

Big Data and Data Mining

Web Information Retrieval

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How Search Engines Work



The user inputs a query

Google

How search engines work

how search engines work

how search engines work google

how search engines rank

how search engines see my site

how search engines work for dummies

how search engines operate

how search engines work pdf

how search engines work video

how search engines see your site

how search engines make money

Google Search I'm Feeling Lucky

The search engine searches the query terms in its very large **index**



About 83,900,000 results (0.36 seconds)

Millions of results found are **ranked** accordingly to a notion of **relevance** and are shown as a sorted list

Automated programs (a.k.a. spiders or **crawlers**) scan all pages in the web to build an index



How search engines work

Web Videos Images News Shopping More Search tools

About 83,900,000 results (0.36 seconds)

You can find pages by following links from other pages but usually it is easier to **search** for things using a **search** engine. These are programs that **search** an index of the world wide web for keywords and display the results in order.

[BBC Bitesize - How do search engines work?](#)
www.bbc.co.uk/guides/ztbjq8f British Broadcasting Corporation

[How Search Engines Work - The Beginners Guide to SEO ...](#)
moz.com/beginners-guide-to-seo/how-search-engines-operate Moz

Search engines have two major functions: crawling and building an index, and providing search users with a ranked list of the websites they've determined are ...

[How Internet Search Engines Work - HowStuffWorks](#)
computer.howstuffworks.com/internet/basics/search-engine.htm

Internet search engines do your research for you. Learn how internet search engines like Google work, how internet search engines build an index and what ...

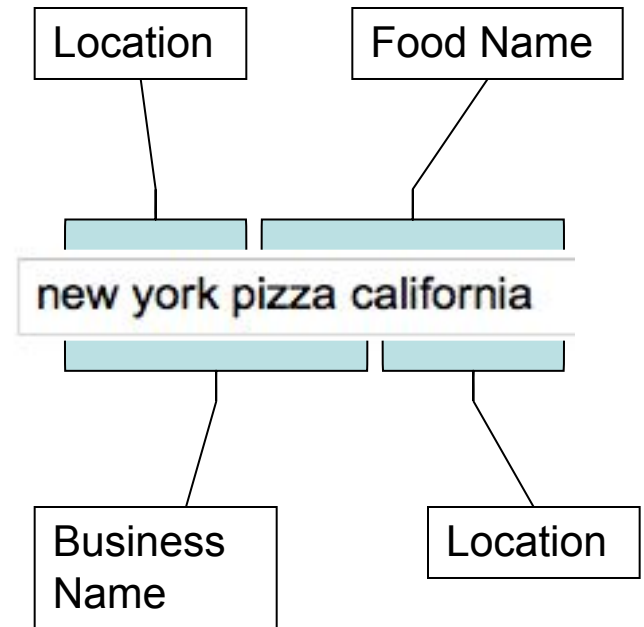
Images for How search engines work

Report images

What is Relevant?

- How can a search engine know what the user is looking for?
 - **Information need:** *a desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need* [Wikipedia]
 - **User query:** the set of consecutive terms formulated by a user to express his information need
 - **Query intent:** the task, goal or intent of a user, expressed by a query. The same query formulated by different users may be the result of different intents

Query intent can be ambiguous:



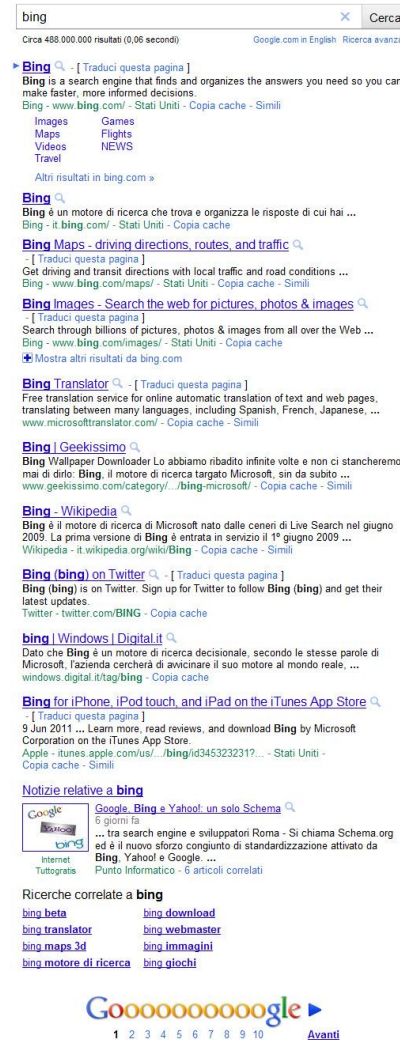


Ranking: Google PageRank

- A relevance notion based solely on term frequencies is not enough to rank billions of documents
- Complex measures are applied to evaluate the quality, reliability and authority of web pages:
 - Measures based **on topological network properties** (such as Google PageRank)
 - Measures based **on different field boosting** (Title, subtitle, body have different weight)
 - Measures based **on semantics and time-space properties** (freshness of a page)
- PageRank set up a **rich-get-richer loop**, whereby few sites dominate the top ranks

