

# COMPUTER GURU

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## Searching the Web

My browser's home page is set to Google because, well, why not? I do a lot of research on the web, and Google has an uncanny way of helping me find what I'm looking for. It not only offers up myriad websites that match my search criteria, I often find what I'm looking for within the first few sites on the list.

The magic of Google results from several algorithms, one of which is called PageRank, an eponym coined from one of Google's founders, Larry Page (it's also an obvious coincidence that it lists web "pages.") PageRank tallies the number of links to a website to roughly estimate of how important the website is and, thus, where to place that website on Google's "hit" list. The underlying assumption is that more important websites are likely to receive more links from other websites that are also popular, and Google lists those first. (You can read more about PageRank at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PageRank>.) For example, if you search for "periodic table," the first website Google lists is ptable.com, which means that many other chemistry websites include links to ptable.com, and those websites are also popular. You'll probably note that Wikipedia is often in the first few "hits" because it's so popular.

Google is a website that returns a list of other websites based on the terms you're searching for. We sometimes call Google a search "engine" because there's a lot going on behind the scenes to make Google work. The Google company also designed the Chrome web browser, but Google will work on any browser.

### Safe Searches

Google is wonderful, but you must use it carefully. Some websites at the top of its "hit" list are advertisements (they're marked with an "ad" icon). Companies pay Google for that privilege, and while the website may be what you're looking for, it may also be a lookalike that's not where you want to go. Google will usually correct mistyped search requests or tell you what it ended up looking for, but, again, be careful. Don't simply click the first result in Google's hit list without checking the description and web address.

Google also collects information about your activity when you use their services—including the terms you search for.

### Other Search Sites

Microsoft's Bing search website has improved over the years, and it's worth trying if Google doesn't turn up what you're after. Like Google, Microsoft collects information from your Bing searches, but you may be more comfortable with Microsoft knowing what you're looking for than Google.

If privacy is your goal, then you should try the DuckDuckGo search site. This odd-sounding<sup>1</sup> search website is managed by a nonprofit organization that promises to never collect your search terms. It's become a major search service, and one worth trying. Team it up with the Firefox browser for maximum privacy.

All that said, I don't want to cause angst among our readers over privacy. Unless you're searching for something that you're only comfortable discussing with your cat, Google is OK. (But I'd give DuckDuckGo a try anyway.)

If you need help using any of these search websites, just stop by the PSRC Tech Lab on Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., or Fridays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.



*Someone who just found what he's looking for!*

<sup>1</sup> The developer, Gabriel Weinberg, had the kid's game Duck-Duck-Goose in mind for no particular reason. He just liked it.