

# GOOGLE HACKS™

**2nd  
Edition**  
Covers Gmail

*Tips & Tools for Smarter Searching*



***Tara Calishain & Rael Dornfest***

*With a new foreword by  
Craig Silverstein, Director of Technology, Google*

**O'REILLY®**

HACK  
#61

## Google Your Desktop

Google your desktop and the rest of your filesystem, mailbox, and instant messenger conversations—even your browser cache.

Not content just to help you find things on the Internet, Google takes on that teetering pile on your desktop—your computer’s desktop, that is.

The Google Desktop (<http://desktop.google.com>) is your own private little Google server. It sits in the background, slogging through your files and folders, indexing your incoming and outgoing email messages, listening in on your instant messenger chats, and browsing the Web right along with you. Just about anything you see and summarily forget, the Google Desktop sees and memorizes: it’s like a photographic memory for your computer.

And it operates in real time.

Beyond the initial sweep, that is. When you first install Google Desktop, it makes use of any idle time to meander your filesystem, email application, instant messages, and browser cache. Imbued with a sense of politeness, the indexer shouldn’t interfere at all with your use of your computer; it only springs into action when you step away, take a phone call, or doze off for 30 seconds or more. Pick up the mouse or touch the keyboard and the Google Desktop scuttles off into the corner, waiting patiently for its next opportunity to look around.

Its initial inventory taken, the Google Desktop server sits back and waits for something of interest to come along. Send or receive an email message, strike up an AIM conversation with a friend, or get a start on that Power-Point presentation and it’ll be noticed and indexed within seconds.

The Google Desktop full-text indexes:

- Text files, Microsoft Word documents, Excel workbooks, and Power-Point presentations living on your hard drive
- Email handled through Outlook or Outlook Express
- AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) conversations
- Web pages browsed in Internet Explorer

Additionally, any other files you have lying about—photographs, MP3s, movies—are indexed by their filename. So while the Google Desktop can’t tell a portrait of Uncle Alfred (*uncle\_alfred.jpg*) from a song by “Uncle Cracker” (*uncle\_cracker\_\_double\_wide\_\_who\_s\_your\_uncle.mp3*), it’ll file both in a search for `uncle`.

And the point of all this is to make your computer searchable with the ease, speed, and familiar interface you’ve come to expect of Google. The Google

Desktop has its own home page on your computer, shown in [Figure 5-9](#), whether you're online or not. Type in a search query just like you would at Google proper and click the Search Desktop button to search your personal index. Or click Search the Web to send your query out to Google.



Figure 5-9. The Google Desktop home page

But we're getting a little ahead of ourselves here.

Let's take a few steps back, download and install the Google Desktop, and work our way back to searching again.

## Installing the Google Desktop

The Google Desktop is a Windows-only application, requiring Windows XP or Windows 2000 Service Pack 3 or later. The application itself is tiny, but it'll consume about 500 MB of room on your hard drive and works best with 400 MHz of computing horsepower and 128 MB of memory.

Point your browser at <http://desktop.google.com>, download, and run the Google Desktop installer. It'll install the application, embed a little swirly icon in your taskbar, and drop a shortcut onto your desktop. When it's fin-

ished installing and setting itself up, your default browser pops open and you're asked to set a few preferences, as shown in [Figure 5-10](#).

