

# Digging Deeper with Google™

IN THE APRIL/MAY 2006 issue of *Internet Genealogy*, we shared a range of basic, but powerful, techniques available in Google and other popular Internet search engines. As demonstrated through the examples in that article (available for download at [www.internet-genealogy.com](http://www.internet-genealogy.com)), these search techniques — all free — can dramatically reduce the time spent searching for relevant clues specific to your family history. Those tips and techniques will serve as your foundation as you continue to “build your house” using more advanced features freely available to anyone with access to the Internet.

## SEARCH WHILE YOU SLEEP

As you become more proficient in the use of multiple-keyword queries, the use of special operators such as “AND”, “OR” and the use of quotations, you will succeed in reducing the volume of query results from millions to a more manageable number. There are two factors, however, we should all keep in mind when surfing the World Wide Web.

First, the Internet is the most dynamic publishing medium in existence, changing and expanding with each page modified, or added, anywhere in the world, by anyone.

Second, Google and others are hard at work developing technology to better fully index this growing medium for our benefit. Both these factors work in our favor and should remind us to do one simple thing — submit the same search every month to see what new information may have surfaced since the last time we checked. Just as you labor over the minute details of your ancestors’ lives, so too does someone, somewhere, spend their time on an adjacent family, location or event that will cause your paths to cross at some point in the future.

Take a moment to think about the most important family lines that you frequently research. Now imagine that each morning you started your day with a 15-minute session on Google, submitting the exact same search requests. If your queries are specific enough, you would certainly turn up something new on occasion and might

even find a clue that could help you break through one of your brickwalls — yes, we all have them, even me!

Now, as great as this may already sound, it gets even better. Google provides a service called **News Alerts**

## SETTING UP GOOGLE NEWS ALERTS

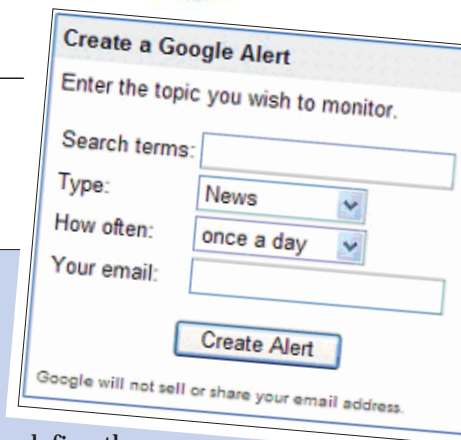
1. Before sitting at your computer, jot down the topics you are interested in searching for on a regular basis and be prepared to define them as you would a well-crafted Google search.
2. Visit the Google home page at [www.google.com](http://www.google.com).
3. Above the search box, click on the link for News (fourth from the left).
4. On the left side of your screen, you will see an icon of a small envelope and the words “News Alert”.
5. Take a moment to read the brief text on the Welcome page, then use the box on the right half of your screen to define what you want to search for and how often you wish to receive results.
6. After providing your e-mail and clicking the “Create Alert” button, Google will send a verification e-mail to the address you specified to ensure you are the legitimate intended recipient of these Alerts.
7. Check your e-mail inbox for a message from “Google Alerts”, then click on the first link to verify the News Alert request you just created.

**Search Terms:** Use this box to define your search the same way you would when submitting a standard Google query. Don’t forget to use your newfound knowledge about basic queries, as the same rules apply here. (Example: A News Alert for “genealogy” will yield many results, but few may be of interest. If you’re searching for your family name from a particular village, you may wish to use: *ditoto OR ditota +campobasso*)

**Type:** Google provides different types of Alerts including News, Web, News & Web and Groups. For those just starting out, I recommend selecting News & Web. This will tell Google to monitor news postings as well as content found on web pages matching your search criteria.

**How Often:** The options here are self explanatory; Once A Day, As It Happens and Once A Week. As you familiarize yourself with News Alerts, I recommend selecting Once A Day. You’ll be able to refine your definitions and, depending upon the volume of results, may choose to keep this option or change it to suit your preference.

**Your E-mail:** Specify a valid e-mail where you would like notifications sent. This can be updated in the future if you change your e-mail address.



which lets you define your most important queries once, and then puts Google to work around the clock to alert you when something new has become available. When one or more items appear to match your search criteria as defined, Google delivers an alert to your e-mail inbox with a headline and brief summary. No advertising, no unsolicited messages, just a clear, concise e-mail outlining the results of your query as defined by you. Now, we can all truly search for our ancestors day and night, but not have to sacrifice our sleep to do it.