Search Engine Results Page

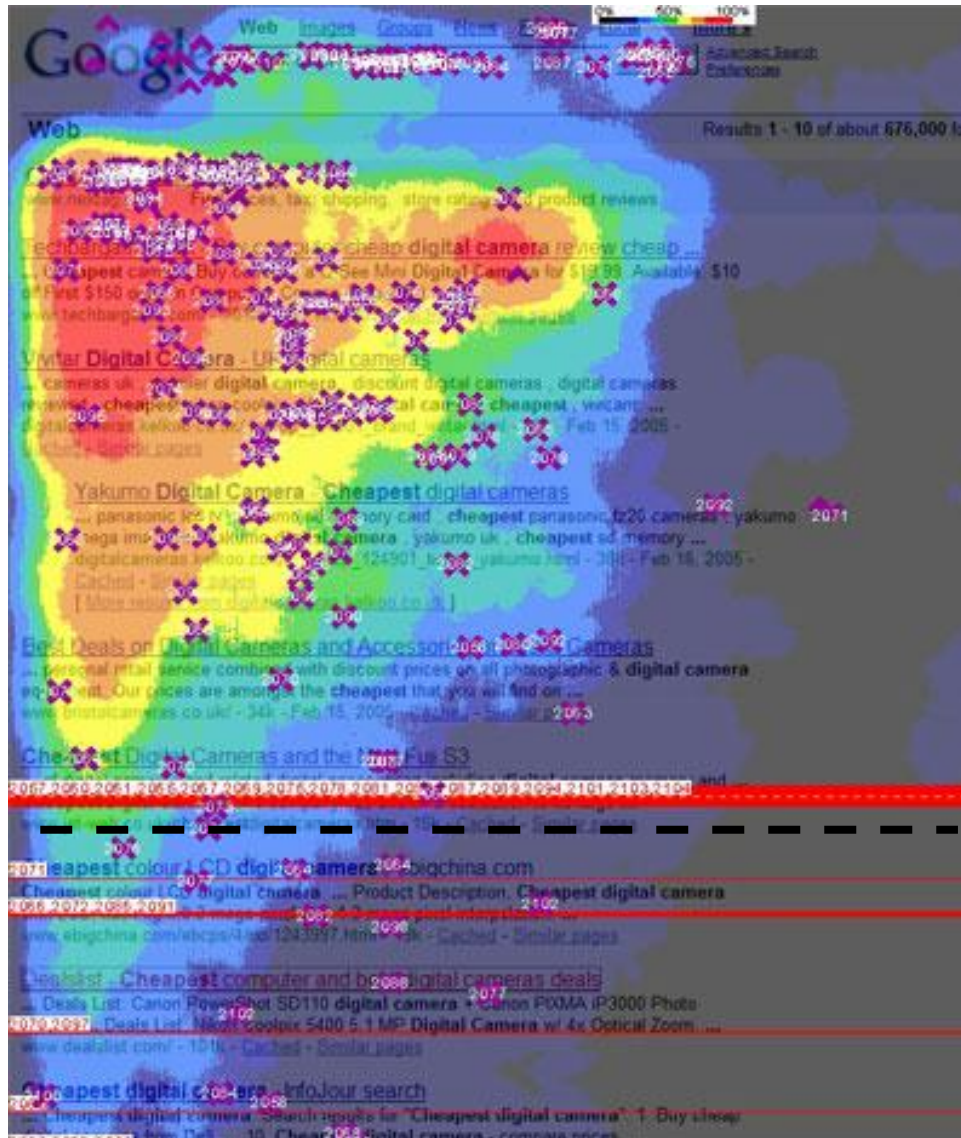
- A Search Engine Results Page (SERP) shows by default **10 results**
- Of these results, on average, the first **5 are visible** without scrolling down
- We will take in consideration the **user behavior on the first SERP** of search engines (the first 10 results)

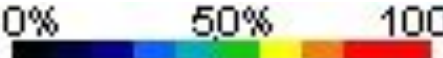



Visible
Area

Scroll
Area

Eye-tracking in 2005: Golden Triangle



- Color  represents percentage of time spent looking the area
- Purple X represents a mouse click on the page
- Dotted line - - - represents where the page breaks on the computer screen (Visible area/Scroll area)
- Red lines  indicate how far down the page scrolled before leaving the page