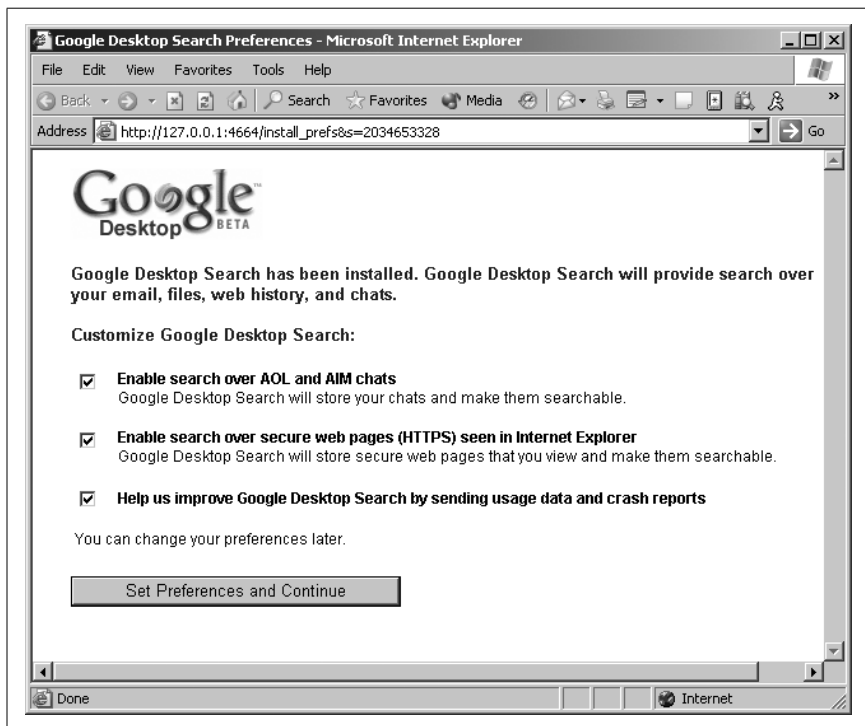


Figure 5-10. Set Google Desktop search preferences

Click the Set Preferences and Continue button and you'll be notified that the Google Desktop is starting its initial indexing sweep. Click the Start Searching button to get to the Google Desktop home page ([Figure 5-9](#)).

## Searching Your Desktop

From here on out, any time you're looking for something on your computer, rather than invoking Windows search and waiting impatiently while it grinds away (and you grind your teeth) and returns with nothing, double-click the swirly Google Desktop taskbar icon and Google for it. Don't bother combing through an endless array of Inboxes, Outboxes, Sent Mail, and folders or wishing you could remember whether your AIM buddy suggested starving or feeding your cold. Click the swirl.

[Figure 5-11](#) shows the results of a Google Desktop search for hacks. Notice that it found 16 email messages, 2 files, 1 chat, and 1 item in my IE browsing history matching my hacks query. As you can probably guess from the

icons to the left of each results, the first three are an AIM chat, HTML file (most likely from my browser's cache), and an email message. These are sorted by date, but you can easily make a switch to relevance by clicking the "Sort by relevance" link at the top-right of the results list.

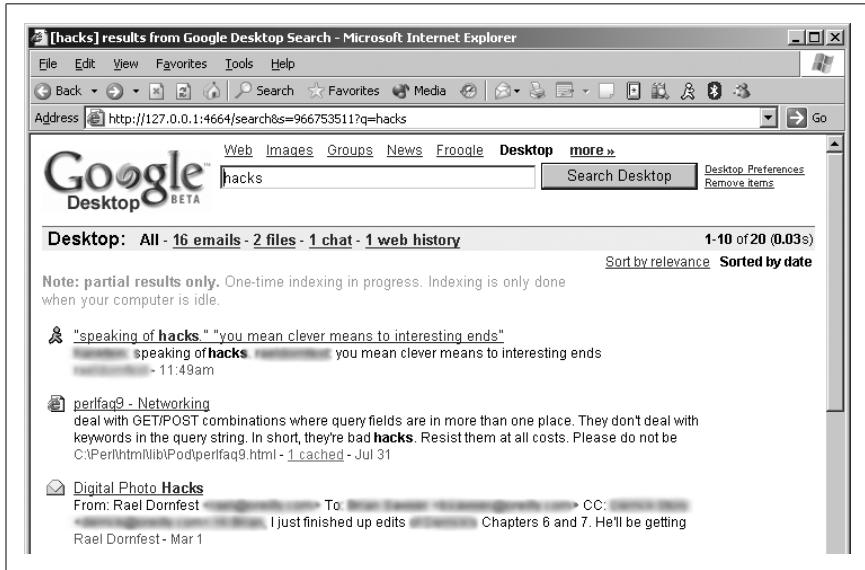


Figure 5-11. Google Desktop search results

Figures 5-12, 5-13, and 5-14 show each of these individual search results as I clicked through them. Note that each is displayed in a manner appropriate to the content.

Click the "Chat with..." link shown in Figure 5-12 to launch an AIM conversation with the person at hand.

Cached pages are presented, as shown in Figure 5-13, in much the same manner as they are in the Google cache.

The various Reply, Reply to All, Forward, etc., links associated with an individual message result (Figure 5-14) work: click them and the appropriate action will be taken by Outlook or Outlook Express.

## Google Desktop Search Syntax

It just wouldn't be a Google search interface if there weren't special search syntax to go along with it.



