

Using Google Custom Search To Access Recommended Legal Sites

— by Terry Ballard

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In the summer of 2010, I was looking for a good summer project that would enhance the research possibilities for our users. I noticed that this library had a detailed structure of web pages that provided links to recommended web sites like Oyez, the United Nations, Thomas and many others. While these were all great sites, to use these pages you would need to go in and out of each one and make individual searches. Wouldn't it be nice to have some kind of federated search that looked up a topic in all of these with one search? Then I remembered something that had been shown to me at a meeting of the American Library Association by Ben Bunnell, a librarian turned Google Books administrator. Google Custom Search allows you to set up your own search engine that only looks at sites that you select. I had set one of these up years ago to search for sites relating to Irish historical documents, but it was not terribly effective. It occurred to me that the Irish engine was not useful because I had only chosen a handful of sites. Looking at our

web page and the one generated by the Law Library of Congress, there was an enormous pool of likely sites to choose from in creating a legal-based custom search.

At the beginning, my idea was to create this engine and launch it as a search gadget on our Facebook page. After the first few entries, I developed a work flow for adding new sites. It turned out that not every web site works with Google Custom Search. Ironically, no other Google products such as Scholar or Google Books will create results in a Google Custom Search. The way to test these is to create a second search engine that only searches one site at a time. One of the features of the custom search engine is a preview. For instance, I would add the URL for the United Nations and then go to the preview screen and ask it to search for Ivory Coast. In less than a second, I would get 100 search results (100 is the limit but there are ways around that to be discussed later). Once a site is green-lighted it is added to the main search engine.

Ivory Coast

[United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire \(UNOCI\)](#)
The official United Nations Website for UNOCI contains background information, facts and figures and the mission mandate. In addition Security Council ...
www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unoci/

[MINUCI: United Nations Mission in Côte d'Ivoire](#)
Having determined that the situation in Côte d'Ivoire constituted a threat to international peace and security in the region, the Security Council set up, ...
www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/past/minuci/

[Côte d'Ivoire: International Criminal Court may initiate probe ...](#)
The office of the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) today said it may open investigations into the "widespread and systematic" killings ...
www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?Cr1=&NewsID=38025&Cr=ivoire

[UN chief underlines warning against attacking peacekeepers in Côte ...](#)
Dec 19, 2010 ... Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon emphasized his warning against attacks on the United Nations peacekeeping force in Côte d'Ivoire or attempts ...
www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=37114&Cr=ivoire&Cr1

[Top UN relief official sounds alarm after 'deeply troubling' visit ...](#)
Apr 7, 2011 ... "He has to mind – if he believes he was a leader of the Ivory Coast for some time – then he has to mind the well-being and safety and ...
www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=38042&Cr=ivoire&Cr1

By the time I had entered 20 sites, it was becoming obvious that we were on to something big here. The results screens had good information and they continued to appear lightning-fast. Normally the results would appear in less than a second. At this point, the work in progress was shown to the full group of librarians. It was clear that this would be a feature of our main web page, not just Facebook, and it would be demonstrated to new students at the beginning of the Fall semester. In the beginning, the project had a series of prosaic names such as “Mendik Library’s Federated Search of Legal Databases.” After a spirited exchange of ideas, library director Camille Broussard struck gold with the name “Dragnet.” I managed to retrofit the name into an acronym by coming up with “Database Resource Access using Google’s New Electronic Technologies.”

By August 30 when DRAGNET was announced to the world, the engine contained about 80 databases. I wrote about the project to a number of listservs. There