Establishing one or more News Alerts is simple and you can follow the step-by-step instructions featured in the box on the previous page. Keep in mind, however, that News Alerts function the same way as a Google search which you submit manually. If you establish an Alert definition using only your surname, you will likely receive a large volume of Alerts with no relevance to your genealogy, causing frustration and time wasted instead of time saved. This will be especially true if you are researching a more common surname. Be sure to use the simple techniques described in my previous article so you can quickly filter out unwanted results from your News Alerts.

### SEARCHING A SINGLE SITE

Another useful command that should be in every genealogist's bag of tricks is the SITE command. This enables you to harness the power of the Google search engine, but focus that power on a single

website. If, for example, you find a particular website to be of interest and have saved it as one of your favorites, you can use Google to search just that site to see what other secrets it might hold for you.

This can be especially helpful for sites dedicated to either a particular surname or geographic location. Some sites represent the collective efforts of many local volunteers posting headstone inscriptions, vital records, biographies, obituaries and other content of great interest to far-away online researchers. By using this single command, you can direct Google to scan the collection of pages that make up a specific website, then view the list of resulting pages to more quickly determine if they are relevant to your search.

In the example below, you can see the three-part syntax for using this command:

1. Begin with the word *site*, followed immediately by a colon: *site*:
2. Immediately following the colon, type the address of the website you wish to search.
3. Placing one space after the website name, enter the keywords using the same techniques you would if submitting a general search from the Google home page.

In this particular example, Google is being asked to search the site [www.greaterwaterbury.com](http://www.greaterwaterbury.com) (a website dedicated to this central Connecticut region) for any occurrence of the surname Judd. Google identifies eight individual pages on this site containing a reference to this surname. The results are presented in the same format as you have become used to seeing for general Google queries.

Now, let's combine two new features I've just described to demonstrate how they can easily lead to a breakthrough in your research with very little effort on your part. If you had established a Google News Alert regarding your interest in the city of Waterbury, Connecticut, you would, at some point, learn about the website used in the example above as new content is posted to the site on a weekly basis by volunteers.

If family legend has it that your Great-Great-Great-Great-Grandpa Hotchkiss was, at one

No advertising, just a clear, concise e-mail outlining the results of your query as defined by you.

Using a combination of Google features can reward you with unexpected results, possibly a photograph of an ancestor you have never seen.

The screenshot shows the website [www.greaterwaterbury.com](http://www.greaterwaterbury.com) with a navigation menu and a sidebar. The main content area is titled "Waterbury CT Mayors" and features four portraits of mayors. Below the portraits is a table listing the mayors from 1853 to 1859.

| No. | Office of Mayor        | From        | To          | Affiliation   |
|-----|------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1.  | Jules Hotchkiss        | 10 Jun 1853 | 10 Jun 1854 | .             |
| 2.  | David T. Bishop        | 10 Jun 1854 | 11 Jun 1855 | .             |
| 3.  | George W. Benedict     | 11 Jun 1855 | 09 Jun 1856 | People's      |
| 4.  | John W. Webster        | 09 Jun 1856 | 08 Jun 1857 | Regular Union |
| 5.  | Henry F. Fish (1)      | 08 Jun 1857 | 04 Oct 1858 | Democrat      |
| .   | Nathan Oskeman Jr. (2) | 04 Oct 1858 | 13 Jun 1859 | .             |

time, the Mayor of the city of Waterbury, you could submit the following search after discovering this site:

**site: www.greaterwaterbury.com hotchkiss +mayor**

This would search for only those pages on this site that contained the words *Hotchkiss* and *mayor*. The results would present two listings, both providing specific details to verify your family legend — and in this case, you would also be rewarded with a photograph of your prominent ancestor!

## BREAKING THROUGH THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

If you are one of the many family history enthusiasts in North America with ancestral ties to Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal or other non-English speaking countries, you may be surprised to learn how Google can help you read foreign web pages and correspond with others in their native tongue.

