

Search function on job boards reviewed:

Part 1: Introduction to the study and the subject

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Nowadays most people in the Netherlands find a new job online. We suppose that is the case all around the world. Traditional media like newspapers and magazines have lost the battle for the job seeker. People search and find their jobs on their favourite job board, for example Monsterboard or Nationale Vacaturebank.

1. Evaluation of the search function on 9 job boards

To assess the usability state of the Dutch vacancy sites we studied the search function of seven Dutch job boards and two foreign ones, an English one and an American one. We report on this study in five online articles, that will all be available free of charge (published under the GNU Free Documentation License) on www.2useit.nl. The subjects of the articles are:

- Part 1: Introduction to the study and the subject.
- Part 2: Search Start Interface on job boards
- Part 3: Search Engine Results Page (SERP) on job boards
- Part 4: Detail Page on job boards
- Part 5: Personalization on job boards

This article is Part 1, the 1st part of the series. The others parts will be published in the following weeks.

2. About the study

With a group of 30 students¹ we evaluated the keyword search function of nine job boards in May 2008. These included seven Dutch boards:

- Monsterboard, www.monsterboard.nl
- Nationale Vacaturebank, www.nationalevacaturebank.nl
- Jobtrack, www.jobtrack.nl
- Intermediair, www.intermediair.nl
- Stepstone, www.stepstone.nl
- Academic Transfer, www.academictransfer.nl
- Werken bij de Overheid, www.werkenbijdeoverheid.nl

To relate these boards to world wide developments we have included two boards from abroad: a British one and an American one:

- Jobs.ac.uk, www.jobs.ac.uk
- Indeed.com, www.indeed.com

For practical reasons we only inspected the keyword search function and not the category search (see next chapter for an explanation).

¹ from the Academy of Digital Communication of the Hogeschool Utrecht (School of Higher Education, the Netherlands)

Based on literature and a first quick research on the vacancy sites we developed a short list of criteria to assess keyword search. We used the checklist to compare the job boards. Each group of students investigated two job boards. They checked the boards with the checklists and wrote an expert review of the sites.

After analysing the results, we developed a new checklist. This checklist we used to check all the job boards again.

The study can be described as a multi-expert review. It is not a user test, for the students were not instructed to test the sites as a user. And they were not part of the target group; they were not searching for a job, they were studying. They assessed the sites as experts.

We evaluated each site on the following elements:

- General behaviour: how does the site perform? How fast is the site?
- Search Interface
- Search Engine Results Page (SERP)
- Detail page, i.e. the page with the job description
- Personalization

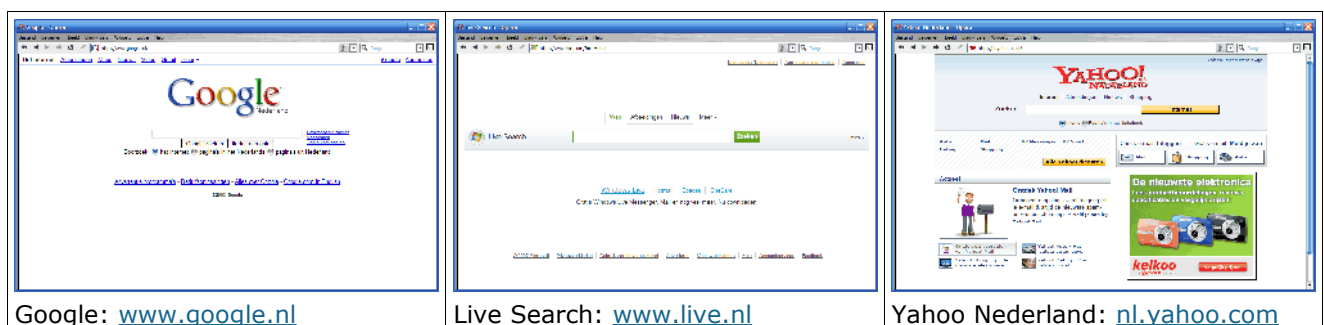
Before we present the findings of the research we will discuss the main elements we evaluated on the sites and describe the main forms of search: keyword search, category search and filtered search.

3. Different kinds of search

There are two main types of online search: keyword search and category search. A third way of searching combines these: filtered search.

3.1 Key word search

Popular search engines use keyword search. For the visitor the search is fairly easy: he just puts in some words in the search box. If the results do not satisfy he will take a better look and will try some other words. Putting in some keywords is not a brain-teaser. The feedback of the search engine creates a smooth interaction so the searcher – in most cases - succeeds easily in his task.



The search engine has to find the results that fits the visitor's needs. He gets one or several keywords, he doesn't know what the searcher is thinking about and based on these keywords he must find relevant content. That is a difficult job, you might say a really difficult job.

Nevertheless, Search Engines seem to manage. In a user study – performed by Nielsen¹ -56 % of the searches in the large external search engines (Google, MSN and Yahoo!) were successful. That is a remarkably high percentage².

We may conclude that search engines are technically enabled to give useful results with keyword search. Combined with the minimum of effort it requires from the user keyword search can be seen as an excellent way of searching.

3.2 Category search

Category search shows the user a number of categories. He can choose one of them, the category he thinks it will help him solving his question.

Below you see a screen shot of this search on the British academic job board www.jobs.ac.uk.



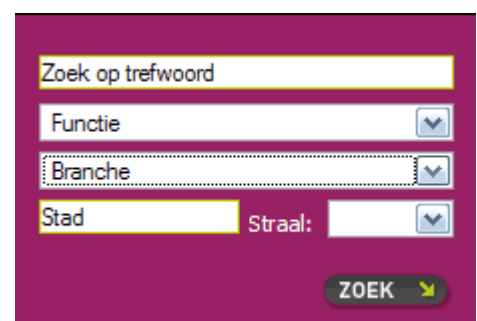
Category search on www.jobs.ac.uk

This kind of searching is also referred to as *faceted search*.

3.3 Filtered search

Most job boards offer a combination of keyword search and category search as default search. You can search with keywords and use filters to refine the results. This kind of search we call *filtered search*. For example: the Dutch job board Intermediair uses this kind of search (see adjoining image).

In the literature this is also called *parametric search* or *restricted search*.



Filtered search,
www.intermediar.nl

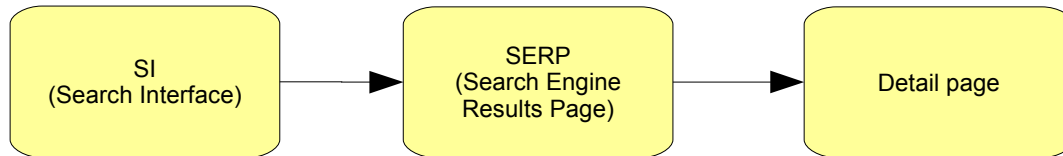
1 Nielsen and Loranger, *Prioritizing Web Usability* (2006)

2 Remarkably with internal search engines only 33 % of the searches was successful, much lower.

4. The search function

An online keyword search function is made up of three steps:

- Step 1: Search Interface (or Start Search Function): a text input field and a search button. It is the place where you can enter your keyword(s) or phrase(s) and start your search.
- Step 2: Search Engine Results Page (SERP): overview with the results
- Step 3: Detail page: the details of one result



Below you see the same steps for the job board Indeed.com.

Start Search Function

Search Engine Results Page

Detail page

We will discuss each step in the following articles.

Next article

How well do job boards perform with their search interface? In the next article we will publish the results.