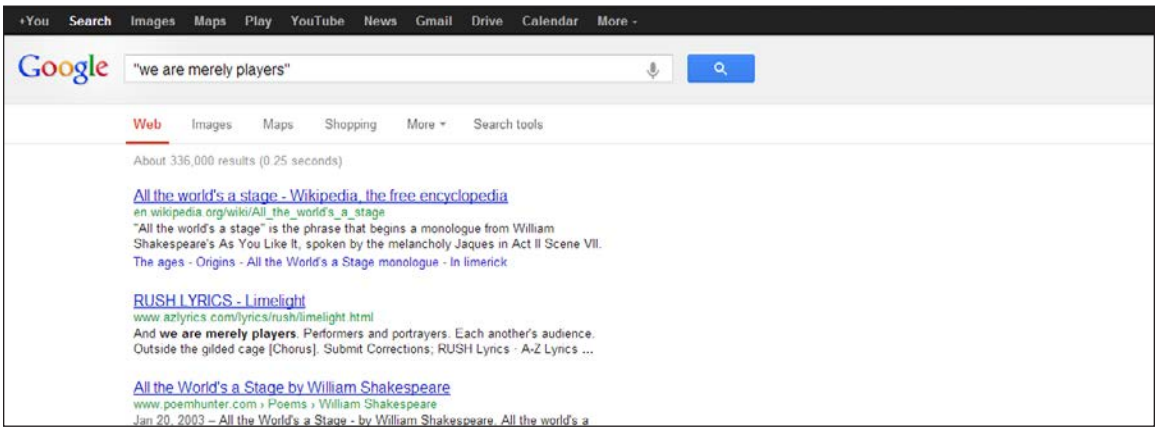

Figure 1.7 Example of exact phrase search results

- *Quotes for phrases*
  To search for an exact phrase, put it in quotes (figure 1.7).

- *Capitalization*
  Capitalization doesn't matter; *This* is the same as *ThiS*.

- *Special characters*
  Most special characters are ignored; ©, for example.

- *Word order*
  To increase the relevance of search results, Google does pay attention to the order in which you enter your search terms. The difference is shown in figures 1.8 and 1.9.

