

Google:

More Than a Search Engine

By Arthur Garbiso

Sure, we've all probably "Googled" something, but the fun doesn't have to end there. Since its inception, Google has become an impressive productivity tool. The website seems to be making great strides toward achieving its mission "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Over the past few years, Google has added so many features to its services that one could easily compare it to a "dashboard." In fact, while preparing for a recent trip to San Diego, I got a chance to develop a deeper appreciation for what this tool is capable of doing.

Three hours before my flight, Google helped to keep me on track with my travels. What would have taken me well over an hour in the past (and that is just the time that I would have spent on the phone waiting), took less than 15 minutes with the help of Google. Have a look at what I was able to do in such a short time.

Flight Status: I typed in my flight number and clicked on the first link in my search results. I was then able to see that my plane was on time and where it was in real time. While I was at it, I went ahead and clicked on the link to the airline's website, checked in online, and printed out my boarding pass—thus saving myself from having to wait in line to check in at the airport.

Weather Report: I typed in "weather San Diego" and I received the current conditions and the forecast for the next 4 days. It was really nice knowing what to pack.

Hotel Reservations: I typed in "hotels San Diego" and Google suggested I try Hotels.com. So I clicked on the link, sorted by price and location, and booked a hotel in less than 5 minutes, without picking up the phone.

Now that I had the essentials taken care of, with time to spare, it was time to make plans for the evening. I pulled up my Gmail account, emailed my itinerary to a few friends, and my evening plans were taken care of. Did you know you can get a Google email account with over two gigabytes of storage for free? You can also have your Gmail sent straight to your cell phone in most places, as long as text messaging is included in your service plan. Otherwise you may have to pay your wireless carrier more for this service.

While signing out of my account, another thought entered my mind. Will I be lucky enough to make it to Mexico on this trip? Just in case, I Googled the U.S./Mexico exchange rate by typing in "dollar to peso" and found that I could get 10.44 pesos for each dollar.

So now I was packed and ready to go with a full suitcase, hotel reservations, and evening plans. Now all I needed was a ride to the airport. I clicked on the Local link,

typed in "City Cab," got the number, called a cab, and was on my way. By the way, you don't have to wait until 3 hours before your flight leaves to be able to appreciate how useful this tool really is—but after this experience, I'm impressed.

In addition to what I've used it for, you can use Google for maps, as a calculator or a dictionary, to track shipments, convert measurements, or find images, and for countless other things. So the next time you have a few free minutes, type in www.google.com/features.html, or click on the "More" link on the Google site. See what it can do for you.

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Game-Based Learning

Continued from the bottom of page 20

interactive media. As our society evolves, so must our teaching methods. Despite the advanced techniques we have now, the focus on gaming in education is still relatively small.

James Gee, author of *What Video Games Have To Teach Us about Learning and Literacy*, lays out, among his many principles, that a good learning game will ensure that the learner must be enticed to try, that the learner must be enticed to put in lots of effort, and that the learner must achieve some meaningful success. Surely these are ideas that can be incorporated into any content area.

Games for many are a philosophical departure from classroom and instructor-led models, but they can teach. They are not all created equal. Games are not meant to replace primary materials or teachers. But beneath what Raph Koster calls "the dressing" of a game, there are significant lessons to be learned and tacit knowledge that can be gained that only comes from tackling issues in a gaming environment, even if virtual. Motivating and reaching the current generation of young learners has changed dramatically—can educators answer the challenge?

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