Results in 1st position are clicked more than 10 times results on 6th position

Eye-tracking in 2014: F-shape Scan

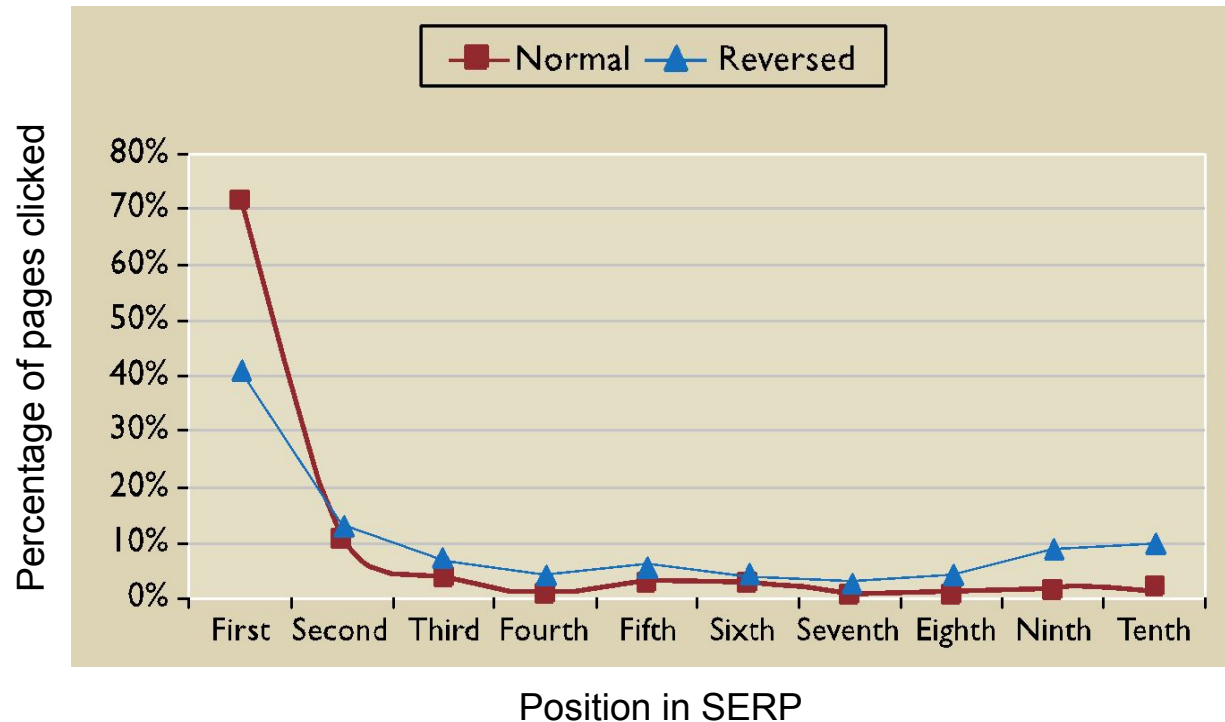


- In 2005, all results were links to a website. Now, we have a variety of results, and the results page layout varies from search to search.
- The first (vertical) glance allows to determine what categories Google has decided to show.
- Then, in a second (horizontal) glance, we go back and deep to the most relevant chunks of results.

The time spent scanning each result is halved: in 2005 was 2.5 seconds, in 2014 is 1.2 seconds.

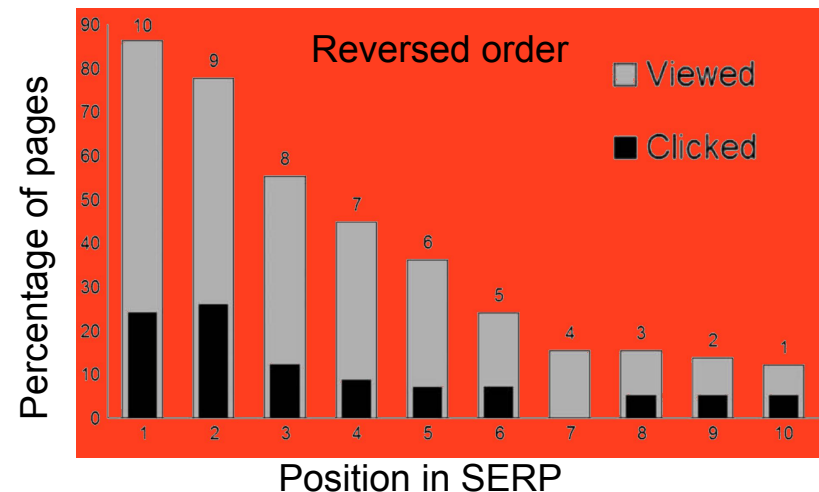
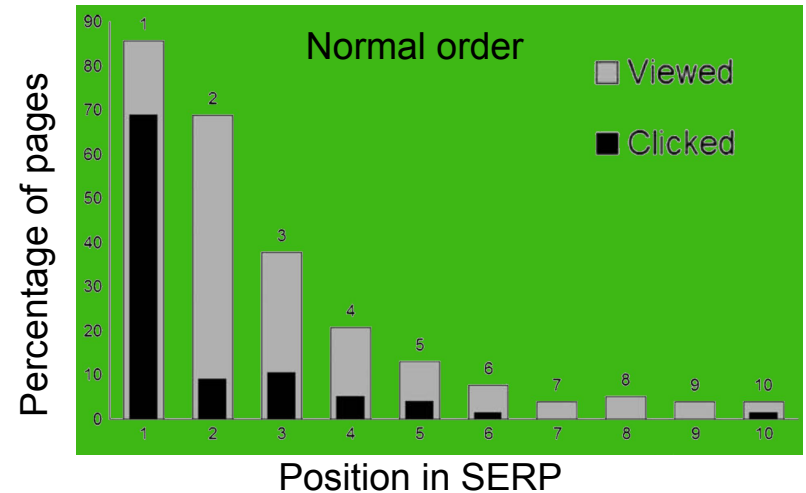
Result Positioning Bias

- When searching for information, the average searchers do not judge systematically all the results, instead they **simply click on top results**
- Studies have been conducted comparing the users' responses when they received results lists in **normal ordering versus a reversed order**



Click and Eye-tracking Bias

- View percentage and mouse clicks are compared in normal vs. reversed order of the first 10 results
- Even though results show some user awareness, **excessive trust in ranking** algorithms may negatively affect smaller positioned websites



Position Impact on Business

Web Images Videos Maps News Shopping Gmail more ▼

Google shopping

About 958,000,000 results (0.21 seconds)