Now, for those of you who may be fluent in another language besides English, I'm sure you'll be quick to find fault with some of the translations and interpretations made by the automated Google tools, but consider how helpful these same tools can be for the rest of us. Last year, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a detailed e-mail from a researcher in Italy. The message, however, was written in Italian and the uncommon surname was one of the few recognizable words. Using cut, paste and Google Language Tools, the text of this message revealed a second-cousin researching the same family line, but his quest was to determine what became of the family after they departed from Naples bound for the Port of New York in 1904.

The above story is just one example of how Google Language Tools can be used by genealogists. Accessed by clicking on the small "Language Tools" link from the Google home page, there are four main components of this service:

1. Language and/or Country Specific Search.
2. Translation.
3. Foreign Language Interface (over 100).
4. International Google Sites (nearly 150).

While each feature is certainly worth exploring if you have an interest in international genealogy, this article will focus only on the first two.

### 1. Language and/or Country Specific Search

This first tool enables a user to submit a Google query using the standard search techniques described earlier, but limiting results to only those pages written in a specific foreign language or hosted in a certain country.

In the example below, the user limits results to pages written in Italian and located in Italy. The search is for a surname with either of two variant



spellings "*di tota*" OR "*di toto*" (note: the quotations are used to indicate this is a single-text string with an embedded space, not two separate words "di" and "tota") AND *campobasso*, the name of the village where the family is known to have lived.

Although nearly all results listed will be in Italian, the Google results page includes a "Translate This Page" link which translates the content of the page from Italian to English. More so than other aspects of Google, using this feature will require some patience and trial-and-error, but if you have the time and willingness to learn, you may once again be rewarded for your efforts.

### 2. Translation

If you already have some text written in a foreign language, this simple tool can help unravel some of the mystery hidden in the documents of our grandparents or other ancestors. Whether it's a simple caption written on the back of a photo from overseas or the formal language of a foreign vital records certificate, you can use the Google Translation tool for a quick (and free) conversion to English. There are just three easy steps to use this tool — first, type or paste the text you wish to translate into the box (as shown on the next page); second, use the drop-down menu to select one of nearly 20 translations you wish to perform and third, click the "Translate" button.

**You can limit your Google search to a specific language, or to websites hosted in a particular country.**

Although nearly all results listed will be in Italian, the Google results page includes a "Translate this page" link.

in many cases, you'll be able to back your way into finding the name and address that connect to that number (syntax is (XXX) XXX-XXXX — obviously the "X" is replaced with the area code and number you have on hand).

#### FINDING GENERAL THINGS LOCALLY

As genealogists, we are often challenged by not knowing the specifics for a geographic area where our ancestors may have lived. Google has a feature called "Google Local" — accessed from a link above the main search box —

Google will quickly perform the translation and provide both the original text and a translated interpretation for your review. In the example, shown right, an English-language message was translated into Italian for posting to an Italian genealogy message board.

The examples described in this article are sure to become favorite tools for your online research.



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#### GOOGLE QUICK TIPS

The examples described earlier in this article are sure to become favorite tools for your online research, but we'll close with two "Quick Tips" that you can use both for genealogy and your every-day quest to find things online.

#### PHONE AND ADDRESS SEARCH

There is certainly no shortage of sites on the Internet where you can search for a phone number. As you might expect, Google has done an outstanding job of integrating this function with address, mapping and other services. I will describe this feature, but will not provide any specific examples that would require publishing someone's phone or address information.

If you're searching for a person's address and/or phone number, try simply typing their name and city into Google. Often, this will yield the phone, address and links to detailed maps and driving directions (the syntax is: first name, last name, city).

If you find a phone number on a scrap of paper, but can't recall who it belongs to, try typing it into Google and

which provides a powerful means to search general topics on a local basis.

If, for example, you are conducting research for ancestors from Oswego, New York, but have never been there and have no familiarity with the area, you can simply search for "cemeteries near Oswego, NY" and Google will provide the names, addresses and phone numbers — as well as a corresponding map so you can see the proximity of each listing to the area you are searching.

Another useful trick for Google Local — if your travels are taking you to a city and you expect to have some free time, you may submit a general query such as "genealogy near Hartford, CT" and Google will provide a listing of area businesses and attractions that relate to your subject of interest. And just because this is an article about genealogy, there's nothing wrong with using this feature to help you find hotels, restaurants and other attractions in that same city you plan to visit.

Happy hunting!

