What knowledge and skills do Baruch students need to thrive in the global economy?
Louise Klusek looks at that question through the lens of a business librarian in her paper “Doing Business Research: Google is not Enough.” Ms. Klusek recently retired as a business librarian in the Newman Library at Baruch College. With her permission, we are distributing her paper in this series. The paper is still very timely and relevant. Our goal is to share the paper with a broader audience as part of a discussion about pathways to promoting global awareness and information literacy in a digital world.

HOW GOOGLE WORKS
We all get advice from friends to “just Google it.” But when you are doing business research that might not be the best way to go.

We love the easy search and fast results that we get from Google, but what do we really know about how Google actually works? How, exactly, does Google select the first 10 items displayed from hundreds of thousands of possible hits?

Google search is powered by an algorithm built on the concept of PageRank, named after Larry Page, one of the founders of Google. Citation counts, originally designed to rank academic papers by the number of citations received from other authors, is the concept behind PageRank which has been extended by Google to cover the much wider domain of the web.

But an even bigger factor in Google’s algorithm comes from advertising, the source of Google’s profits. We’ve heard of ‘search-engine optimization,’ tools that companies use to bring their websites and ads to the top of a results page. But do you know that one of the key factors in today’s Google algorithm is the click through rate which Google calculates by counting the number of clicks a site gets, as well as the time users spend on the site? This might seem to reflect a vote of confidence in the usefulness of a particular website, but we might also think of it as merely a proxy for popularity, not for authority.
To be fair, we should note that Google says that their algorithm also considers over 200 other inputs, some of them based on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the form of their ‘RankBrain’ factor. They employ these to understand new or unusual search queries. You might recognize some of these factors. For example, you know that when you sign in to use Google, your search history is tracked in order to build a record of your preferences. What you might not recognize is that this personalization of results means that you could be working in a “filter bubble’ where Google feeds you the results they think you want based on your personal search history. This means that if you are researching a controversial issue you will see results supporting your point-of-view, not others. It also means that if you are working on a team project, you and your fellow team members could see vastly different results.

Geolocation is another element of the Google algorithm. Google knows where you are and ranks websites from that location higher in its results. This is great if you are looking for a nearby restaurant, but it can skew what you see when you look for news on an international issue or a foreign company.

GOOGLE CONTENT

Now let’s consider a bigger issue when you are doing business research with Google—the content that Google provides. Since Google indexes only the public web, its search results are limited to “free” websites. These include commercial websites (dot-com), the websites of universities (dot-edu), government websites (dot-gov), and various associations, nonprofits, and research organizations (dot-org). In addition, Google searches blogs, discussion groups, videos, publically available images, and more. Even so, researchers estimate that this accounts of only about 4% of all web content.

What are you missing when you search by means of Google? You will find no reference password-protected sites, sites behind paywalls, or sites restricted to members-only. Nor will you find proprietary information, that is information owned by publishers and sold by subscription—which includes most scholarly research available on the web. Articles from scholarly journals such as the Journal of Finance or the Harvard Business Review are not free on the web. Nor is some of the best research on companies and industries, which comes from Standard & Poor’s, Fitch, Moody’s and similar sources. Also not found on Google are bank analysts’ reports, or stock reports from Morningstar or Value Line. This is why business databases from the library are so important for your research.

To gain wide access to business new sources, do not rely on Google. Some major business newspapers exist behind paywalls, including The Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times. In 2017 The Wall Street Journal opted out of Google News because of Google’s requirement that they allow users up to ten free articles a month. They lost their news rankings but gained subscribers. Databases available at the Baruch Library like the Factiva news database offer you free, full text access to the best business journals, magazines, and newspapers.

To gain access to the sources used day-in and day-out by business professionals, visit the Baruch Library online and use our business databases.

If you need help choosing a database, go to the Library website and chat online with us at “Ask a Librarian”.

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