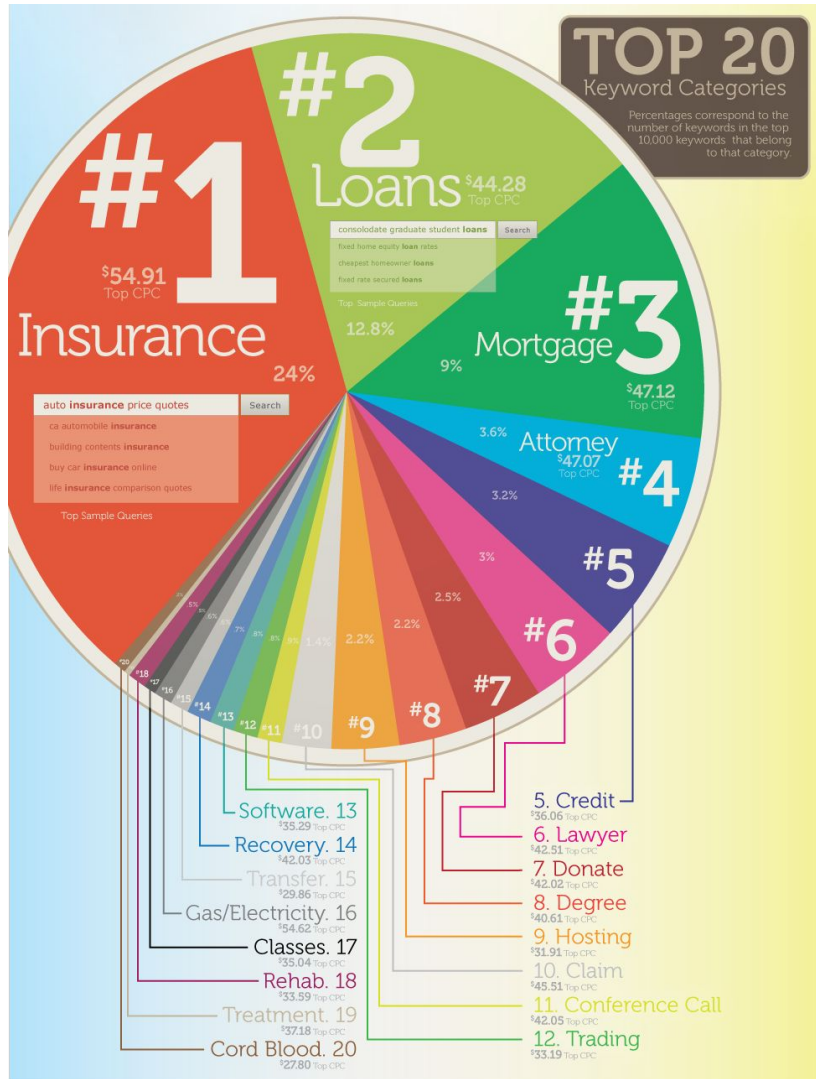
2006 AOL LEAKED DATA

	% OF CLICKS
Shopping.com - Online shopping. Price comparison, product reviews ... Shopping.com. Shop and find the lowest prices on products from online merchants. Price comparison shopping, product reviews, and store ratings - all the ... Electronics - Clothing - Shoes - Digital Cameras www.shopping.com/ - Cached - Similar	42.13%
Overstock.com: Online Shopping - Bedding, Furniture, Electronics ... Purchase name brands at clearance prices at Overstock.com! Buy discounted name brand Bedding, Furniture, Jewelry, Watches, Electronics, Clothing, Books, ... Show stock quote for OOSTK Furniture - Electronics - Clothing & Shoes - Jewelry www.overstock.com/ - Cached - Similar	11.90%
PriceGrabber.com - Comparison Shopping Beyond Compare Get the lowest prices on computers, electronics, furniture, cameras and more. Compare products and find the best deal with PriceGrabber.com. www.pricegrabber.com/ - Cached - Similar	8.50%
Welcome to Easton Town Center in Columbus, Ohio Site offers directions, store directory, dining and calendar of events. eastontowncenter.com/ - Cached - Similar	6.06%
Columbus Ohio Shopping - Find Stores and Malls in Columbus Ohio Directory of Places to Shop in Columbus Ohio including Local Malls and Stores. columbus.retailguide.com/ - Cached - Similar	4.92%
Shopping Columbus OH Ohio + Outlet Mall - City Guide Shopping Columbus OH Ohio, Outlet Malls, Jewelry, Furniture and Discount Retailers. www.discoverourtown.com/ Ohio - Cached - Similar	4.05%
Shopping - Google YouTube Calendar Photos Documents Reader Sites Groups - even more » - My Shopping List Search settings Sign in, Google Product Search ... www.google.com/prdhp?hl=en&tab=wf - Cached - Similar	3.41%
Yahoo! Shopping - Online Shopping with great products, prices and ... Yahoo! Shopping is the best place to read user reviews, explore great products and buy online. shopping.yahoo.com/ - Cached - Similar	3.01%
Amazon.com: Shopping: Sadie Frost, Jude Law, Sean Pertwee, Fraser ... Amazon.com: Shopping: Sadie Frost, Jude Law, Sean Pertwee, Fraser James, Sean Bean, Marianne Faithfull, Jonathan Pryce, Daniel Newman, Lee Whitlock, ... www.amazon.com/ » ... » Action & Adventure » Crime - Cached - Similar	2.85%
QVC Official Site - Online Shopping for Jewelry, Beauty ... Online Shopping, QVC live for Beauty, Jewelry, Electronics, Fashion, Handbags, Kitchen, Home, Food, Sports, Wellness, Crafts, Leisure, Toys, Todays Special ... www.qvc.com/ - Cached - Similar	2.99%

- Results in 1st position are clicked **more than 10 times** results on 6th position
- Suppose company A and company B are respectively on the 1st and 6th position for a valuable business keyword
- B should buy 10 times the clicks that A gets to obtain the same traffic!
- How much does a click cost?**

[[BMW given Google 'death penalty'. 2006](#)]

Click Economic Value



- In web advertising, the cost of a single click, also known as Cost-Per-Click (CPC), is **1\$ on average**. However...
 - On Google some keywords can be really expensive ([Google most expensive keywords 2011](#)):
 - **Insurance: 54.91\$**
 - Mortgage: 47.12\$
 - Attorney: 47.07
 - Claim: 45.51\$
 - Loans: 44.28\$
 - Lawyer: 42.51\$
 - Bing is even more expensive ([Bing most expensive keywords 2015](#)):
 - **Lawyers: 109.21\$**
 - Attorney: 101.77\$
 - Structured settlements: 78.39\$

Web Crawling

- Web crawling is the process by which **we gather pages from the Web**
- Goal: **quickly** and efficiently gather as many useful Web pages as possible, together with the **link structure** that interconnects them