Figure 5-12. An AIM instant message

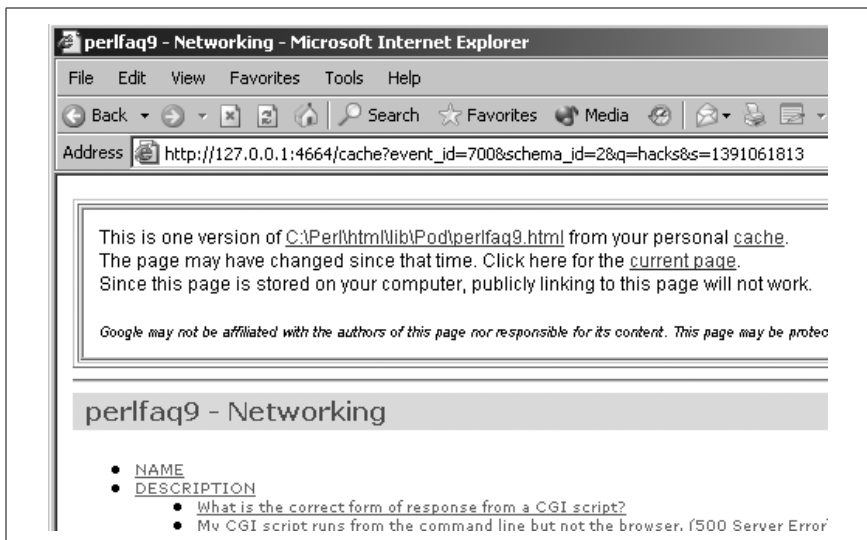


Figure 5-13. A cached web page

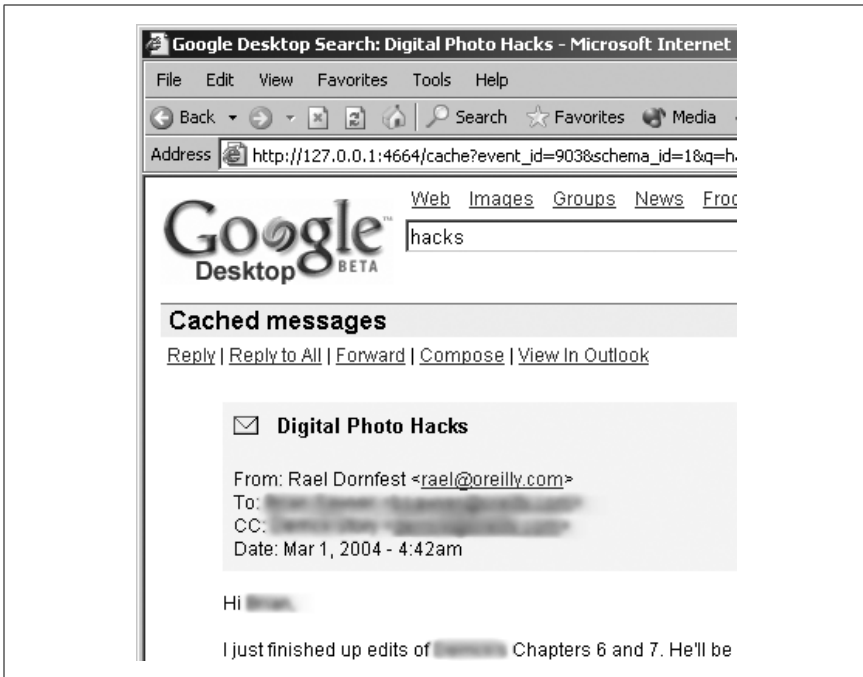


Figure 5-14. An email message

The Boolean OR works as expected (e.g., hacks OR snacks), as does negation (e.g., hacks -evil).

A filetype: operator restricts searches to only a particular type of file: filetype:powerpoint or filetype:ppt (.ppt being the PowerPoint file extension) both find only Microsoft PowerPoint files while filetype:word or filetype:doc (.doc being the Word file extension) both restrict results to Microsoft Word documents.

## Searching the Web

Now you'd think I'd hardly need to cover Googling ... and you'd be right. But there's a little more to googling via the Google Desktop than you might expect. Take a close look at the results of a Google search for hacks shown in Figure 5-15.

Come on back when you're through with that double take.

If you missed it, notice the new quick links [**“Quick Links” in Chapter 1**]: “27 results stored on your computer.”

Yes, those are the same results (and then some, given my indexer was hard at work) returned in my earlier Google Desktop Search of my local machine.