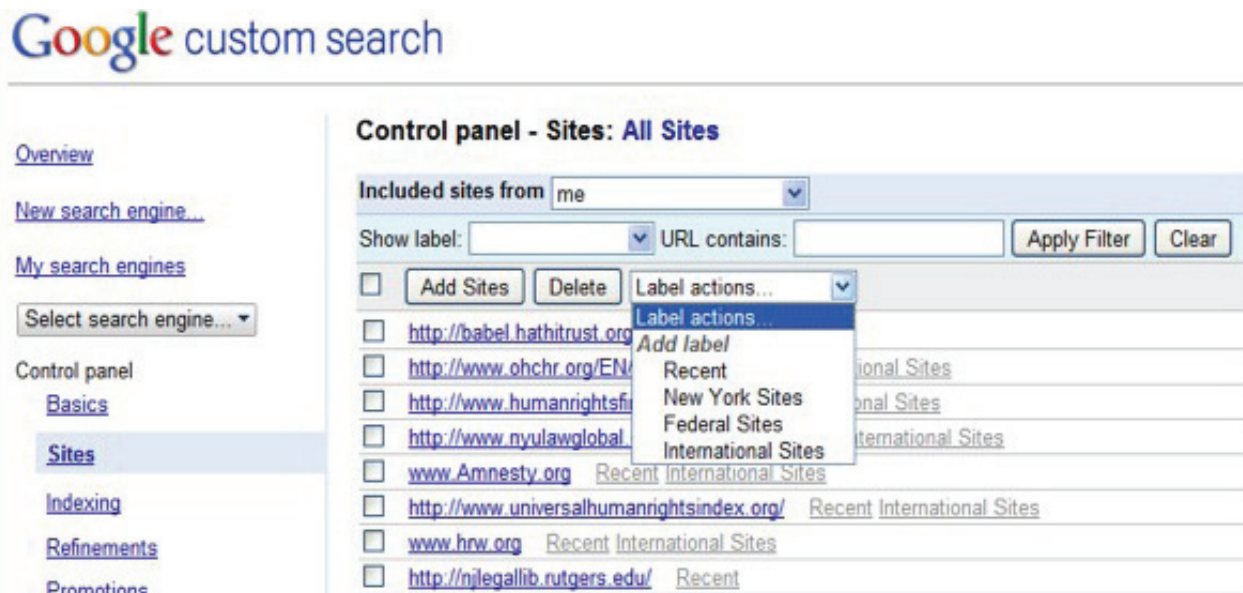
was almost no direct response, but our tracking mechanism through statcounter.com told the story of the initial response. On the first day nearly a thousand libraries took a look. Some of the visitors had very impressive dot gov addresses. Over the next week, DRAGNET was a hot topic in the blogosphere and the Tweetosphere. Later that week I heard from Nicholas G. Tomaiuolo, a librarian and writer at Central Connecticut State University who had been doing some work of his own on Google Custom Search. He was helpful in steering us towards a solution to the problem of the 100 hit limit in DRAGNET’s results. The answer was to set up tabbed search categories in the coding. To do this, you choose “Refinements” in the control panel.

Once your tab is named, it can be set with one of two flavors. In most cases we stipulate that the results for this tab must be present in one of the sites that we have set with that tab, such as federal or New York. Otherwise, it can just emphasize those sites.