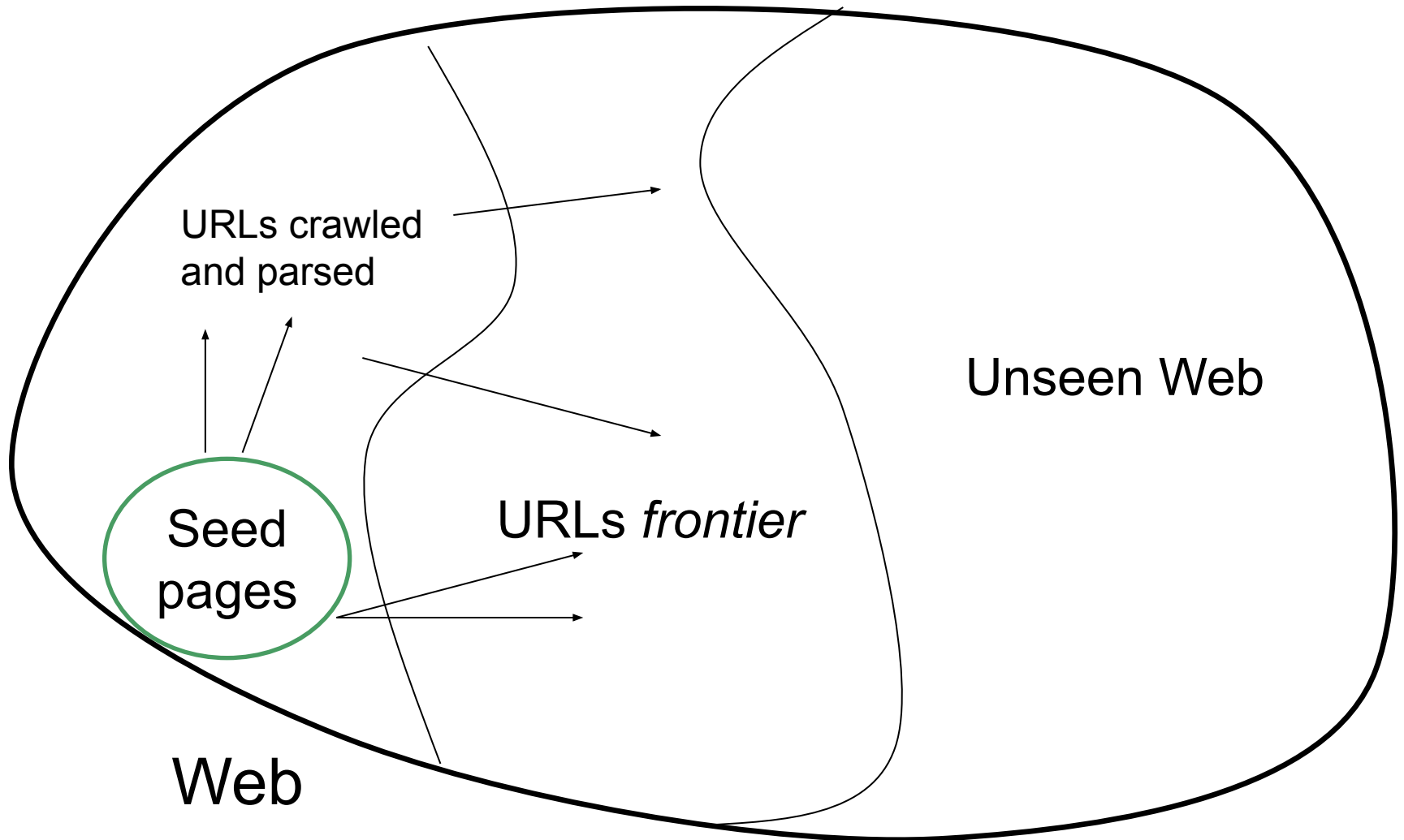




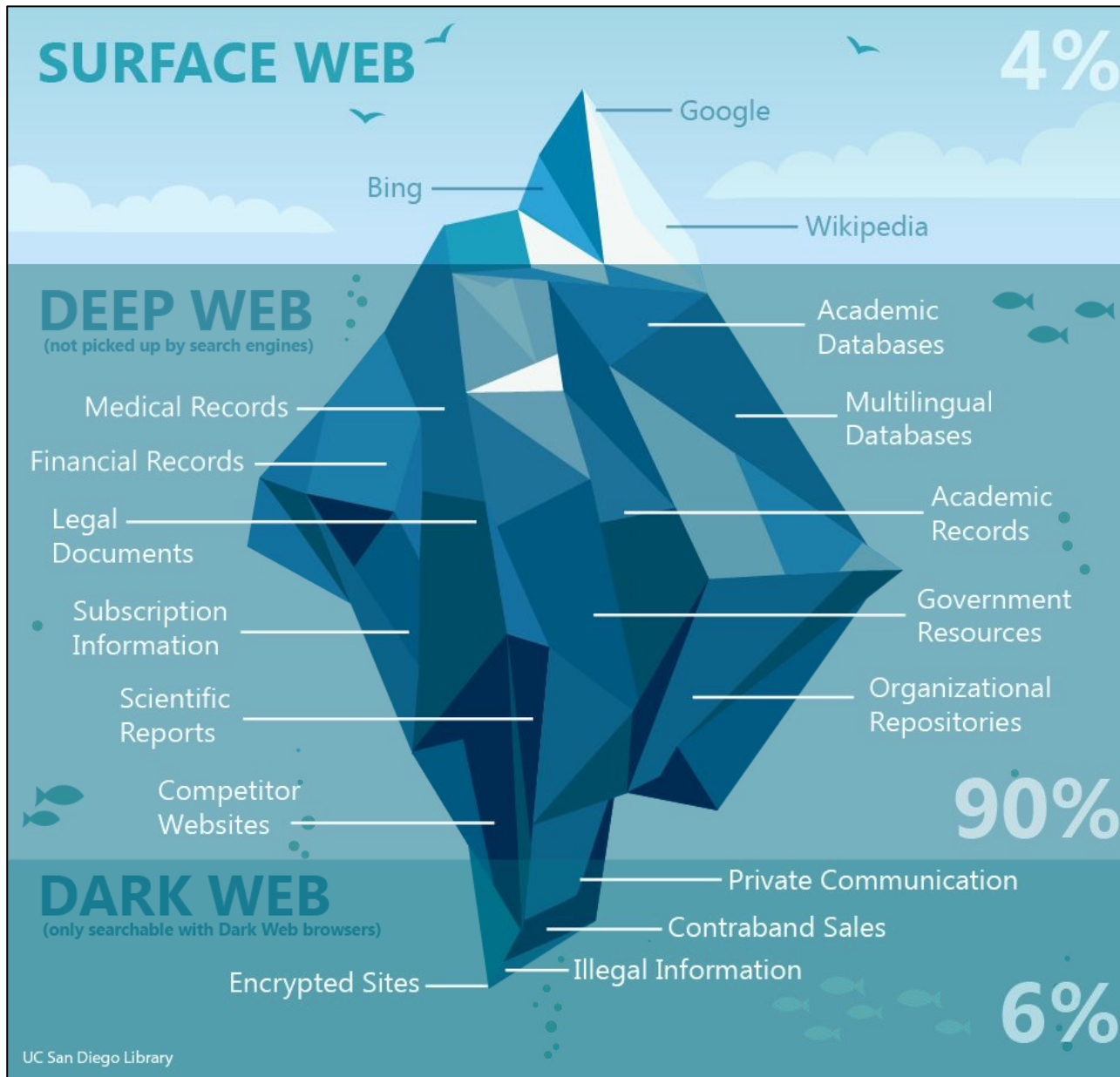
Basic Crawler Operation

- A crawler (a.k.a. spider)
 - Begin with known “seed” URLs
 - Fetch and parse them
 - Extract URLs they point to
 - Place the extracted URLs on a queue (the URLs *frontier*)
 - Fetch each URL on the frontier and repeat

Crawling Picture



Web, Deep Web & Dark Web



Crawler requirements

- A crawler must respect some requirements:
 - **Robustness:** MUST avoid spider traps (fetching an infinite number of pages in a particular domain)
 - **Politeness:** MUST respect Web servers policies, regulating the rate at which crawlers can visit them

Robustness

- Web crawling isn't feasible with one machine
 - All of the above steps are distributed
- Malicious pages
 - Spam pages
 - Spider traps – including dynamically generated
- Even non-malicious pages pose challenges
 - Latency/bandwidth to remote servers vary
 - Webmasters specific guidelines
 - How “deep” should you crawl a site's URL hierarchy?
 - Site mirrors and duplicate pages

Politeness

- **Explicit politeness:** specifications from webmasters on what portions of site can/cannot be crawled
 - `robots.txt`
- **Implicit politeness:** even with no specification, avoid hitting any site too often

robots.txt

- Protocol for giving spiders (“robots”) limited access to a website, originally from 1994
 - www.robotstxt.org
- Website announces its request on what can (or cannot) be crawled
 - For a server, create a file named `robots.txt`
 - This file specifies access restrictions
- `Robots.txt` contains set of rules that **should** be followed by clients



robots.txt: an Example

- Example:
 - No robot should visit any URL starting with "/yoursite/temp/", except the robot called "searchengine":

User-agent: *

Disallow: /yoursite/temp/

} For **all** user-agents
(client names) forbid
access to directory
/yoursite/temp

User-agent: searchengine

Disallow:

} For user-agents named
"searchengine" do not
forbid nothing,
everything is thus
accessible

- A proposal to standardise a dedicated file for providing guidance to LLMs on interpreting website content during inference
 - <https://llmstxt.org>
- A markdown file to websites to provide LLM-friendly content
 - For a server, create a file named `llms.txt`
 - This file is human and LLM readable that allows fixed processing methods (*i.e.*, parsers and regex)



llms.txt: an Example

Title

> Optional description goes here

Optional details go here

Section name

- [Link title](https://link_url): Optional link details

Optional

- [Link title](https://link_url)



