

The Mossberg Solution

Truveo Video Search Is Well Worth Patience

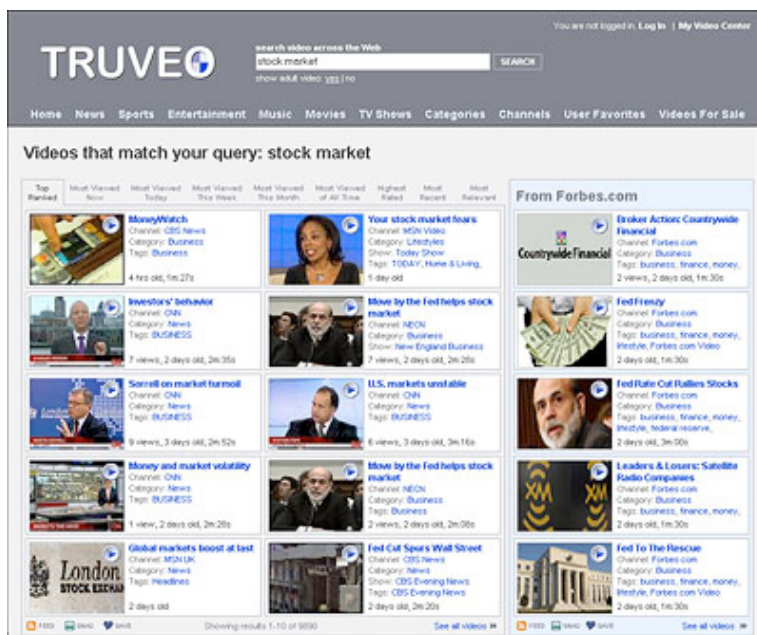
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Some fascinating results can be produced when you scour the Internet using a giant search engine like Google's. You can discover the seedy past of a creep you might have otherwise dated, find directions to the nearest Thai restaurant, or instantly learn how many inches are in a mile (63,360).

But searching for video, the hottest content on the Web right now, isn't easy. Sure, you can go to Google's popular YouTube site and look for clips stored there. But that won't find videos from other sites, especially copyrighted clips that YouTube doesn't offer or has removed from its site.

This week, I tested four video-search engines, including revamped entrant Truveo.com, a smartly designed site that combs through Web video from all sorts of sources ranging from YouTube to broadcasting companies. Truveo, a subsidiary of AOL, is stepping out on its own again after spending three years in the background, powering video search for the likes of Microsoft, Brightcove and AOL itself. It unveiled its new site last week, though I've been playing with it for a few weeks now.



Truveo organizes search results by grouping clips together and spreading them out in a smart grid-like display.

This Web site, www.truveo.com, operates under the idea that users don't merely search for video by entering specific words or phrases, like they would when starting a regular Web search. Instead, Truveo

thinks that people don't often know what they're looking for in online video searches, and browsing through content helps to retrieve unexpected and perhaps unintended (but welcome) results. I found that, compared with other sites, Truveo provided the most useful interface, which showed five times as many results per page as the others and encouraged me to browse other clips.

In effect, Truveo combines the browsing experience of a YouTube with the best Web-wide video-search engine I've seen.

The other video-search sites I tested included Google's (www.google.com/video) and Yahoo's (www.video.yahoo.com), as well as Blinkx.com (www.blinkx.com). None of these three sites do much to encourage browsing; by default they display as many as 10 results per search on one page and display the clips in a vertical list, forcing you to scroll down to see them all. The majority of clips watched on Truveo, Yahoo and Blinkx direct you to an external link to play the video on its original content provider's site — which takes an extra step and often involves watching an advertisement.

Searching on Google video almost always displays only content from Google and its famously acquired site, YouTube. The giant search company is working on improving its search results to show a better variety of content providers. Still, the upside here is that clips play right away in the search window rather than through a link to the site where the video originated. YouTube works this way because its clips are user-generated — either made by users and posted to the site or copied from original host sites and posted to YouTube, saving a trip to the original content provider's site.

