

The Current Issue

The area of "web search" is surely an area of great commercial interest. One can follow this commercial story via the newspapers or search for it on the web— the ongoing saga of Microsoft courting and being rebuffed by Yahoo ..., Google market share numbers continuing to increase to the point of bringing DOJ interest, Microsoft re-introducing its search effort, now called "Bing!", new international entrants to the search market, etc. This blizzard of news tends to blur the fact that "search" is also a technical area where "new avenues" are being pursued.

It is these new avenues in search that is the subject of the current issue. What is terrific about this area is its combination of commercial importance, hard technical problems, and continuing insights. We are no longer satisfied with answering the straightforward key word search over html pages. One effort is to discover more fully what the user intent is. Another is to search the web more deeply, in many cases for underlying, and partially hidden structured information. Collaborative search is yet another direction. This area is rife with both challenges and opportunities.

Sihem Amer-Yahia is the editor for this special issue. Her letter provides a more complete overview of the current issue. Being at Yahoo, Sihem is very much aware of the work going on in the search area, who is doing it, and what is important about it. She has put that awareness to good use in assembling the current issue. This issue provides a way both to introduce yourself to the search area and also to learn some of the latest thinking from researchers active in the area. I want to thank Sihem for doing a fine job on this issue, which I expect will be read with great interest not only by our technical community but by the more business oriented folks as well.