# 21. Search Models and UIs for IR

INFO 202 - 10 November 2008

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#### **Plan for Today's Lecture**

The "Classical" Model of Search and the "Classical" UI for IR

Web-based Search

Best practices for UIs in query specification, query results, and query reformulation

# A Range of Information Needs

Citations to documents

Answers to specific questions

Comparison of similar items

Familiarization (browsing and "building upon")

Knowledge discovery / data mining

# Some General Usability Goals for IR Systems

From Shneiderman, Byrd, & Croft, Clarifying Search, DLIB Magazine, Jan 1997. www.dlib.org

Strive for Consistency

**Provide Shortcuts** 

Offer Informative Feedback

**Design for Closure** 

Provide Simple Error Handling

Permit Easy Reversal of Actions

Support User Control

Reduce Short-term Memory Load

#### The "Classical" IR System: Searching for Citations or Documents

Early in the digital era (1970s) large specialized bibliographic collections were created for academic articles, legal cases and opinions, news articles, etc.

The users of these systems were reference librarians, paralegals, journalists, and other professionals willing to be trained in using them

Since these systems predated the PC and graphical terminals, their user interfaces used "command lines"

The command languages were complex and powerful, typically supporting Boolean, adjacency, and term stemming operators

(PCR OR POLYMERASE(W)CHAIN(W)REACTION? OR DNA(W)SEQUENC?) AND (CANCER? OR PRECANCER? OR NEOPLASM? OR CARCINO?)

#### **The Classical Model of Search**

Assumes a "go to the library and use the IR system" approach, where the user is either a trained searcher or has a trained searcher acting as an intermediary actually doing the search

Assumes the information need remains the same throughout the search process

Goal is to maximize recall and precision simultaneously

The value is in the retrieved document set

#### **Processing Model in Classical Search**



#### **Query Specification in "Classic" Search UI**

# Challenges Posed by the "Classic" IR UI

Untrained users (e.g. with public access terminals in libraries) generally couldn't use these systems effectively on their own

But effective use is essential in narrow and specialized domains where high recall is mandated

#### **Classic Query Specification "Webified" -- 1998**

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#### Classic Source and Field Selection "Webified" -- 1998

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#### **Searching the Web**

The size and scope of the Web is vastly greater than any "classic" bibliographic or document collection

But the scope of what people search for is also vastly greatly than in classical IR systems

People expect to get information and documents, rather than just citations

# **Challenges Posed by Searching the Web**

UIs must accommodate differences among people in:

- Knowledge / life experience
- Cultural background and expectations
- Reading / scanning ability and style
- Methods of organizing and looking for things

UI functionality is constrained by heterogeneity of content (e.g., can't assume complete and consistent metadata or structure)

So what this means in practice is that the default web search UI is the simplest possible one: just a search box...

Additional challenges arise because people have multiple devices on which they want to search the Web and many have limited capabilities for UIs

# Google's Default Search UI

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# **Ask's Default Search UI**

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# "Ordinary" People Just Don't Get IR

1 in 7 never type URLs in the address bar and others use it wrong

Some use "URL style" (no spaces between words) when entering words into query forms

Only 1 in 6 uses quotes in query forms, and many of these do so incorrectly

Almost no use of any advanced search syntax or functions

They don't appreciate the "vocabulary problem," so if their first query term doesn't work, they just give up rather than trying other terms

# **"Ordinary" People Don't Understand Boolean** Operators

For most people, Boolean semantics are counterintuitive or backwards

- Boolean AND narrows a search, but natural language "and" implies a request for more information
- Likewise, Boolean OR is a union that widens a search, while "or" implies a mutually exclusive choice in everyday language

# "Ordinary" People Don't Understand Text Processing in IR Systems

If very frequent words ("stop words") are removed by the search engine, a query like "To be or not to be" won't find anything

A query like "boat fire" is different from "fire boat" but many users don't realize that term order matters

# **The Search Process and Interface Components**

Hearst says "the heart of the search process is an iterative cycle of query specification, inspection and interpretation of query results, and query reformulation"

- Query Specification: Selecting and structuring search terms
- Query Results: Ordered list of documents or other objects matching the query
- Query Reformulation: If nothing in the results satisfies the query, users modify their initial queries and submit new ones

