

Dan Naumovich: Google THIS, Gleb

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER
Posted Apr 13, 2008 @ 12:00 AM

Today, I stand atop my clan. Not to be boastful, but I've risen to a position that few, if any, will.

When I type my last name into Google, I am the top Naumovich. The billion-dollar algorithm created by Larry Page and Sergey Brin goes to work and, after scouring through 26,200 pages of results, picks me first. Or rather, it picks the Web site I set up to promote my freelance writing. The one Google loves best.

Pretty cool, huh? Or is it? No, it is. It definitely is.

So take THAT, Gleb Naumovich, assistant professor in the Department of Computer and Information Science at Polytechnic University in Brooklyn.

For many years, before my Internet presence exploded, Professor Gleb ruled the top of the Naumovich search engine results. But not anymore. He and his precious little instructor profile have been relegated to runner-up status. I guess his research into finite state verification and obfuscation of program design just doesn't draw the crowds like it once did.

Being Google's chosen one puts me in elite company. I have something in common with Angelina, who is the most popular Jolie, and Prince, who is the most popular Prince. Not even Bill Gates, Mr. Internet Explorer himself, is the master of his own surname. If you type Gates into a search engine, you'll find that Bill plays second fiddle to an automotive and industrial products concern out of Colorado. That's got to be embarrassing.

What's it like to be the most famous Naumovich on the World Wide Web? Well, if you look at it from a statistical perspective, it's like being the most popular kid in a medium-sized, Eastern Bloc high school. There aren't a lot of us Naumoviches roaming the hallways of cyberspace, so being the BMOC doesn't carry much weight.

I realize that being a G-list celebrity is a dubious claim to fame. I really don't have much in common with Angelina and Prince. Having people visit your Web site or blog isn't the same as having them hysterically chase you down the street while shrieking for your autograph, although I often pretend it is. It's likely a good number of the people who visit my Web site find themselves there by accident. Maybe they're looking for Gleb.

Putting your name into a search engine to find out where it's showing up, is clearly an act of vanity and paranoia. For better or worse, people want to know what's being written about them and who is linking to their Web site or blog. I'm lucky that I've not come across any salacious rumors or sensationalistic stories associated with my name, except for those that I wrote myself.

Many of the other online Naumoviches - pianists, professors and film directors among them - are much more accomplished than am I, as is everyone in my immediate family. Still, I'm proud to be the Naumovich that Google thinks of first on those rare occasions when someone searches for it - and accidentally spells it correctly.

Update

Last month, I wrote a column in which I put forth all sorts of outlandish theories on why teens don't wear winter coats, even on the coldest days. It seems I may have been a bit off the mark.

I received a thoughtful e-mail from a recent high-school grad who told me the reason they don't wear bulky winter coats is because they won't fit, along with their books and bags, into the half-lockers they're issued. Better to be cold for a few minutes to and from school, these students apparently have surmised, than to have to lug their coats around with them all day. Makes sense. It's not that funny, though.

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