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- World
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- AP Headlines
- Business
- Technology
- Biotech
- Markets
- In Depth
- In Iraq
- Pension Crisis
- Special Reports
- Multimedia
- Photo Galleries
- Topics
- Education
- Features
- Health | Fitness
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- Science
- Solutions
- Opinion
- Columnists
- Steve Breen
- Forums
- Weblogs
- Communities
- U-T South County
- U-T East County
- Solutions
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- Just Fix It
- Services
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- Archives
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- Wireless | RSS
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Google 'Sunroad' search reveals a blind spot

UNION-TRIBUNE

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Google is changing the way we think, I think.

What was once a pretty deliberate process – connecting the dots, one synapse at a time – has been turbo-charged into a sprint, thanks to Google's bionic gray matter.

Hooked up to Google (or Yahoo! or whatever search engine), we're smarter, quicker and cooler.

Instead of cocky chips on our shoulders, we have computer chips practically implanted in our brains, tirelessly informing us who's who, what's what.

The other day, a telephone caller kept referring to an "LLC" during the course of a rapid-fire conversation. He used the abbreviation as if it were as familiar as FBI.

My unassisted mind drew a blank. I knew I should know, but the circuits weren't firing fast enough to decode "LLC."

As the caller hurtled on, I typed the three letters into the Google search field, which is almost always on the top of my computer screen. In seconds, I casually interjected, "So you really think a limited liability company is the way to go?"

Time was, we relied on dog-eared desktop relics like dictionaries and almanacs to support our gap-filled intellects.

Google performs the same service, but quicker and, in many cases, leading us to new, even more interesting information.

But at the same time, Google can make some *really* stupid value judgments that can make you look really stupid, too.



The other day, I asked myself an obvious Google question.

How's the Sunroad *brand* faring out there in the Internet? What would someone from, say, Des Moines learn about Sunroad's public image from a cursory Google search?

We San Diegans know, of course, that the La Jolla-based company is still bleeding from a self-inflicted wound.

What has been a solid regional trademark – 14 years ago, I was the

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proud owner of a new Cherokee, purchased from Sunroad Jeep in Escondido – is now symbolized not by an abstract sun on the ocean waves, suggestive of an optimistic future, but by a 180-foot tower on a mesa, suggestive of a fat, upraised middle finger.

In the past few months, I've often wondered how many San Diego drivers have pulled out the Phillips, unscrewed license plates with "Sunroad" stamped on them and tossed them in the trash can. (Can't find the answer on Google.)

At the very least, Aaron Feldman, the Mexican citizen who owns Sunroad Enterprises, is poised to go down in San Diego history as a developer who, blinded by hubris, flew his company's good name into his 180-foot office building near Montgomery Field.

Feldman had an opportunity early on to apologize, admit he had tried to finesse the FAA's 160-foot height limitations, pay for a trim on his star-crossed tower, and put the scandal behind him.

Instead, Feldman evidently tried to squeeze a muddled Mayor Jerry Sanders and, when there was no room to maneuver, said OK, he would cut off the offending 20 feet but he would see the city in court to recoup his losses.

Not exactly a tack that promises to win friends and influence customers north of the border.

With all this in mind, I did a Google search for "Sunroad."

In descending order from the top, I found: a business link to Sunroad's marina on Harbor Island; a link to pages created by broker Burnham Real Estate touting Feldman's Sunroad Centrum project as "Kearny Mesa's most exciting Master Planned Development"; a link to a Sunroad jobs page; a link to Sunroad's charitable foundation.

You have to look to the *bottom* of the page to find recent stories suggesting Centrum's agony.

On the Centrum site, we are told the 12-story tower eventually will include two buildings, one of which will be 14 stories and the other 16 stories. (Wonder what the FAA will say about them?)

Not one word about the Sunroad scandal.

This is like finding a travel brochure for the Titanic at the top of Google.

Yahoo! was next.

The Centrum puff page commanded the No. 1 spot, a pole position many companies would (and do) pay for.

■ ■ ■

It's complicated, and somewhat secret, the method by which Google ranks pages.

Google says it "relies on the uniquely democratic nature of the Web" in interpreting the frequency and "importance" of the links it displays.

Sounds noble, but bottom line, Google and Yahoo! have allowed obsolete information to outrank reality.

"The Internets," to use Bushspeak, offers any number of deceptions, great

and small.

A tip: When surfing for the skinny, and not waves of self-serving fat, blow off the standard Google search. Instead, click on Google's customized "News" engine and type in "Sunroad."

There, you'll find nine pages of searing sunshine, links to more than a hundred news stories from a wide range of publications, all bearing upon the Sunroad wreck. Nary a whiff of PR puffery.

In "Boomsday," satirist Christopher ("Thank You for Smoking") Buckley's latest book, a computer mogul develops "Spider Repellent" software that deletes all embarrassing references to a rich celebrity, earning the company "jillions."

"In the brave new world of the Internet, if it wasn't on Google, it didn't exist," Buckley concludes.

Well, Sunroad's gaping pothole can be found on Google, but you have to look for it, which in this day and age can be a lot to ask.

■ **Logan Jenkins:** (760) 737-7555; logan.jenkins@uniontrib.com.

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By BigDog on 07/23/2007

You just have to be a little smarter in your searches. Instead of just Sunroad, try the search for 'Sunroad "Jim Waring"'.

Top page search results:

Why did the Sunroad Controversy get so Political?
Timeline and Archive Related to Sunroad Lawsuit
Letters to the editor | The San Diego Union-Tribune: "Sunroad reneged..."
'I want us to remain spectators, not actors in this' | The San ...
CITY OF SAN DIEGO AIRPORTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES: "The meeting was recessed until Jim Warings arrival"
CITY OF SAN DIEGO AIRPORTS ADVISORY COMMITTEE "Mr. Story stated that Sunroad has filed a countersuit against the City..."
voiceofsandiego.org: This Just In... Waring on Sunroad Report
voiceofsandiego.org: News... Sunroad Probe Shows Staff Blunders ...
April 19, 2007; Money Talks, Safety Doesn't | City Lights | www ...
voiceofsandiego.org: Scott Lewis... Why the Sunroad Thing Won't Go ...

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By Coast Watcher on 07/23/2007

Google yourself, Logan. It is interesting!

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