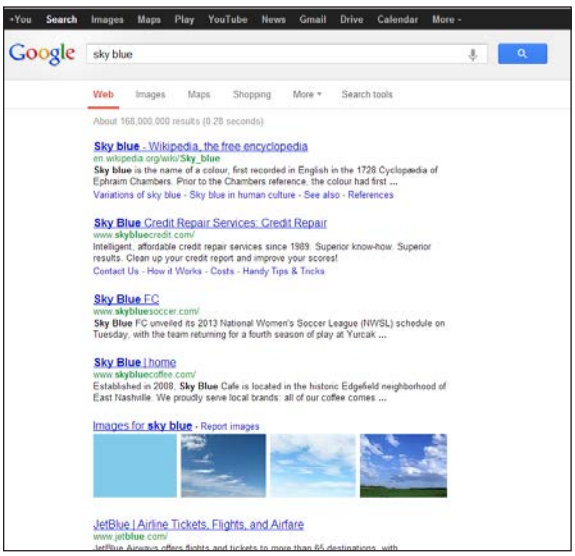

Figure 1.8 Results for *sky blue*

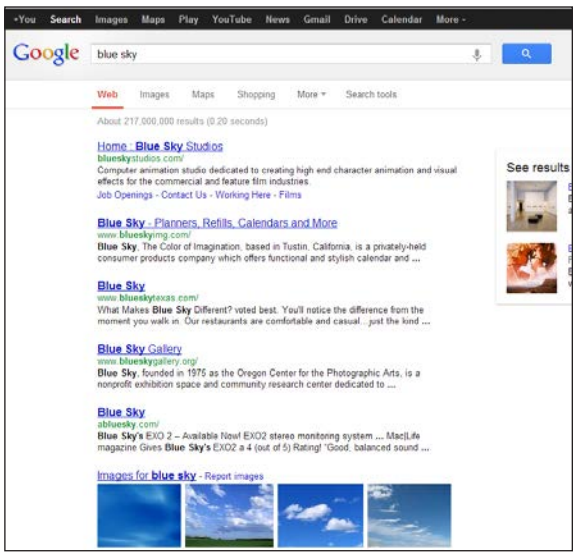

Figure 1.9 Results for *blue sky*

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SEARCH OPERATORS

Google search operators can be used to focus your search. Here we will detail the common operators. In each of the following chapters, you will learn the operators specific to that chapter's type of searching. All these options are available to you when you do your basic search, but you need to know the syntax necessary to access them. If you go to an Advanced Search screen, you just fill out the fields you wish to use and click the "Advanced Search" button.

The first section of an Advanced Search form, "Find pages with . . . ," is designed to find web pages that have the following:

- *All these words*
  This field works as a Boolean "AND." Every word in this field will be considered in the search.

- *This exact word or phrase*
  This field is used in place of the standard quotation marks to form a phrase. All words in this field will be considered in the order given.

- *Any of these words*
  This field works as a Boolean "OR." Any word in this field will be considered in the search, but only any one word of the list need be considered.

- *None of these words*
  This field works as a Boolean "NOT" (AND NOT). Words in this field will be explicitly excluded from consideration in the results list.

- *Numbers ranging from*
  Separate numbers by two periods (with no spaces) to see results that contain numbers in a given range of things like dates, prices, and measurements. For example, if you're looking for reviews of digital cameras costing between $200 and $300, you could enter those values here.

You may have noticed that our wording is not exactly standard when it comes to explaining these items. Typically when describing a Boolean operator, such as "AND," one would say that both words "must appear in the result." However, based on how Google's search algorithm works, at times you can require a word to be present—but that word will not appear in the result. Therefore, we needed to say that the words "will be considered in the search," as opposed to the more standard "must appear" language.

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More Search Options

The final section on the Advanced Search page, "You can also . . . ," has links to other search types, which work independently of one another and anything else you may do on this page.

FIND PAGES THAT ARE SIMILAR TO, OR LINK TO, A URL

You can use special search operators to find pages that are similar to or link to a specific URL. For example, let's say we're looking for the websites of other libraries in our area. We know that the URL for our home library is http://www.lincolnlibraries.org/, so we use the "related" operator and enter *related:lincolnlibraries.org* into the Google search box, and receive the results shown in figure 1.10.

