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Business

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Posted on Tue, Dec. 07, 2004

ON COMPUTERS

The latest findings on online search efforts

Set up news alerts and seek services as well as products

By JOY AND BOB SCHWABACH
Columnists

One of **Google's** neatest tools is the Google Alert. Just go to www.google.com, click on More, then click on Alerts. Type in anything you want to hear about.

You can choose to receive these alerts once a day, once a week or as they happen. Joy typed "Wordsworth," selected News and received 10 items almost immediately. Wordsworth, who died in 1850, is still in the news as it turns out. She received alerts about a bookstore closing, quotes in newspapers, travel articles, etc.

There's a similar service from **NewsGator**, which is found at www.newsgator.com. You can track news topics, sports results, editorials, blogs, etc., across many sites. This used to be exclusively a paid service, but recently became free for searches through major sources like BBC News, *The New York Times*, ESPN, MSNE *Rolling Stone* and popular blogs. More extensive searches still carry a charge.

Nextag (www.nextag.com) is a shopping site that lets you search for services as well as products. Some other search services do only products. This turned out to be a good service for ideas, as it suggested alternatives to what we were looking for.

Online shopping increases every year. **Yahoo** (www.yahoo.com) and **Froogle** (www.froogle.com) are the lesser services. Interestingly enough, they do not all come up with the same products when you do a search on a general category. Our favorite search service for most things continues to be **Clusty** (www.clusty.com), the new incarnation of **Vivisimo**. (This is where we found a miniature plum tree for sale from South Africa.)

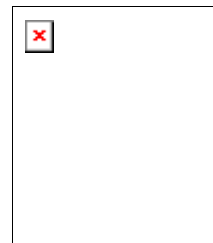
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We found a \$99 program that's similar to **FinePrint's** free PDF Factory.

Why would we bother with that, you ask, when you can get a perfectly good PDF (portable document format) f created for nothing? Well, you get more features. Actually, you get a lot more features. Let us begin.

The program is called ePrint, and it's from www.leadtools.com. You can take a file from any Windows program and convert it into any one of 140 file types. You can combine several files into one file, converting all of their separate formats into one. The PDF output can have embedded watermarks and encrypted files. You can get greater file compression for images, which means less transmission time and less cost for phone line time, if tl matters. We compressed a picture from 192k to 24k.

There is a built-in e-mail program that allows you to directly send new PDFs as attachments and print to multip printers at the same time.

We thought that ePrint was impressive. It was priced at \$83 at www.programmersparadise.com.

If you missed our earlier column on how to get PDF Factory and make PDF files for free, you can get it at www.fineprint.com. The free version puts a single-sentence line at the bottom of each page, saying the PDF w created with PDF Factory, but it is quite discreet. The program works great. The version without any tag line a bottom of the pages is \$50.

A particularly nice feature of PDF Factory for people with older computers is that it will run on Windows 95 witt problems. It also runs on Windows systems after 95.

Scanning 35 mm

There's still a demand for scanning 35 mm slides and negatives, and now you can do it at the professional lev for less than \$200.

The OpticFilm 7200 from **Plustek** is \$199 at www.plustek.com and can scan slides at 7200 x 7200 dots to the inch. That's roughly 52 million dots to the square inch and exceeds the resolution of most 35 mm film. Color dt is 48 bits per dot, both for input and output, which is easily enough to capture the most subtle gradations.

Plustek is known as a high-quality maker, and the OpticFilm 7200 won two photo magazine awards as soon a came out.

Musical games

Music Game International has put some of its games online for free.

All you have to do is go to www.interactiveclassics.com and click on Play. Then you have a choice of five gam that let you learn to distinguish the instruments of an orchestra while you're enjoying music by Vivaldi, Mozart Tchaikovsky. They're designed as samples for the full CDs you can buy, but they're much more than samples are quite enjoyable on their own.

Books

Business Cards: The Art of Saying Hello, by Mike Dorrian and Liz Farrelly; \$30 from **HarperCollins** (www.harpercollins.com). (We found it for \$20 at **Amazon.com**.)

This is without a doubt one of the strangest books we've ever reviewed. It has pictures of 1,000 business card some of them made of recycled subway tickets, punched metal, stitched fabric and laminated cutouts. The designs are sometimes bizarre, but nearly always eye-catching. There are only three short pages of text, with suggestions on how to create your own designs; the rest of the book is pictures of business cards.

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