Rage Against the Machine

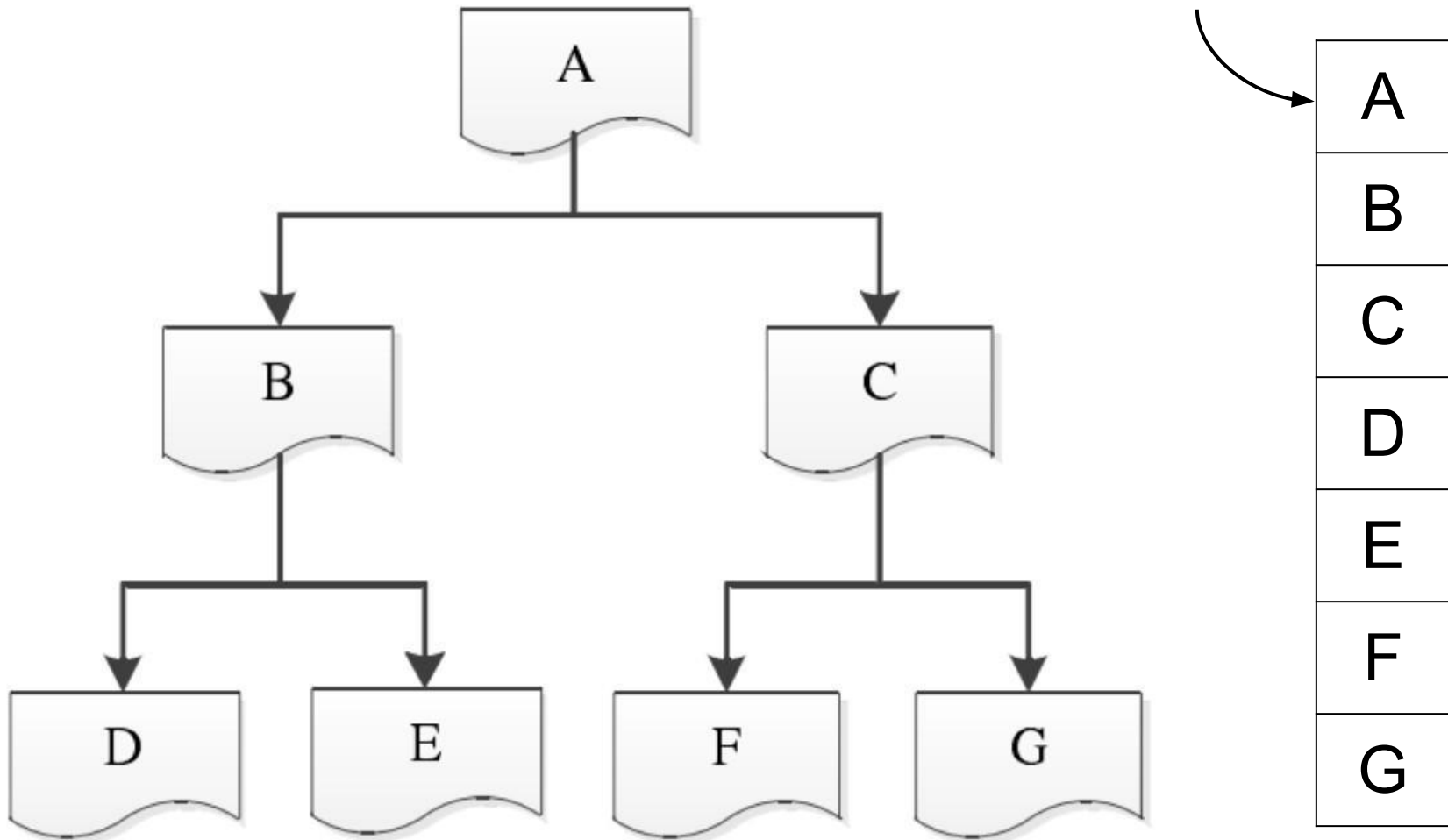
- Cloudflare has developed AI Labyrinth to **mitigate the impact of unauthorised web scraping** by bots that collect data for AI training
- The system generates **AI-created decoy pages** that appear authentic but are designed to **mislead bots and drain their resources**
- By monitoring interactions with these decoy pages, Cloudflare can accurately **detect and blacklist malicious web scrapers**

URL frontier

- Pages are **added** to the URL frontier according to the following strategies:
 - **Breadth first** strategy: given a Web page in the URL frontier, add **all pages linked by the current page**. Coverage is wide but superficial
 - **Depth first** strategy: given a Web page in the URL frontier, **follow the first link in the current page** until the first page without links

