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THE NUMBERS GUY

Blog Search:

Carl Bialik examines the way numbers are used, and abused.

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July 30, 2008, 4:05 pm

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Cuil's Overreaching Numbers

[Cuil](#), the search engine that launched with [widespread publicity](#) Monday, claimed in the first paragraph of its introductory [press release](#) that it “has indexed 120 billion Web pages, three times more than any other search engine.” But it turns out that neither Cuil nor anyone else has enough information to verify that claim. It’s also not clear that a bigger index is better.



Representatives for Google, Yahoo and Microsoft — which together control 90% of the U.S. search market, according to [Nielsen Online](#) — told me they don’t reveal the size of their indexes. So Cuil based its claim on “past knowledge and tests,” Cuil spokesman Vince Sollitto told me. These tests could include counting search results for “searches for the intersection of rare words.” He added, “It is disappointing that others won’t state their index size publicly, as we think it is

important that people know how much of the Web is being searched on their behalf.”

For Google, specifically, Cuil had some prior knowledge because its co-founder and president, Anna Patterson, previously worked on Google’s search index. “Anna knows how big it was when she built it a couple of years ago,” Mr. Solitto said.

But is it still that size? Last week, Google announced that it was processing one trillion unique links online. The Google index doesn’t include all of the pages found at these links. Mr. Solitto said Cuil’s research has found that the average Web page has almost 20 links, which would suggest that there are more than 50 billion pages in Google’s index. Google also removed an undisclosed number of duplicate pages.

Even if Cuil’s index is three times larger than any competitor’s, it’s not clear that means better search results for users, many of whom don’t scroll past the first page and are seeking the most-relevant results rather than the most results. [Tech bloggers are skeptical](#) so far; part of the problems arose from heavy traffic to Cuil on its first day, Mr. Solitto said.

I asked him for an example of a search which yields better results than Google because of Cuil’s larger index, and he cited a search for Cinderella, pointing out that most of Google’s results centered on the fairy tale, while Cuil made room on the first page of results for a page selling footwear for women with small feet. “I’m not saying that URL isn’t in Google’s index, but we think it’s nice to offer users alternative results from which to choose,” Mr. Solitto said. Google reported more hits, though as I’ve written before, these counts [aren’t entirely accurate](#). The images returned with Cuil results also can be baffling; a search for my name yielded no photos of me but [Malcolm Gladwell](#)’s and [Jeff Jarvis](#)’s faces are displayed. “We are working to improve, especially in this challenging but we believe valuable feature,” Mr. Solitto said.

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I was excited to try Cuil when I read about it yesterday. So I “Cuiled” my own name, since I’m an egomaniac. It only came back with 3 links to one of my many accomplishments, while Google and even Ask come back with pages upon pages. I think the press got bamboozled in reporting Cuil’s numbers and should have checked them first, but I’ve given up expecting the truth from the press, or even a semblance.

Comment by disappointed egomaniac - July 30, 2008 at [4:39 pm](#)

I was typing in a store name and city in cuil and it displayed “no results found”, the same in google will give address, phone & a map and may be reviews. cuil got to catch up, when the catch up happens it is already too late.

Comment by WEBMANIAC - July 30, 2008 at [4:45 pm](#)

I tried Cuil and have found it speedy. The market trend will be more niche players like unamoo.com boasting a safer search with no filter on/off capability. While Cuil was predictably slow on its first day the search should not be benchmarked as slow.

Comment by Tom - SearchTrends - July 30, 2008 at [4:51 pm](#)

While I really wanted Cuil to be Cool, it isn’t. I did exactly what he said and did not get a single hit on cuil.com that remotely pointed at myself. Yet when I did it on google.com the first result



The Numbers Guy examines numbers in the news, business and politics. Some numbers are flat-out wrong or biased, while others are valid and help us make informed decisions. Carl Bialik tells the stories behind the stats, in daily updates on this blog and in his column published every other Friday in The Wall Street Journal. Carl, who holds a degree in mathematics and physics from Yale University, also cowrites [The Daily Fix](#), a sports column on WSJ.com. He welcomes your comments at numbersguy@wsj.com.