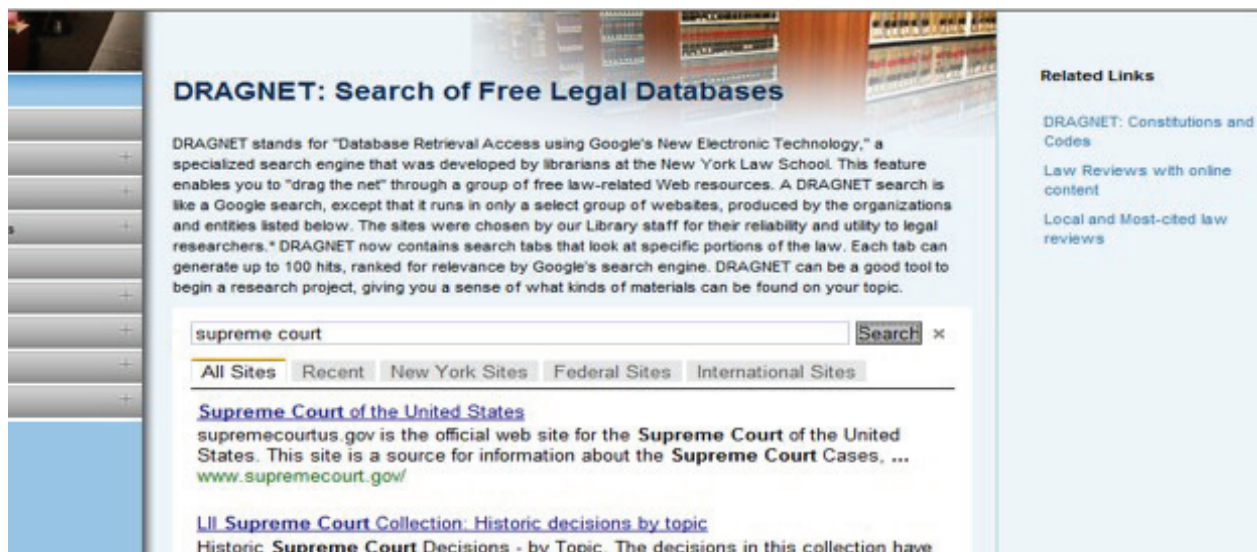
Google custom search

The screenshot shows the Google Custom Search interface. On the left is a navigation menu with links for Overview, New search engine..., My search engines, Select search engine..., Control panel, Basics, Sites, Indexing, Refinements (highlighted), Promotions, Synonyms, and Autocompletions. The main content area is titled "Control panel - Refinements: All Sites". It contains a "Manage refinements" section with an "Add Refinement" button and a list of recent refinements: New York Sites, Federal Sites, and International Sites. Below this is a "Displayed refinements" section with a text input field for the maximum number of refinement labels to show (set to "All") and a "Learn more" link. At the bottom are "Save Changes" and "Cancel" buttons.

Afterwards, you can go through the list of sites and tag them using a dropdown box:



After the tabs were set up, search results in DRAGNET were displaying up to 500 results, and the user could choose a field of specialization for a more refined search, or choose the “recent” tab to get up-to-the-minute results:



By the fall of 2010, DRAGNET had grown to my goal size of 100 sites. We looked for new ways to use this technology, and we didn’t have to look far. Since 2009 we had been tracking about 150 law journals that put their current issue and at least some of their archive free on-line. Since we already had a list of sites and the correct URLs, it was an easy task to create a second DRAGNET search bar to search all of the journals instantly. We then added search tabs


for specialized journals such as environmental and international law. We also created a Google Custom Search to find material from the constitutions and established law of the fifty states and the federal government.


In the spring of 2011, I began a project of adding the DRAGNET engines to the iGoogle directory of gadgets. These are all in the directory and accessible to anyone with an iGoogle account:


iGoogle [Gadgets](#) [Themes](#)


Narrow by category
» All categories
[Editor's picks](#)
[Celebrity picks](#)
[News](#)
[Tools](#)
[Communication](#)
[Fun & Games](#)
[Finance](#)
[Sports](#)
[Lifestyle](#)
[Technology](#)
[Politics](#)
[by Google](#)

Search results for "mendik"

 **Catalog of the Mendik Library**
Find listings for all of the books and databases provided by the library, including links to online j
<http://hosting.gmodules.com/>
[Add it now](#)

 **DRAGNET: Search of Free Legal Databases**
Searches 100 recommended legal databases simultaneously. This uses a Google Custom Sea
librarians at New York Law School's Mendik Library
<http://hosting.gmodules.com/>
[Add it now](#)

 **Classic Catalog of the Mendik Library**
Find listings for all of the books and databases provided by the library, including links to online j
<http://hosting.gmodules.com/>
[Add it now](#)

 **Law Reviews with Online Content developed by New York Law School's Mendi**
Searches 150 law journals simultaneously
<http://hosting.gmodules.com/>
[Add it now](#)

In February 2011, we entered the DRAGNET products in an annual competition to honor the best library publication, non-print division. Early in March, we were notified that we had won. I will be going to Philadelphia in July to accept the award on behalf of the library. In the future, we hope to create a mobile application so users will be able to search DRAGNET on the train. To see the original DRAGNET site, go to http://www.nyls.edu/library/research_tools_and_sources/dragnet. To see the full list of DRAGNET products, visit http://www.nyls.edu/library/research_tools_and_sources/dragnet1. I can be considered a resource person for anyone who wants to create their own such page. ■

Terry Ballard is the Assistant Director of Technical Services for Library Systems at the Mendik Library of New York Law School in Lower Manhattan. He received his MLS from the University of Arizona in 1989. He is the author of "INNOPAC: A reference guide to the system," published in 1995, and also the forthcoming book "Google This: Putting Google products and other social media to work for libraries," to be published in the spring of 2012 by Chandos Publishing.