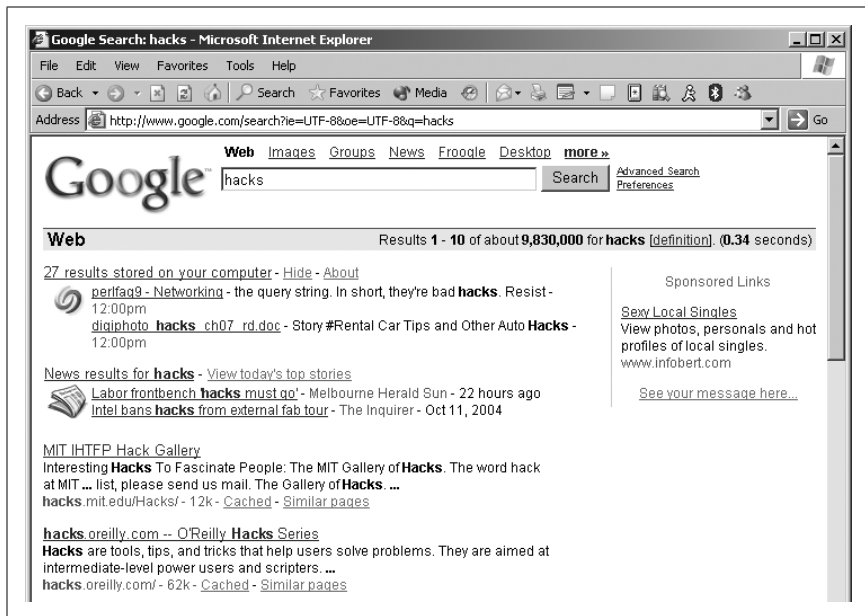


Figure 5-15. Google Desktop Web Search results pack a little extra

As an added reminder, they're called out by that Google Desktop swirl. Click a local result and you'll end up in just the same place as before: all 27 results, an HTML page, or Microsoft Word document. Click any other quick link or search result and they'll act in the manner that you'd expect from any Google.com results.

## Behind the Scenes

Now before you start worrying about the results of a local search—or indeed your local files—being sent off to Google, read on. What's actually going on is that the local Google Desktop server is intercepting any Google Web searches, passing them on to Google.com in your stead, and running the same search against your computer's local index. It's then intercepting the Web search results as they come back from Google, pasting in local finds, and presenting it to you in your browser as a cohesive whole.

All work involving your local data is done on your computer. Neither your filenames nor your files themselves are ever sent on to Google.com.

For more on Google Desktop and privacy, right-click the Google Desktop taskbar swirl, select About, and click the Privacy link.

## Twiddling Knobs and Setting Preferences

There are various knobs to twiddle and preferences to set through the Google Desktop browser-based interface and taskbar swirl.

Set various preferences in the Google Desktop Preferences page. Click the Desktop Preferences link on the Google Desktop home page or any results page to bring up the settings shown in [Figure 5-16](#).