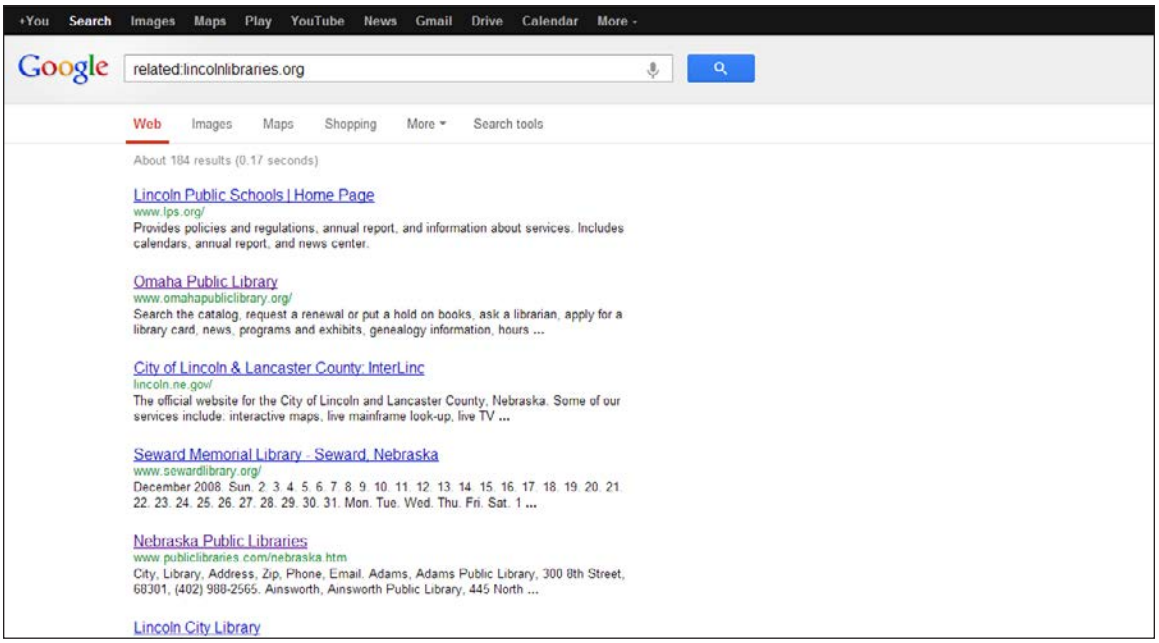

Figure 1.10 Similar pages search for *lincolnlibraries.org*

As you can see from the results, we've been presented with a list of other libraries and library-like institutions in Nebraska and surrounding states. The list is not geographically limited, but generally the farther down the list we go, the farther out into the rest of the state the libraries are located.

The "link:" operator gives you a list of results to pages linked to the URL that you entered. For example, if we'd like to know what websites link back to a particular site, we would enter *link:nlc.nebraska.gov* into the Google search box. Figure 1.11 shows the results.

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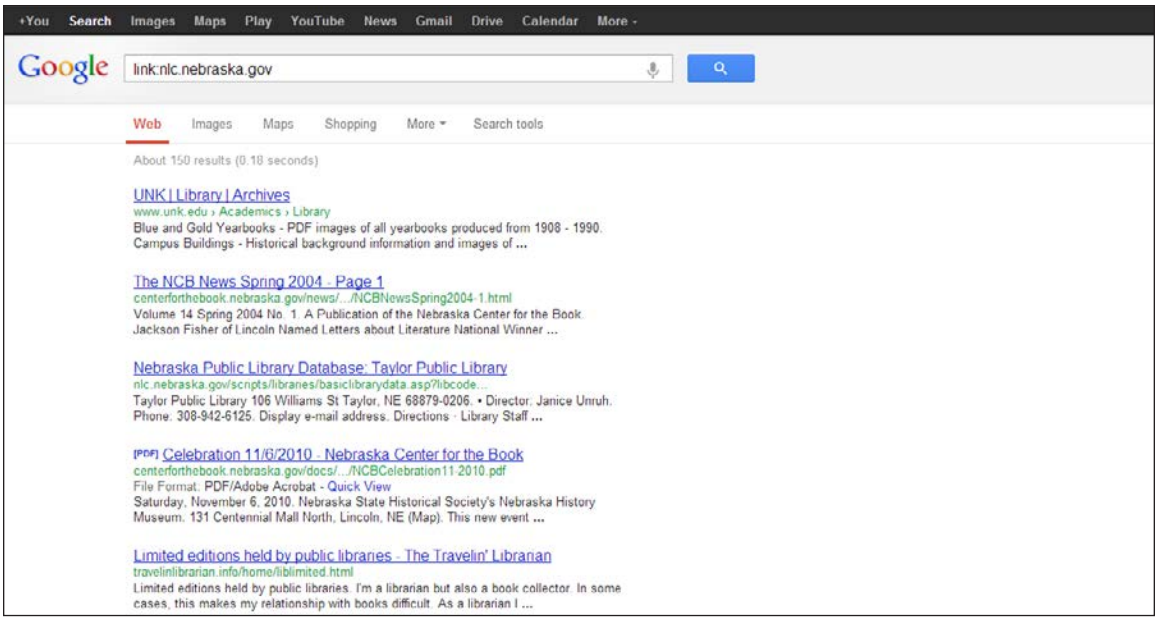

Figure 1.11 Pages that link to *nlc.nebraska.gov*

Be aware that the "link:" operator will search only for pages that link to the exact URL that you enter. Thus, for the previous example, you will get results that link only to that web page but not to any other page on that website. To see links to any other page on the site, you would use *link:nlc.nebraska.gov/ncompasslive*, for example.