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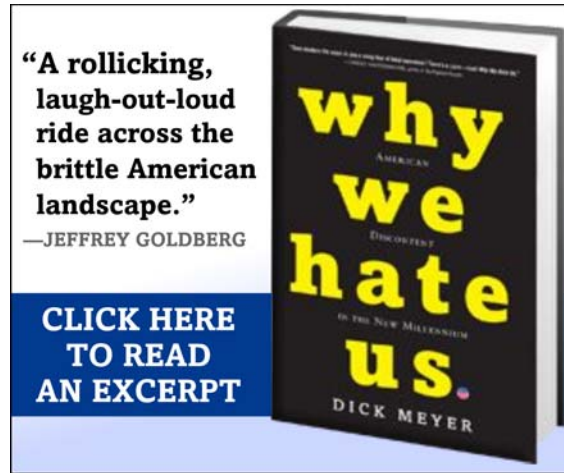
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pulled was me on a photo club I belong to. That is exactly what a search engine should do, pull the most relevant result first. Cuil isn't cool, it's cruel. (I know that was horrible, but it did make me grin).

Comment by Wade Simon - July 30, 2008 at [4:52 pm](#)

I have tried this search disaster and determined that they have one thing in mind. Building it to sell. It has no accurate results that compare to google, Live, Yahoo.



Comment by Cuilsuxs - July 30, 2008 at [4:54 pm](#)

I searched for "Cuil"
 No mention cuil.com on the first page of cuil.
 Google: Fiest result: "News Results for Cuil" with this News Item in there
 Second Result: cuil.com

Long way to go...

Comment by Nivas - July 30, 2008 at [5:09 pm](#)

Cuil was a waste of \$33 Million. This thing is slow and the results are so outdated they are worthless. I did a Vanity search and the only information displayed was posted in 1999.

Comment by DNR - July 30, 2008 at [5:09 pm](#)

I tried it out Tuesday, typed my name, of course, found 2 entries, poor results will not use it for a long time

Comment by Werner - July 30, 2008 at [5:17 pm](#)

Barf. Terrible.

Comment by Nick - July 30, 2008 at [5:24 pm](#)

no local listings and a lot of adds for results instead of actual sites pertaining to the searched word. the first 3 random things I searched returned 3-4 in text ads on completely differnt topics on the first reults page...useless to me.

Comment by rachel - July 30, 2008 at [5:36 pm](#)

The real story here is how a site so useless and amateurish managed to generate so much press.

Comment by Mark - July 30, 2008 at [6:02 pm](#)

I tried Cuil on the first day it came out. I did the typical Apple search and got nothing about the fruit. But what must be remembered is that Cuil is still very new. If they can keep people coming to their site while enhancing the searches as I expect they will, Cuil could become a better search engine than Google within a year.

Comment by Brett - July 30, 2008 at [6:23 pm](#)

Tried to search for my name, got absolutely nothing. Oddly enough, when I added my company name to my name though I got a full slate. Cuil will go under soon.

Comment by Bozo - July 30, 2008 at [7:02 pm](#)

They never could have anticipated the fanfare the launch got. There is going to be quirks...hopefully they will get them worked out. Love how the results are displayed...I see much potential.

Comment by Nick Z - July 30, 2008 at [7:09 pm](#)

I searched for my partners name, Cuil had about 9 entries, all with unrelated pictures, Unamoo had nothing, not a reference, nada, zip. Google came in a close 1st with 3,790. Where is the gong for Cuil and whomever suggested Unamoo?

Comment by ed in chapel hill - July 30, 2008 at [7:13 pm](#)

total waste of everyone's time. it does not return right results, and no spell check!!!

Comment by mehta - July 30, 2008 at [8:07 pm](#)

I am excited to have a search engine that will expose the back alley ways of the web. The less traversed odd ball pages that were so common place in the early 90's, but have been lost in the

flood of a)the explosion in the number of web sites available on the web b)the popularity contest that is google page ranking

Comment by Duke - July 30, 2008 at [8:11 pm](#)

yeah lets all stomp on Cuil, and praise the lord google, master of the net. Hey why dont we all just stick with GOOG and then later we can whine about a monoploy.

