

## Searching the Internet-- How to find what you're REALLY looking for

**How many times have you tried, unsuccessfully, to use a search engine to find something? If you said, "many times" then you're not alone.**

Search engines are remarkable tools for sifting through the mounds of information or products on the Internet but there is a trick to using them. To begin, a brief explanation of what a search engine is and what it does will help in understanding the best way to use one.

When a web site is ready to be put on the Internet, developers and/or web site owners decide on a selection of "keywords" that they think visitors might use to find the information or products that they offer. These keywords are placed in the header of the web site so that the search engine "spiders" can find them. For instance, a web site that sells baby items would probably use keywords that include: baby, babies, gifts, pregnant, infants, children, clothes, dresses, rattles, bottles, and.....you get the picture.

Once the keywords are entered and the web site is published the search engines begin their work.

1. The first thing a search engine does is send out a "spider" or "crawler" to go into a web site and read all the information it contains.
2. The information that the "spider" finds is then "indexed" or "cataloged." This part of the search engine's job can be equated to making copies of all the web sites it "crawls" and then putting the copies into a "folder."
3. The third part of a search engine is the search engine software. When you are looking for something specific on the web you use "keywords" for your search criteria. The software is the part of the search engine that sifts through the "folder" of indexed information to find a match for your keywords and then ranks the matches in order of relevance.

Now if you were going to use a search engine to find baby items, depending on why you were looking for them, you would probably use one or more of the above keywords in your search. The key to finding sites that offer EXACTLY what you are looking for, though, is putting these keywords together in the right way.

Example: I want to buy a gift for a friends' new baby. To search for this gift on the Internet I would use the keywords "baby gifts" enclosed in parentheses as shown. By using the parentheses, I should eliminate a lot of the sites that just deal with babies and the sites that sell all kinds of gifts. My search should produce sites that specifically sell baby gifts. If I specifically wanted a baby dress I might conduct a search using "infant baby dresses" for my keywords. Again, this should narrow my search to sites that sell or supply baby clothes, including infant dresses. The use of parentheses should make my search more specific, thereby providing me with a pertinent list of sites from which to choose my gift

The use of parentheses around keywords is very helpful when sifting through the millions of web sites that are on the Internet, but it there's definitely one more thing to consider: the use of a good search engine. There are a few that consistently produce good search results but several million others, and I, think that Google is one of the best. This site is clean, simple, easy to use and (thank goodness! ) doesn't bombard you with advertising. But best of all, a search on Google using keywords within parentheses will probably net you a good selection of sites that actually offer what you need or want. Now wouldn't that be nice??!!