# **Small Details Matter**

UIs for IR require great care in small details because of the text-intensive nature of search

Tension between more information and clutter

How and where to arrange components of the interface and results matters a lot (cf. Tidwell's principles)

- People don't read instructions or help text
- People scan / skim rather than read

# **Best Practices in Query Specification**

Provide advanced capabilities for defining queries and constraining results, but progressively disclose them to hide complexity

Query suggestions

Query expansion and contraction (also used in query refinement stage) that is TRANSPARENT to the user

DWIM / spelling correction

# **Google Advanced Search**

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#### Windows Live Advanced Search

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# **Query Refinement That No One Knows About**

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#### **Search Window with Query History**



# Search Window with Subject Drop Down Menu

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#### **Query Suggestions in AltaVIsta**



# **Google Presents a Spelling Correction**

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# DWIM

"Do What I Mean" mechanisms try to be "smart" and determine the searcher's unstated intentions or goals

Examples:

- Automatically suggest spelling corrections
- Automatically augment my query with related terms, synonyms, abbreviations, etc.
- Pop up "the paperclip" that tells me what kind of help I need

CRITICAL POINT: Users love DWIM when it works, but DESPISE it when it doesn't

#### **Best Practices in Results Presentation**

Present ranked results (people won't look past the first page) but don't show ranks

Sort of search results according to important criteria (date, author)

Group results according to well-organized category labels (see Flamenco)

Highlight query terms

Present query terms in context

Counter-intuitive failure to help: visualization

# Search Query Term Highlighting

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# **Grouping of Search Results**

Interviews with lay users often reveal a desire for better organization of retrieval results

Useful for suggesting where to look next

Variety of techniques - categories vs clusters, single vs complex (faceted) category structure

# **Comparing the Techniques -- Clustering**

Clustering is an automated technique for assigning results to groups (exclusively)

More flexible than pre-defined categories

Disambiguates ambiguous terms

Automatically generated labels can be unintuitive and occur at different levels of description

Potentially useful if the user wants a summary of the main themes in the subcollection

Potentially harmful if the user is interested in less dominant themes

#### **Results Clustering by Clusty.com**



#### **Results Clustering by Vivisimo.com**

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	Bob Glushko is a lecturer at the University of California at Berkeley in the School of Information Management and System	IS			

# **Results Clustering by iBoogie.com**



# **Comparing the Techniques -- Categories**

Human-created categories, but items can often be automatically assigned (to multiple categories)

Usually restricted to a fixed set

Intended to be readily understandable to those who know the underlying domain

Provide a novice with a conceptual structure

#### **Results Categorization by Google**



#### **Results Categorization by Google [2]**



# Results Organized Using Faceted Categories (Flamenco)



# **Best Practices in Query Reformulation**

(Do what works in query specification within the context of current results)

Make it easy to conduct iterative search by modifying queries to search within the current results

Get relevance feedback from searcher ("more like this")

#### **Not all Suggested Refinements Work**

	Refinement type	Percent frequency of	Percent frequency of use for new search
Refinement category	Examples (query / refinement)	use as	
Head	triassic / triassic period	refinement	
Modifier	buckets wholesale / plastic buckets	<b>*</b> 15	12
Elaboration	jackson pollack / museum of modern	▶ 25	10
	art	→ 24	27
Location	vietnam / ho chi minh city	4	5
Alternative	job listings / job openings	12	30
Hyponym	birds of prey / falcons	5	0
Morphological variant	norse myth / norse myths	3	2
Syntactic variant	map of sudan / sudan map	4	2
Acronym	usa maps / united states of america	2	0
Spelling	stationary catalog / stationery	4	0
Change	skateboards / mountainboards	2	12

# Query Refinement Based on Relevance Feedback

Many studies show that if users engage in relevance feedback, the results are much better.

But the explicit effort required to rate relevance is usually a roadblock

This is one motivation for using "social" or indirect methods of assessing relevance

# **Readings for Lecture #22**

Christopher D. Manning, Prabhakar Raghavan and Hinrich Schütze, Introduction to Information Retrieval, Cambridge University Press. 2008.

- Chapter 1: Information retrieval using the Boolean model
- Chapter 2: The term vocabulary & postings lists