Comment by gaggle - July 30, 2008 at [8:26 pm](#)

When I searched in Chinese, Cuil cannot do most of the search, it always shown "No results were found for: XXX". Whereas I typed the same Chinese Character to search in Yahoo, Google & MSN - I see results. Cuil is over rated and a waste of time

Comment by LEE - July 30, 2008 at [8:51 pm](#)

Cuil is the way of the future, and the future looks grim.

Comment by Beastal - July 30, 2008 at [9:02 pm](#)

Unfortunately, Cuil.com still has some work to do, including... Adding search results format options, search results per page option, and review the quality of their searching algorithm.

The people who founded the company are obviously very intelligent, but most searches result in crap that does not really pertain to the search phrase. Also, the layout is nerve racking and not enough serach results display on each page. I would love to have the option to have 20 items display instead of just 11 or 12...

Comment by Jimmy - July 30, 2008 at [9:04 pm](#)

FYI, The first episode of Seinfeld was terrible. Timing was off, jokes fell flat, Kramer was inanimate.

Give em time.

Comment by Sherwood - July 30, 2008 at [9:07 pm](#)

can't believe how much can they speak lies and fool people ... even simple queries returned such unimaginable bad results...even the first search engine would be better than this...if you don't believe then just search 'wsj' is cuil and google/msn and see the difference

Comment by pipal2010 - July 30, 2008 at [9:12 pm](#)

most results i got were "No results were found for: XXX", they have a long way to go...

Comment by Lee Long - July 30, 2008 at [9:32 pm](#)

Methinks that our friend Sherwood here likely works for Cuil.com

:)

Seriously, my vanity search did not produce the same quality of results that Google can, but I agree with Mr. Forest. Give them some time to work out the kinks.

Comment by Philthepill - July 30, 2008 at [9:36 pm](#)

cuil is not very cool. Search results are not impressive. Google is lot lot lot looooooot better. however, I like the fact that someone atleast got the guts to compete against the internet giant.

Comment by Vass - July 30, 2008 at [9:37 pm](#)

I Googled our web page name (on Google!) and got no hits. On Cuil it was the first result shown. I'm impressed!

Comment by JimmyCee - July 30, 2008 at [9:42 pm](#)

I can't do a string search like I can on Google.

Comment by Dennis in Edina - July 30, 2008 at [9:54 pm](#)

I like Cuil. It does provide relevance rather than sites that managed to escape Google's penalties. Sites that are ranked high in Google are often not particularly relevant; there are many relevant sites (sites with real content) that Google has penalized for petty reasons of its own. Google's results continue to deteriorate.

Comment by Max - July 30, 2008 at [10:04 pm](#)

At least for numbers, Cuil sucks. Eg:

1) Tried a ups # (google takes you to the tracking info). Cuil - zilch.

2) Put in a zip code. Google shows a map first, then zip code info links (real estate profiles, yellowbook, other zip groupings, etc). Cuil gives me foreign sites, specific businesses with that zip, blah.

Comment by zach - July 30, 2008 at [10:26 pm](#)

I was happy to hear someone was stepping into those shoes but what a dissapointment!!! all results are completely irrelevant... :(it's SAD!!

Comment by Catherine - July 30, 2008 at [10:33 pm](#)

cuil is not cool at all. The press release is bunch of lies. The site is so dumb. I don't think cuil is going to succeed in the competition.

Comment by cool - July 30, 2008 at [11:00 pm](#)

Hey JimmyCee, do you mind if I ask your web page name that you didn't find on Google?

Comment by Matt Cutts - July 30, 2008 at [11:35 pm](#)

cant even find my friends and classmates online. www.searchme.com is a nice search engine

Comment by net addict - July 30, 2008 at [11:45 pm](#)

Cuil does not give good search results even with some popular stuff like “Johnny Depp”. The first page for “Johnny Depp” doesn’t provide IMDB or Wikipadia (which Google’s top 2). Instead, it just gave some fan sites.

It’s even worse if you search in foreign language.