You can also "Search pages you've visited," if you are logged into your Google account. Since that is not something that you would generally do when helping your patrons, we do not cover that option in this book.

If the Advanced Search options aren't finding what you need, you can "Use operators in the search box." This is a more complex way of doing most of the searches that are available to you on the Advanced Search page. There is a list of these, with examples, from this link at the bottom of the Advanced Search page.

Search Settings

The Search Settings page is where you can customize your preferences in Google search. Changing any of these settings means you are changing them indefinitely for the computer you are using. So, if you are on a computer that is used by more than one person, you may want to consider your changes carefully. By signing in to Google, you can have these settings affect your own account as opposed to the particular computer. To reinstate your customized settings, just log in to your Google account.

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There are multiple access points to your settings. The last option on the Advanced Search page is to "Customize your search settings"; you can go to http://www.google.com/preferences, or after you have done a search, you can click the gear icon in the upper right corner of the results page and choose "Search settings." To finalize any changes you make on these screens, click on the "Save" button at the bottom of the screen.

On the left side of the screen, you will see that there are three categories on the Search Settings page (figure 1.12): Search results, Languages, and Location. In the Search results category, you have the following options:

- *SafeSearch filters*
  SafeSearch is Google's technology for filtering out potentially offensive content. This option allows you to change your browser settings to help eliminate adult content from your search results. By default, the SafeSearch filter is disabled. To enable SafeSearch, click the "Filter explicit results" check box. This will filter sexually explicit video and images from Google Search result pages, as well as results that might link to explicit content. To disable the SafeSearch filter, uncheck the "Filter explicit results" option. Please be aware that no filter is perfect. Even Google says that "we do our best to keep SafeSearch as up-to-date and

