PART

I

Getting to Know Google

Google. Unless you live in a cave, you've probably heard the name. In fact, it's one of the most frequently (and most globally) used search engines. Google wasn't the first search engine to hit the Internet, but it's one of the best. And did you know there's more to it than just search capabilities?

There is. A lot more. And in the chapters that follow, you'll learn just how much Google makes available to you. In this section of the book, you'll also find out how to get connected with Google so that you can start taking advantage of all the programs the company has to offer.

1

Buried Treasures

Muck around on the Google Web pages long enough, and you're bound to find a program you didn't know Google made available. You probably know that Google search technology is among the best (and most used) in the world. But did you know that Google has a program that will let you search for a local business, map it, and even zoom in or out on the map so you can find it? You can even access this information from your smartphone or wireless-enabled PocketPC.

That's the promise of Google: buried treasures. The folks over at Google (there are more than 6,500 Google employees now) are constantly working on something new and exciting to help you find information, do business faster, or connect to the world more easily. And that means there's always something more just around the corner.

Google Is More Than Search

In 1995, two guys who didn't even like each other all that much — Larry Page and Sergey Brin — managed to come together on one topic: They agreed that searches could be performed faster and return better results, if only the software would enable it. An application called BackRub was born out of that agreement, and today it's the biggest player in search. Wait, that's not exactly how it happened. Yes, a search engine called BackRub was designed by Brin
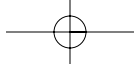
and Page, but eventually it was renamed Google, a play on the mathematical term "googol," which is a number that consists of a 1 followed by 100 zeros. (Try figuring equations with numbers in *that* range!) The idea was that the name Google would represent the organization's mission to classify the immense amounts of data available on the Web.

So in the beginning, Google *was* just search. And it was very good at it. The company started in a college dorm room, used a garage as a first office, and eventually "Google-ized" the Silicon Graphics, Inc., campus in Mountain View, California. It became a giant because of the search algorithms that were developed in those early days and then were continuously improved upon by the brightest minds in technology. But did you know there's more to Google than just search?

There really is. In the years since its inception in 1995, Google has expanded and improved. The company has bought out other companies and added to its offerings. Each of the programs now included in Google's huge portfolio has a search capability as a basis for its operation. Maybe it's simply searching documents, or perhaps it's searching for a title or a term, but you can bet that anything coming out of the Google portfolio will have search built into it in some fashion.

But don't be fooled into thinking that's all you get. Many of the applications coming out of Google right now are useful for far more than just search. I'm writing this book from the Google Docs & Spreadsheets application that Google is beta-testing. It's about 60 percent complete, and fully functional as far as I can tell. Yes, some of the functionality that you'll find in Microsoft Word just doesn't exist in the Docs half of the program, but for the price (FREE!), it's an excellent application. I cover Google Docs & Spreadsheets more in Parts II and III, so that's all I'll say for now.

What's more, Google is now a household term that people use as both a noun and a verb. As of mid-2006, it's officially a word in the dictionary, as well. You can "Google" any term that comes to mind and something can even be described as "Googlesque." So today, Google *is* search, but it's also much more.

So, what else does Google offer that you might find useful? The following is a list of Google programs that you can pick and choose from. Some are very search-specific (such as Froogle), while others include some elements of search but will help you with other activities, such as keeping your calendar.

- **AdWords:** An advertising/marketing program
- **Alerts:** A reminder service
- **Analytics:** A Web site metrics collection and analysis program
- **Blog Search:** A blog search service
- **Blogger:** A blogging tool
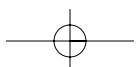
- **Book Search:** A book search service
- **Calendar:** A Web-based calendar application
- **Catalogs:** A catalog search service
- **Checkout:** An e-commerce checkout application
- **Desktop:** A collection of tools to make your desktop more user-friendly
- **Directory:** A service that allows you to browse the Internet by topic
- **Earth:** A combination of satellite imagery and mapping applications referred to as a "3D interface to the planet"
- **Finance:** A financial news and information service
- **Froogle:** An e-commerce price-based comparison service
- **Gmail:** An e-mail application
- **Google Docs & Spreadsheets:** A Web-based word-processing and spreadsheets application
- **Groups:** A mailing-list service
- **Images:** A picture-specific search service
- **Local:** A local search service
- **Maps:** A Web-based mapping application
- **Maps for Mobile:** A mapping application for mobile devices
- **Mobile:** A collection of Google-related mobile applications
- **News:** A Web-based news service
- **Notebook:** A note-taking and information collection application
- **Page Creator:** A Web-design application
- **Picasa:** A photo-editing and sharing application
- **Scholar:** A search service specifically for scholarly papers
- **SketchUp:** A 3D modeling application
- **SMS:** A text message–based search service for mobile devices
- **Specialized Searches:** A search service for specific topics
- **Talk:** An instant messaging and Internet telephony application
- **Toolbar:** A toolbar that puts Google search capabilities in your Web browser
- **Translate:** A Web-based language translation service
- **Video:** A video sharing application
- **Web Search:** A Web-search service that indexes billions of Web pages
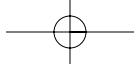
I've probably missed some additional programs in the preceding list, which doesn't even include the programming-based applications that enable you to design your own plug-ins for Google. The point is, Google has programs that will help you do lots of stuff better, or faster, or more conveniently. And the best part of these programs, again, is that they're FREE.