Search “Tokyo” in Japanese (東京)...

Cuil: Wikimedia Incubator in Korean, Jonathan Browne’s Blog: 2008年 ..., Time after Time . . . This HP is &D E A T H 1 3 & site etc. None of the results at the first page are about Tokyo.

Google: Wikipedia - Tokyo, Tokyo Metro government official site, Tokyo tourism info etc. all related to Tokyo.

Also, (as you know) when you click Map, it gives map of Tokyo, when you click News, it gives news about Tokyo.

Cuil does not give any links to maps or news. I searched as “東京 マップ” and “東京 map” and they both lead me to “No results were found”. “Tokyo map” in English didn’t give me good results either.

I also don’t like the layout of the search results. It’s somewhat confusing to go through.

Comment by Loisaída King - July 31, 2008 at [12:14 am](#)

Searched for
Distance Learning fiction writing
got results for some breast feeding chemical.
TOTAL F*CKING CRAP.

Comment by bob - July 31, 2008 at [12:16 am](#)

Cuil doesn’t do conversions or math.

When you search “24+86=” at Google, it gives you the answer; 110. When you do that at Guil, it gives “No results”. When you search “86f to c”,

Google converts Fahrenheit to Celsius and gives the answer; 30 C. Cuil doesn't do that.

Cuil is pretty much useless... at least at this moment. It's much worse than Live.com or Ask.com. I don't see how it can be competitive with Google.

Comment by JK - July 31, 2008 at [12:24 am](#)

I searched my name, and Cuil gave an Asian porn site (or at least it looks like a link to a porn site). I'm nothing to with porn and/or I don't think there's any porn actors with my name (as far as I know). When I clicked it ;-), it took me to "can't find the server" ;-(

Google gave few relevant results including some of my work at "Images".

Comment by PT - July 31, 2008 at [12:34 am](#)

I think Cuil was built to sell. If anything, all they got is they found a new way to index. They are hoping Microsoft would buy the company/site. I just can't imagine competing with Google or Yahoo or Microsoft. It doesn't even have "Map", "News", "Images" etc.

Comment by Anonymous - July 31, 2008 at [12:49 am](#)

What's the point of indexing 120 billion web pages if it can't give relevant results? No one wants to go through pages and pages to find the relevant links. Accuracy of the first few pages is the key.

Comment by Sat-Li - July 31, 2008 at [12:58 am](#)

What I want to know is how they even THINK of launching a search engine without test-driving it extensively. An advertising teacher I had once said "Nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising." Some people commented that Cuil will get better as people keep using it. Who is going to waste their time using it with it's pathetic search results? You find some reason for people to try your search engine and keep using it while

you improve. But telling people it's better than google is NOT the reason anyone's going to ever go to Cuil again.

Comment by Eve Ryone - July 31, 2008 at [1:02 am](#)

where is cuil????

Comment by nikalwei - July 31, 2008 at [2:00 am](#)

Nikalwei, Cuil is at www.cuil.com.

My personal opinion... Well, I appreciate the fact they tried. I don't really like the fact that the site's front page is black, because it hurts my eyes, though that's really a personal thing. I don't like the layouts of the searches, and the spelling corrections - if it exists - is in no obvious place like it is with Google, nice and bolded at the top of the results.

It does indeed have potential, but at the time of writing, I think I will avoid it.

Comment by Akey - July 31, 2008 at [2:52 am](#)

It seems cuil has a particular approach to safe search as well: try looking for "the tipping point"!

Comment by The Tipping Point - July 31, 2008 at [6:40 am](#)

Wow!

I'm getting my books at books.booksfree.com from now on!! Thank's, Cuil!

Comment by With Tipped Point - July 31, 2008 at [8:30 am](#)

If Cuil can make content king, rather than popularity (minus the ad hoc penalties imposed by Google), then Cuil might succeed. After all, Google did not have lots of bells and whistles years ago as a start up.

Comment by Max - July 31, 2008 at [10:06 am](#)

After about 20 searches of different genres, I can see that Cuil returns far too many irrelevant results on most searches and no results at all on many searches that should return mountains of results. There is no image, video or audio search. This search engine fails massively!