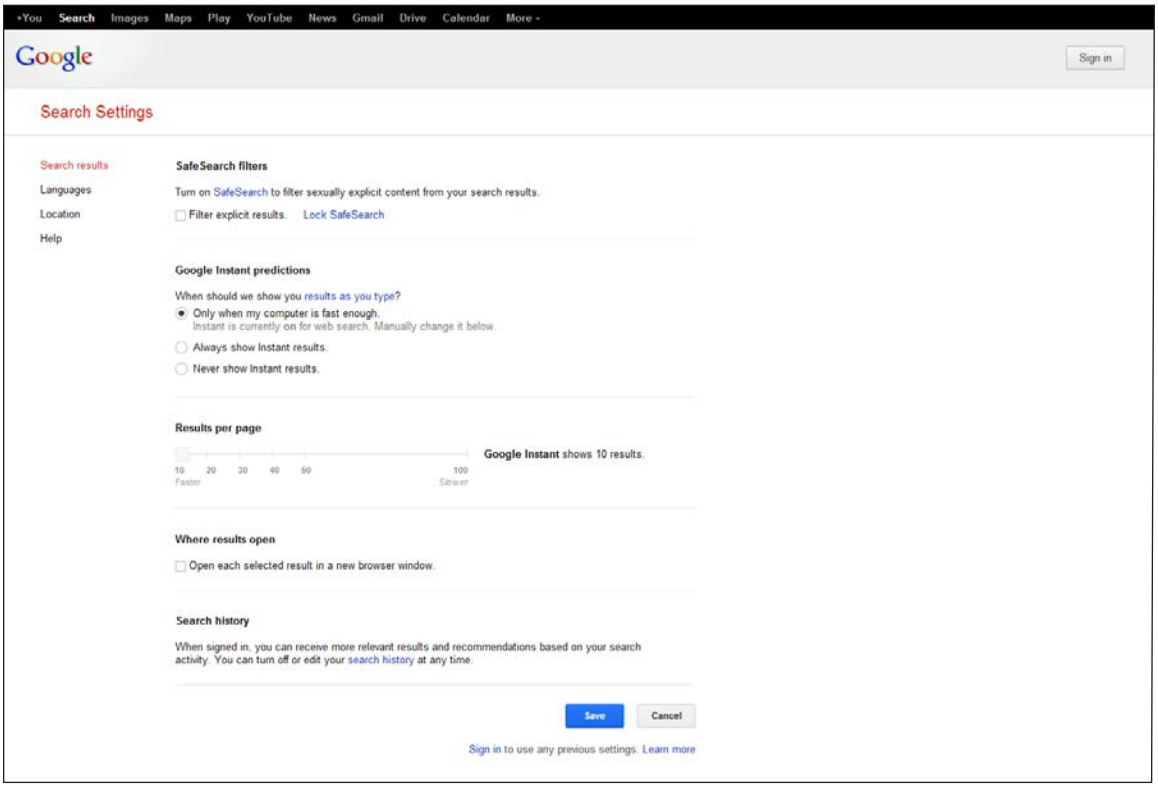

Figure 1.12 Google's Search Settings page

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comprehensive as possible, but inappropriate sites will sometimes slip through the cracks." Also, this is not a replacement for any filtering software you may be considering installing in your library. Anyone can easily get around this filter by coming back to this page and changing the setting.

- *Google Instant predictions*
  Also discussed earlier in this chapter, this is where you can choose to show Google Instant predictions "only when your computer is fast enough," "always show Instant results," or "never show Instant results."

- *Results per page*
  Here you can set how many results you would like per screen. The default is 10, but if you would like more, you can change this to 20, 30, 40, 50, or 100.

- *Where results open*
  When this option is selected, the result you click on will be opened in a new window or tab (if your browser supports tabbed browsing). This will allow you to open multiple results at the same time instead of having to move back and forth between results and the Google results list. If you are not comfortable working with multiple browser windows or tabs, checking this option is not recommended.

- The final two options, blocking unwanted results and web history, are available only when you are logged in to your Google account, and thus will not be covered in this book.

The second category on the Search Settings page is Languages (figure 1.13).

- *For Google text*
  Here you may choose whichever of the available languages you wish to use for Google's interface. Choosing an option here will "permanently" change Google's interface for your computer. From this point forward (until you change it again), when you go to www.google.com, you will be presented with the language you've selected.

- *For Search results*
  The default setting for Google's search language is "Search for pages written in any language." This instructs Google to retrieve all relevant results regardless of the language the result is written in. By changing this setting to "Prefer pages written in these language(s):" you can then select one or more of the 46 languages listed to limit your results. Here

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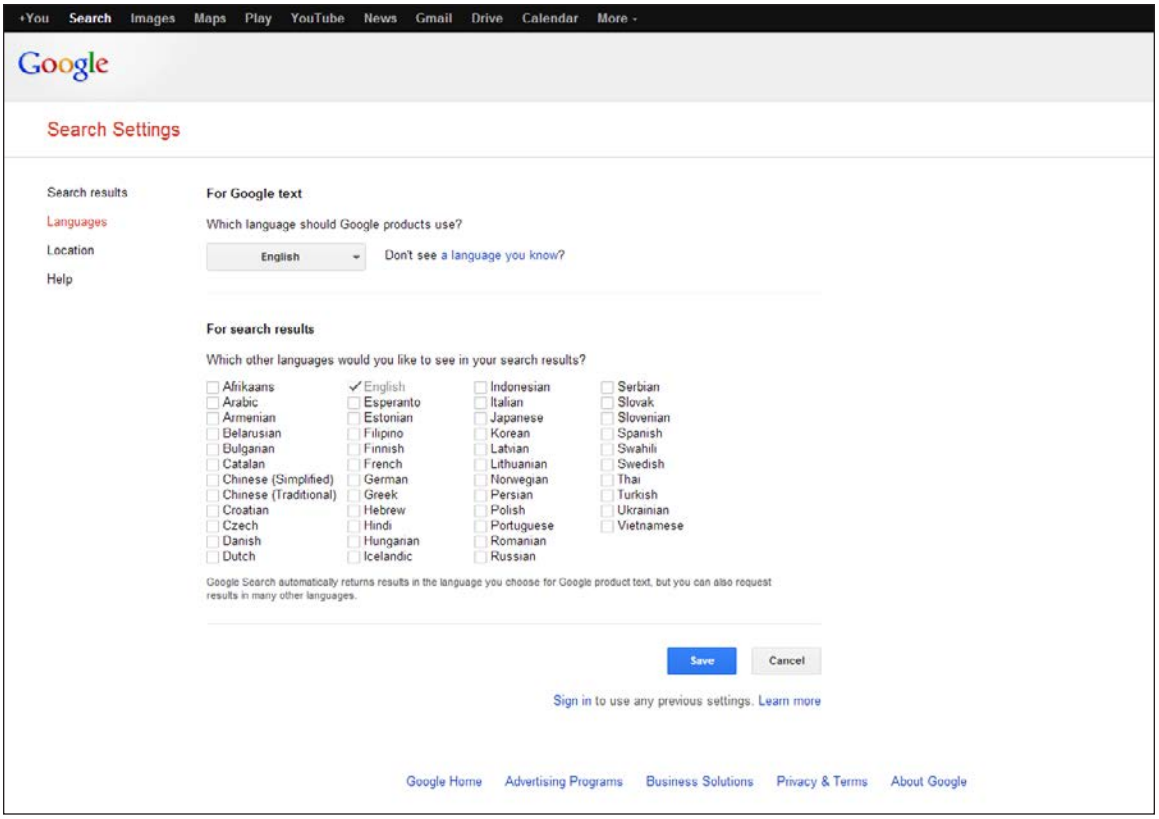