What You Can Do with Google

Okay, so that's a lot of programs. But what can you do with them? None of them are fully functional, right? Wrong. Many are fully functional. For example, Google's Page Creator can help you to quickly build and publish a Web page, and you'll find everything that you need to do it included in the program.

One great part of all of these programs is that they're Web-based. What that means (and this is especially true for the programs covered in this book) is that you have access to your information from any computer, anywhere in the world. You don't have to carry a computer with you if you're going to Florida or the Bahamas for a vacation. If you need any of the information that you've created or added to Google programs, all you have to do is find a cyber cafe and log in. Your documents and publications will all be right there. No need to carry disks, USB drives, or any other equipment that's going to weigh you down.

With Google you can also be more productive. Some of the programs covered in this book allow simultaneous editing. You and three or four colleagues can work on the same document, at the same time, and immediately see the changes. It doesn't matter if you're in the United States and your colleagues are in Japan, Russia, and Spain. You can work together as if you were sitting side by side. You don't have to wait five hours or even five minutes for feedback on your changes to a document. Your colleagues can see your changes immediately, and can respond to them just as quickly.

One more thing Google does is guard your bottom line. Because Google programs are free, that means you're not shelling out hundreds of dollars for the privilege of working. Instead, you and every other person in your company can access these programs right from the Internet; the only cost to you is the Internet connection, which presumably you're already paying for. Bottom line is no worry.

That's not to say these programs aren't useful to home users, too. The benefits of Google applications are just as relevant if you're using the programs for personal rather than business reasons. You can bring your friends into the mix as you collaborate on the greatest party of the year, or share your work-in-progress with your critique group. You can even use Picasa to manipulate and share your favorite photos. The possibilities with Google are endless.
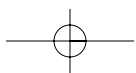
What's Not Covered Here

I can hear you already: "That's a long list of programs to cover all in one book." You're right. It's too long and it wouldn't do the programs justice, so I've chosen just the programs that will help you be more productive while saving you from having to purchase high-cost, proprietary software: Google Docs & Spreadsheets, Page Creator, Calendar, Notebook, Talk, Picasa, and Gmail.

The programs should give you a fully functional office suite when used together:

- **Google Docs & Spreadsheets:** The Google answer to Microsoft Word and Excel. These two programs aren't as functional as their Microsoft rivals, but what's there should be all you need for basic data processing, blogging, and spreadsheet functionality.

- **Page Creator:** Google's Page Creator is an online tool for designing and publishing Web sites. It takes just minutes to set up an attractive Web site using this program, and although it's not as functional as some Web page design programs, the What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) interface is easy to use.

- **Calendar:** Need to keep track of your day-to-day appointments? Google Calendar is a decent calendar application that lets you quickly see what you have scheduled for the day. It's missing a few of the nicer functions of Microsoft Outlook, but it's functional (and useful) nonetheless.

- **Notebook:** One problem that many people come up against as they're searching the Web or using an Internet-based application is that they need somewhere to put notes about what they're learning or need to know. Google offers Google Notebook to help you with that. Save all or parts of Web pages and add notes to them, or just create your own notes in the program. Then, when you need to access your information, it shouldn't be too hard to find.

- **Talk:** Everyone needs to stay connected. Google Talk offers a variety of ways to do that, from chats and instant messaging to VoIP services that are easy to use.

- **Gmail:** Of course, no office suite is complete without some e-mail application. Gmail may be the newest e-mail app on the Web, but unofficially it's the granddaddy of them all. Gmail has a never-toss-just-search philosophy about e-mail, so you never again have to worry about another accidentally deleted e-mail. And if security is your concern, you'll be most pleased with the Gmail spam filter. It's amazing.

■ **Picasa:** Digital photos are quickly taking the place of their paper-based counterparts, and everyone wants an application that will let them manipulate photos. Picasa is that application. You can even use Picasa to share your digital photos with other people.

All of that still doesn't tell you what's not covered here. And there's quite a lot that's not. Some things you probably won't see (or won't see more than a note about) are AdWords and Google Analytics. AdWords is an advertising application from Google, and Google Analytics is about tracking your Web site traffic. Both might be useful in your daily business flow, but there's just not enough room to cover them here. Besides, great books have already been written about both applications.

LEARN MORE ABOUT ADWORDS AND GOOGLE ANALYTICS

If you're really interested in reading more about Google's AdWords program or the Google Analytics application, that information is easy enough to find. Here are some books that I recommend as a jumping-off point. And don't forget to review the help files for both applications. You'll find these books full of information that you don't want to miss.

■ *Winning Results with Google AdWords*, by Andrew Goodman. McGraw-Hill Osborne Media, ISBN: 0072257024.

■ *Google Analytics*, by Mary Tyler and Jerri Ledford. Wiley, ISBN: 0470053852.

■ *Building Your Business with Google For Dummies*, by Brad Hill. Wiley, ISBN: 0764571435.

Other programs you probably won't even see mentioned include Catalogs, Scholarly, Directory, and most of the Search applications that Google has in its repertoire. These programs are beyond the scope of this book, but if you're interested in learning more about them, there's plenty of information to be found on the Google Products page online at `www.google.com/intl/en/options/`.

You might find the other programs mentioned here and there. There may even be a note or sidebar included about how those programs can help to improve your experiences with Google. But this book really is about the different productivity tools available from Google, so that's mostly what you'll find in the chapters that follow.