Comment by Glenn - July 31, 2008 at [10:28 am](#)

I tried it out : the layout of the result page is crap and so are the results???? Why da hell are they getting so much buzz..?????

Comment by Ely - July 31, 2008 at [12:28 pm](#)

Ely, they are getting “so much buzz” because people keep using their name on internet discussion forums. Hail the power of Google!

;)

Comment by Texrat - July 31, 2008 at [12:40 pm](#)

My eyes were going side to side to view results, going to have to re-train myself.
Yes I can change from to a 2 column system, but I like to scroll and view results top to bottom, not top-right-left-bottom-right, etc
How do you pronounce this anyways?
Lot's of re-training to do ...lol

Comment by TonyJamm - July 31, 2008 at [12:49 pm](#)

- i'm with the other self lovers out there. i have two websites that are my full name ie ...
FirstnameLastname.COM
FirstnameLastname.ORG

When I searched my name - nothing but a web page older than dirt referring to me came up.

You'd think it would be easy to find yourself on a search engine with a domain name that is as plain as day...

cuil sucks. (for now?)

Comment by yep - July 31, 2008 at [12:52 pm](#)

As webmaster I have spent a lot of time getting my company's name and products to rank well on Google. On Cuil, they barely appeared. When I Google myself (real name) I appear. With Cuil, nada. Maybe later it will will work better.

Comment by Trackbike - July 31, 2008 at [3:35 pm](#)

I tried to search for a recently released IRS notice. The first try froze on the website. The second try turned up empty. Google, of course, gave two pages worth of relevant hits.

So what's so cool about cuil?

I'll try again in a week or so, but the results had better improve if they want to cut into Google's business.

Comment by JiminNorfolk - July 31, 2008 at [3:59 pm](#)

I get so tired of they can do it, give them time let them be great. Seriously. all the news talks about is how these people are Ex Google and how great CUIL will be. if she is so smart why couldn't she expect such a rush on the first day? With as much BS fan fair and they got it was kinda obvious. My vote is No for Cuil its an over hyped worthless search engine. Hype is not relevant to a good search engine results are.

Comment by Chris Mccammon - July 31, 2008 at [4:32 pm](#)

First of off - Cuil is a stupid and pretentious name. Secondly, I searched a well known zagat rated best business web site by name and it didn't even come up in the cuil search (it comes up first in Google) 227 other pages come up in Cuil with a reference to the business as opposed to over 2,200 in Google. Boring! Another crap search engine - how 1990's.

Comment by Cuil Tester - July 31, 2008 at [6:36 pm](#)

SHDVD.com

Comment by Anonymous - July 31, 2008 at [6:56 pm](#)

I tried searching my name on Cuil and got 0 results. On Google I got 70 results and every hit on the first two pages was directly relevant (I didn't look at the last 5 pages). I tried a couple other searches and found Google clearly superior. Another criticism: Cuil doesn't allow negative search terms. For instance on Google and most other sites, you can search: "George Bush" - "George W. Bush" if you only want to look for the senior Bush.

Comment by SD Dad - August 1, 2008 at [5:37 pm](#)

I tried Cuil too. I think the results were fairly lame. First of all, when a directory you listed in can come up above you with information that's two years old, and your site is #1 in every other engine for that exact same phrase, then it's pretty obvious that cuil is indexing anything and everything, and that their algorithms need a list tweaking.

Comment by Steve Hill - August 3, 2008 at [1:43 am](#)

I see that most of the negative comments about Cuil are petty, and the language embodied in those comments indicates that the authors/webmasters are most likely opportunistic rather than relevant. Furthermore, I think Google and Matt Cutts are attempting to create a "snitch/tattletale" society governed by algorithmic rules and by rules of algorithms. Do we want to see Google create an environment in which surfers volunteer to snitch for algorithms and for the rich authors of algorithms? (I'm surprised the Rappers and the rest of the anti-snitch crowd have not boycotted Google. The boycott would sure bring them a lot of publicity.)

Comment by Max - August 3, 2008 at [10:49 am](#)

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