Figure 1.13 Google's Languages Settings page

you can limit your results to more than one language. However, you must remember that by choosing this option, Google will remember this limitation until you come back and change it again.

The last category on the Search Settings page is Location (figure 1.14). This is where you can chose the location you would like Google to use for Google Search, Google Maps, and other Google products. You can enter a street

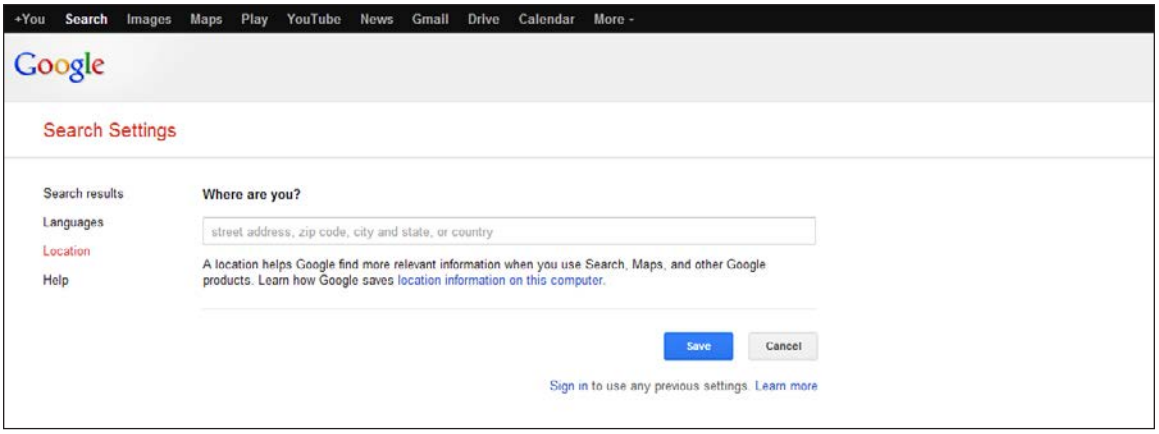

Figure 1.14 Google's Location Setting page

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address, zip code, city and state, or country. By default, Google's location detection technology will automatically set a location for you using your IP address, but you can change that location to anyplace you like and then save it as your default location.

So, now that we've got the common items covered, let's get a little more specific and start searching.

NOTE

1. This is a bit of a simplification of how Google's "Page Rank" works, as today Google determines relevancy using literally hundreds of factors. However, it's a good enough explanation for our purposes.

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