

April 6, 2004

The Brave New World of Google

Today I got an e-mail from a Turkish student of International Relations who wanted to know who Denny was. He wrote:

Dear Denny,

I visited your web site the softwaretimes.com accidentally while I was reading an article by Immanuel Wallerstein. I came up with a phrase "ponzi game" which I had never heard till then. I made a search on google and click on the tittle "Banks? Ponzi game!" to find out what that phrase means. I read the article with astonishment for I have never rack my brain on how does banking work...Anyway, I took a look at your site and I am a bit confused. There are many articles on different issues, mostly political as far as I understand. but the name of the site gives an idea of a site that is about computers:) Then I wondered who is this Denny guy? Again I did a search on google but could not find any stuff like a cv. If you do not mind I would like to know your academic background. It seems like there are a lot of articles about the issues of my interest. I am a IR graduate and currently a master student of IR. Thanks in advance.

Cheers,

I was highly intrigued by this e-mail. Who as this *Immanuel Wallerstein*? Why would my essay "*Banks? Ponzi game!*" be so prominent in a Google search that a Turkish graduate student of International Relations would want to know who Denny was? To start my research I Googled *Immanuel Wallerstein* and discovered that the "IR" in the email did not mean Industrial Relations but International Relations. Then I Googled *Ponzi game* and now I was both astonished and overjoyed. There are approximately 12,300 web pages with the phrase *Ponzi game*. My essay was number six on the first page. That, in itself, was quite astonishing seeing that I never did anything at all to optimize this page. I wrote the piece in January 2001 as part of a thread on the Gilder Technology Forum

about the Fed, a long time before I was conscious of search engine optimization (SEO). But the biggest surprise, the most astonishing surprise, was that my essay shared this Google front page with learned papers from the Economics Department of the University of Pennsylvania and the Osaka University Institute of Social and Economic Research Association; the Brookings Institution; The New York Times; MIT; and the Wharton School Rodney L. White Center for Financial Research.

WOW!

Imagine for a moment the world before Google (BG?). What were the chances that I, a school dropout who never had a formal university education, would be sharing a podium or a forum with the learned institutions mentioned above. A snow ball's chance in hell comes to mind. Before Google information was compiled into directories, dictionaries, text books and encyclopedias by learned people who relied not so much on the content as on the renown, authority and hierarchy of the author. For example, in the world of science, to be somebody you have to publish in a learned journal. You can bet your last dime that no self respecting journal would accept a paper from a school dropout. The world before Google relied on authority and hierarchy.

In the Brave New World of Google content can be read and evaluated. Publishing on the front page no longer depends on the authority and hierarchy of the author but on the actual content of the piece being published. Granted, the spiders and robots -- the ranking algorithms actually -- are not yet very smart but they can only improve.

Many of our human institutions are designed to keep interlopers out. Most often the prima facie reason for these institutions is the protection of the consuming public. In the case of medicine they do tend to keep the witch doctors at bay. But there are many cases where the protection afforded by the guilds is not for the consumers but for the providers of whatever service the guild is about. How does the actors guild protect the consumer? How does a trade union protect a consumer? These guilds are specifically designed to protect the members of the guild by keeping nonmembers out, unable to get jobs, or in the case of academia, unable to publish.

Clearly the search engines like Google will thrive and make fortunes for their owners when these search engines best satisfy the needs of the consuming public, the people searching for information on the web. Google does not get rewarded for hiding or ignoring a piece by an obscure nonentity. On the contrary, Google's ability to find nuggets of gold based on content alone irregardless of the fame or rank of the author is a boon to the searcher. The fact that the search is based on real content and not on the renown, authority and hierarchy of the autor is, in my opinion, a great step forward. The ETA of intelligent and spiritual machines might be closer than Ray Kurzweil thinks.

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[Search Google for 'Ponzi game'](#)

[Google results page for 'Ponzi game' at the time of this writing \(pdf\)](#)

[Denny's Curriculum Vitae](#)