

Ross' Rave: For Quality Assurance, This Call May be Monitored

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Out of the blue the phone rings.

For some unfathomable reason, our campus has the most ancient phone system on the planet. Listen closely, and you'll hear, "Watson, come here, I need you," echoing in the wires. We don't have caller ID, so I don't know who this person is who is calling, and he/she probably wants me to do something for him/her, and I really have more than enough to do, thank you very much. But, I'm too much of a Virgo to not pick-up the phone so, I say,

"Hi, this is Ross."

"Hi, my name [insert name] and I'm a library tech at [insert name of high school] in [insert some town about 50 miles away]."

While she's still talking, I'm thinking she probably wants to bring a pack of pubescents to the university library for a history day project, or merit badge scavenger hunt, but just as I begin formulating my, "Do you really think this is a good idea?" speech, she says,

"A couple of us were talking the other day, it occurs to us that maybe there are some things we could do at the high school to better prepare the students for their first year in college. Hello? Are you there?"

I had dropped the phone.

"I'm sorry. Could you say that again?"

"Well," she said, "We are teaching our college bound students [insert some library skill thing] and most of them go on to either your school or the local community college, so we thought maybe if we coordinated our efforts it would, like, you know, be a good idea."

I stammered something unintelligible then composed myself enough to reply.

"I'm so glad you called," I told her. "Let's get together! We can call some other people, too. How about the county school district, the library at the community college? I can get people from our public library and the other university? What do you think about..."

"Slow down there, Sparky," she said. "You're getting overheated!"

"But, you don't understand. An overture like you are making doesn't come very often. Forgive me if I'm a bit verklempted."

She said okay, but was probably thinking I was totally cracked.

"I'll try to set something up and we'll plan on coming up to your place in a couple of weeks. How does that sound?"

"No, no," I said, not wanting to lose her. "I'll drive down there."

"Well, actually, we have some shopping to do in [insert name of a big-box store] and there is one near your school, so this way we can combine a little business with pleasure."

Ok. Maybe the motivation wasn't as pure as I had imagined, but I was still flying.

True to his/her word, a fortnight later, we had exchanged emails, finalized plans, set a date and time. I baked cookies.

Five of us sat around a small table in our library classroom. We made small talk about the holidays, the weather, lunch, then got down to business. At first it had the feeling of a 12-step program.

“My name is [insert guy’s name] and I’m the librarian at [community college]. We don’t have any formal classes for our students, but I was thinking we could maybe add a one-unit module to the freshmen English classes and teach library skills to them.”

“My name is [insert woman’s name] and I work in the school library at [small town]. We just started requiring the students to do a set of worksheets. It’s like a workbook. They all have to use the library to answer questions, like what is an index, or how to look up a Roman god in the OPAC.”

“I’m [insert guy’s name] and I work at the county library. We don’t have anything formal, but we like to show students our reference books and special encyclopedias, because they just use the computers and don’t ever want to use books. And, they are really expensive.”

It went on like this for half an hour. I felt like the host of a talk show that was going sour.

“What do you do at the university to teach students library skills?” someone asked.

I answered politely. Succinctly. Hearing the words as they came out of my mouth.

“You know,” I said. “I had this very same conversation 30 years ago.”

“Really?”

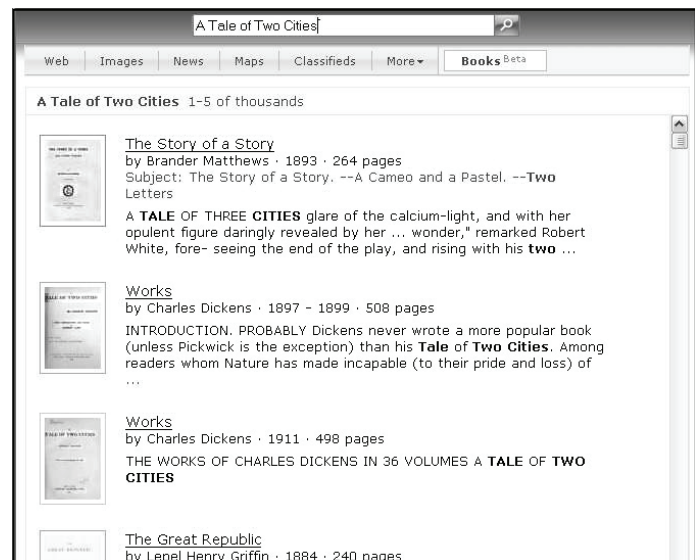
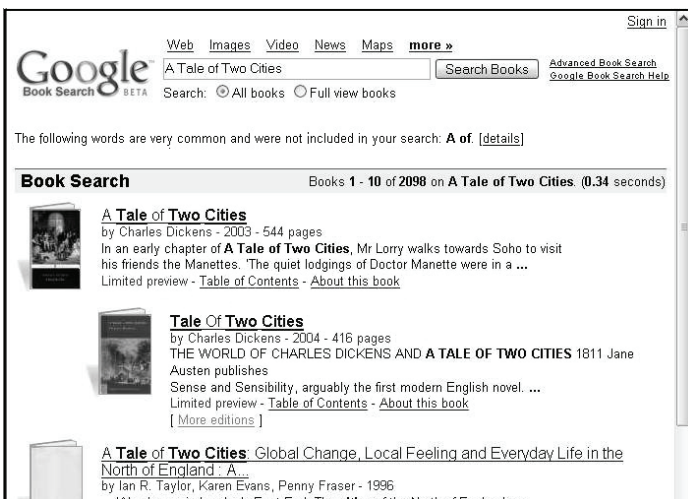
“Yep,” I said, realizing that I was older than their parents(!)

“Well, what happened? Did you come up with anything? Were you able to make a change in the curriculum, or develop any common instruction?”

“Nope,” I said with a sigh, “but that doesn’t mean we can’t try again!” And, I passed around the plate of cookies.

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Figure 2: Results Pages for both services



One notable weakness of the Microsoft search tool is the absence of an Advanced Search feature to facilitate searching for a specific edition of a work. In contrast, Google’s Advanced Search screen allows users to enter the title, author, publisher, date of publication, and/or ISBN which makes finding a specific work significantly easier.

In the end, Google currently seems to have the clear edge over Microsoft in the book search realm. Google

Book Search is the more full-featured search tool, and certainly their database contains a larger collection of materials. Of course, the Microsoft tool is very new and undoubtedly they will continue to develop their product to make it a more competitive option. As I’ve said before, competition in the search domain can only benefit our students and library users as companies will be pushed to continually improve and expand their Book Search programs.