Yahoo's video-searching page looks clean and uncluttered, with a large box for entering terms or phrases with which to conduct searches. Two options — labeled "From Yahoo! Video" and "From Other Sites" — help you sort results in one step. But the clips that I found on Yahoo video seemed less relevant, overall, and included more repeated clips. One search for the Discovery Channel's "Man Versus Wild" show returned seven clips, four of which were identical.

Blinkx, a three-year-old site, distinguishes itself with its "wall" feature — a visually stimulating grid of moving video thumbnails. It is like Truveo in that it also works behind the scenes for bigger companies, including Ask.com. Blinkx says it uses speech recognition and analysis to understand what the video is about, while the others stick to text-based searching. And this seemed to hold true: I rarely got results that were completely off-base using Blinkx.

But Truveo's focus on browsing and searching worked well. It repeatedly displayed spot-on results when I was looking for a video about a specific subject, or provided a variety of other videos that were similar, requiring less overall effort on my part. Its most useful feature is the way it shows results: by sorting clips into neatly organized buckets, or categories, such as Featured Channels, Featured Tags and Featured Categories. These buckets spread out on the page in a gridlike manner, giving your eye more to see in a quick glance.

This grid also lets you change the direction of your search quickly. Tabs at the top of the page can re-sort your results according to Most Viewed Now, Today, This Week, This Month or of All

Time. Three more tabs rearrange the results into Highest Rated, Most Recent (my personal favorite) and

	Truveo	Blinkx.com	Google Video	Yahoo Video
Web Site	www.truveo.com	www.blinkx.com	www.google.com/video	www.video.yahoo.com
Maximum # of Results Displayed Per Page	51	10	10	10
Display Type	Grid	Vertical List	Vertical List	Vertical List
Displayed Clip Data	Number of times viewed, date posted, duration, channel, category, distributor, tags, thumbnail, summary for 15 clips	Date posted, duration, channel, thumbnail, summary	Date posted, duration, thumbnail, rating (out of five stars), summary	Duration, thumbnail, summary
Best Feature	Grid Display	Visually-stimulating "wall" of video clips	Plays most content directly in site	Clean interface
Worst Feature	Clip duration not shown on main search results page	Annoying 10-25 second previews of each clip	Majority of displayed sources are Google Video and YouTube	Limited variety of content

Note: All data reflects default settings, some of which can be altered. Not all searches produce the same result.

Most Relevant.

The other video-search sites offered fewer details, overall, about each clip. This meant that I had to waste time opening and watching clips to discern whether they were what I wanted to see.

I searched for a variety of things, including a new television series called “Mad Men” on AMC that has me hooked. The show is still just gaining popularity, so I was curious to see what my video search would return. A single Truveo search can display as many as 51 results on a page, and the bucket organizational system placed all of these results into a layout that didn’t look overwhelming. Of the four sites, Truveo had the highest number of clips related to the actual television show: 32 out of 51. On the other sites, all of which show 10 results per page, all of the Blinkx clips, five of the Google clips and eight of the Yahoo clips were relevant.

With the exception of a few clips, Truveo search results include a thumbnail image of each video, its title, channel and category, and a line about how old the clip is and how many times it has been viewed.

The top 15 results — grouped into three columns of five clips each — feature slightly larger thumbnail images, and moving a cursor over one of these larger images shows a brief summary of that clip.

If your search generates numerous relevant clips on a well-known Web site, a special bucket is created at the top right of Truveo’s results page that will hold just that site’s clips. For example, if you were to search an MTV show that’s popular enough to have a lot of clips available directly through the MTV.com Web site, a bucket is designated just for MTV.com clips.

Truveo is considering selling this prominent bucket as an advertisement in the future, but for now, no ads appear on the video-search site.

With so many videos added to the Web each day, the search for online clips can be fruitless and tiresome. Truveo starts users out with enough relevant clips right away so that they can more easily find what they’re looking for. And its organizational buckets encourage browsing and, therefore, entertainment — one of the reasons for Web video’s popularity.

Truveo takes a refreshing look at video search, and as long as you have the patience to travel to sites where content originated, you’ll find it useful. It stands apart from other search engines in looks and functionality.

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