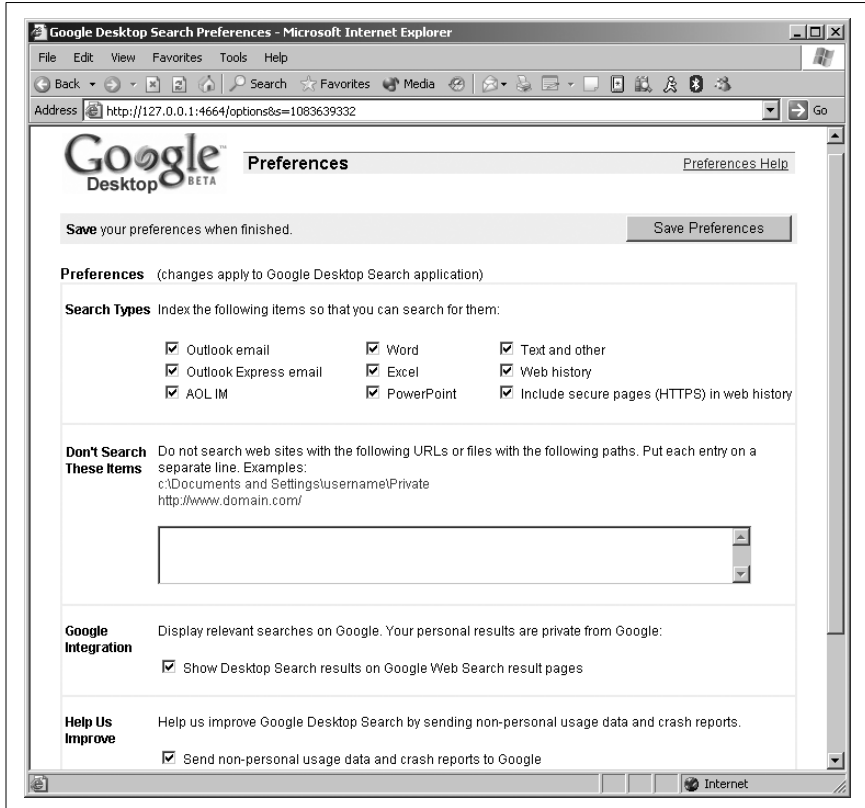


Figure 5-16. Google Desktop Preferences

Hide your local results from sight when sharing Google Web Search results with a friend or colleague by clicking the Hide link next to any visible Google Desktop quick links. You can also turn Desktop quick link results on and off from the Google Desktop Preferences page.

Click the “Remove results” link next to the Search Desktop button on the top-right of any results page and you’ll be able to go through and remove particular items from Google Desktop index, as shown in [Figure 5-17](#). Do

note that if you open or view any of these items again, they'll once again be indexed and start showing up in search results.

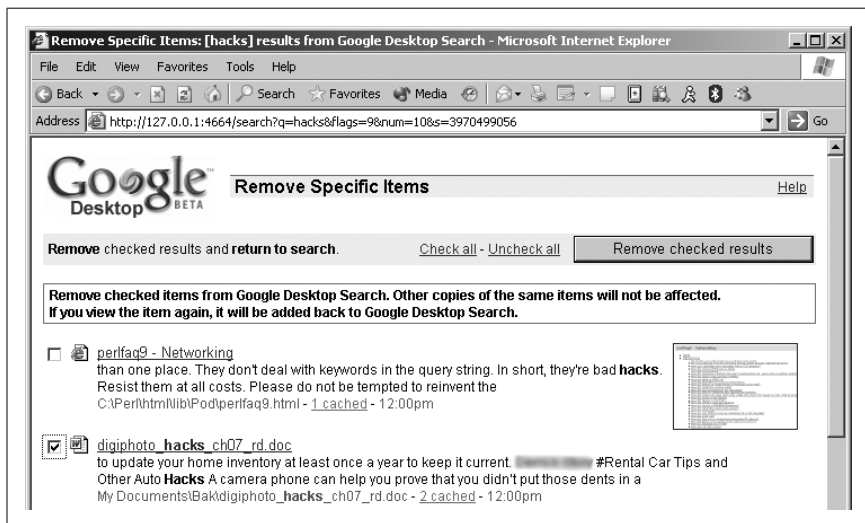


Figure 5-17. Removing items from your Google Desktop index

Search, set preferences, check the status of your index, pause or resume indexing, quit Google Desktop, or browse the “About” docs by right-clicking the Google Desktop taskbar swirl and choosing an item from the menu, shown in Figure 5-18.

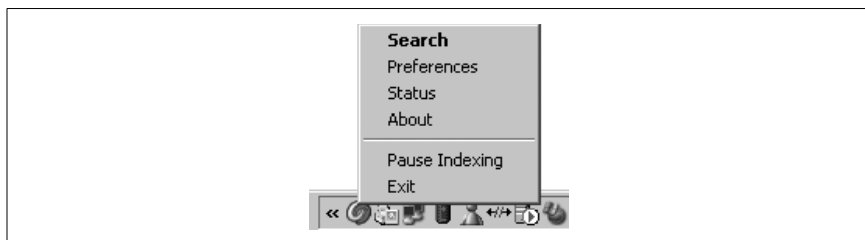


Figure 5-18. The Google Desktop taskbar menu gets you to knobs to twiddle and preferences to set

When evaluating the Google Desktop as an interface to finding needles in my personal haystack, one thing sticks in my mind: I stumbled across an old email message that I was sure I'd lost.

## See Also

- The Google Desktop Proxy (<http://www.projectcomputing.com/resources/desktopProxy>) takes desktop searching beyond your own desktop. A little proxy server sitting on your computer accepts queries from other machines on the network, passes them to the Google Desktop engine running locally, and forwards the results on.