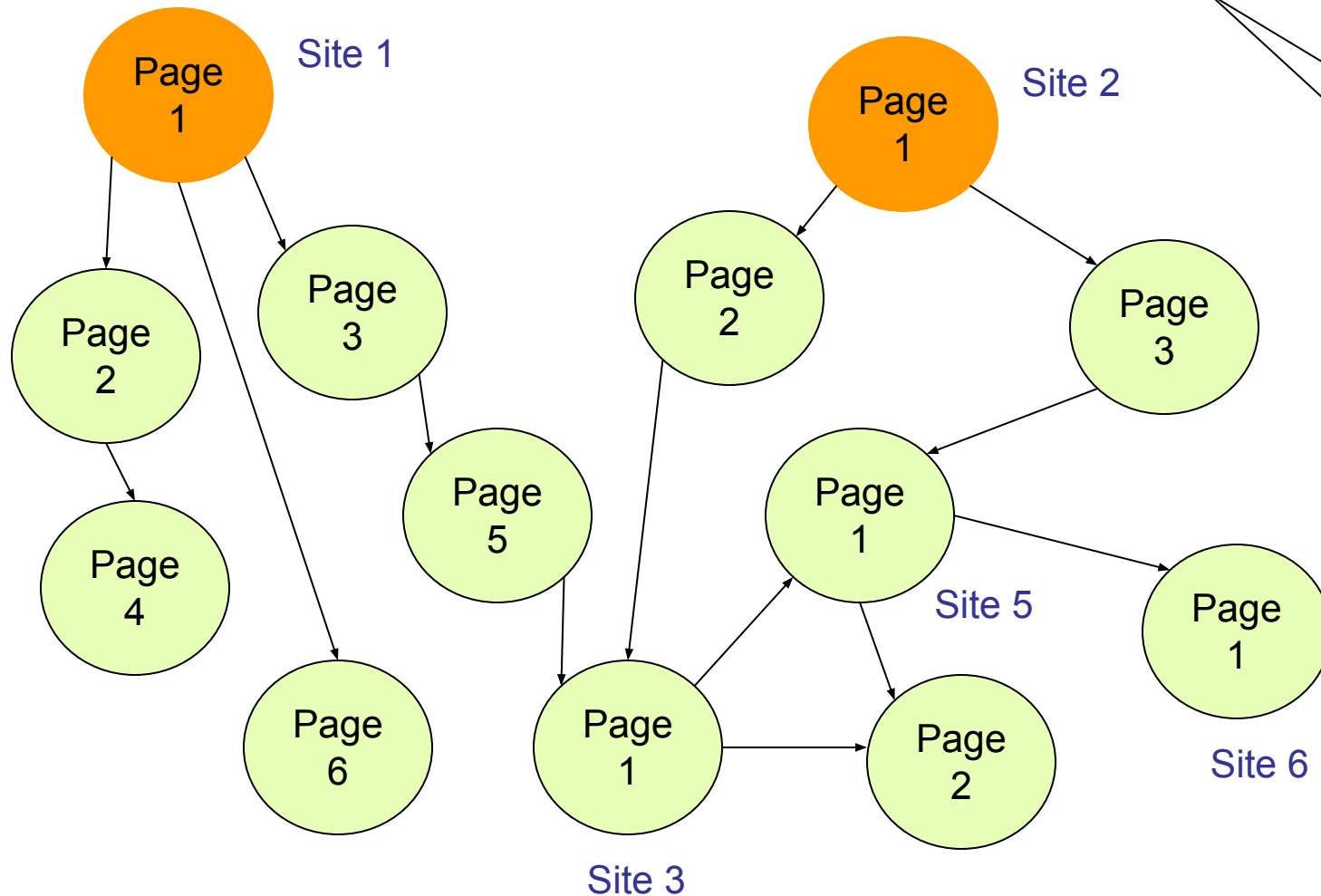
Breadth first strategy

Pages initially available in the URL frontier



URL frontier with BFS

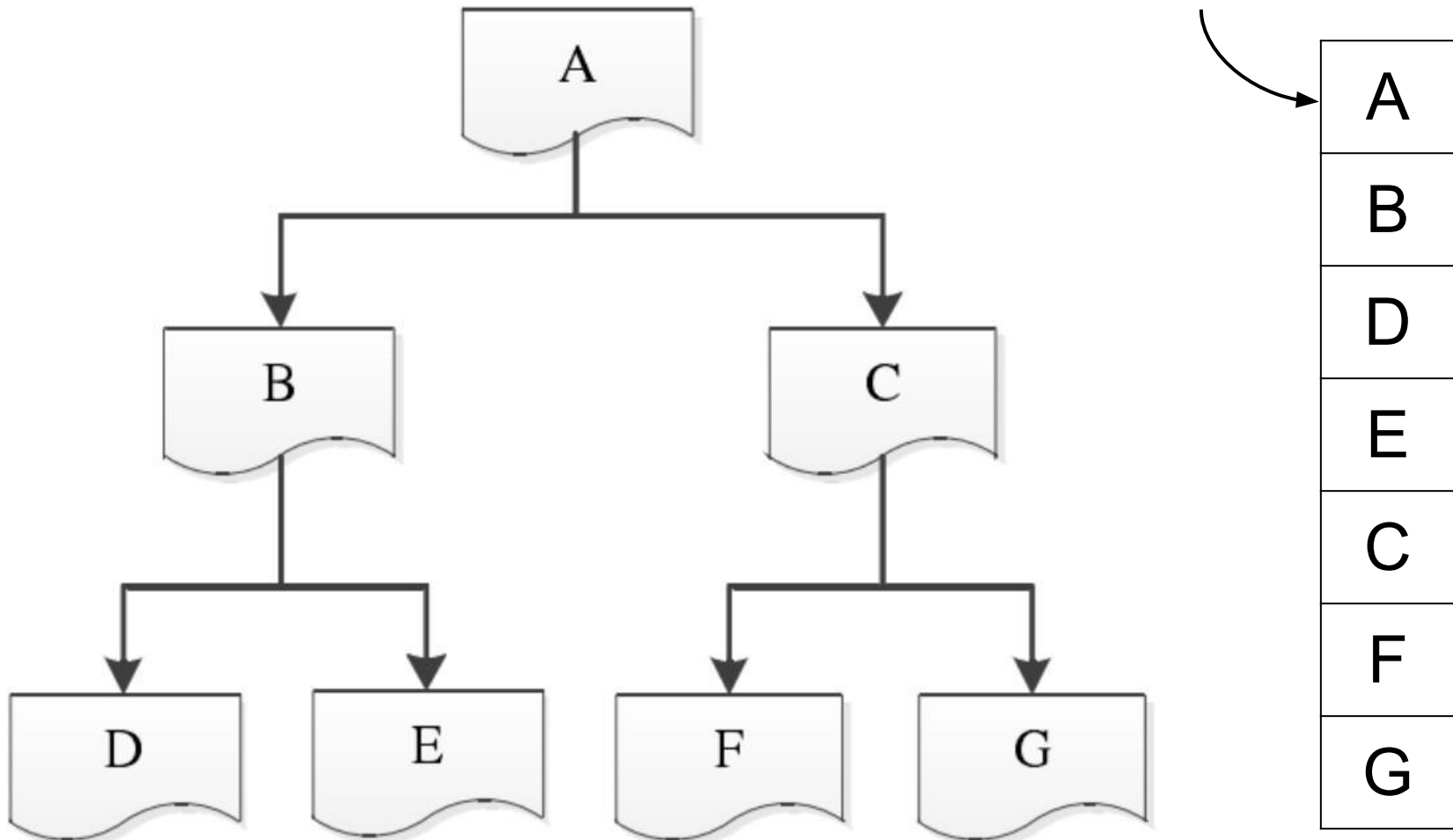
Pages initially available
in the URL frontier



Site	Page
1	1
2	1
1	2
1	6
1	3
2	2
2	3
1	4
1	5
3	1
5	1
5	2
6	1

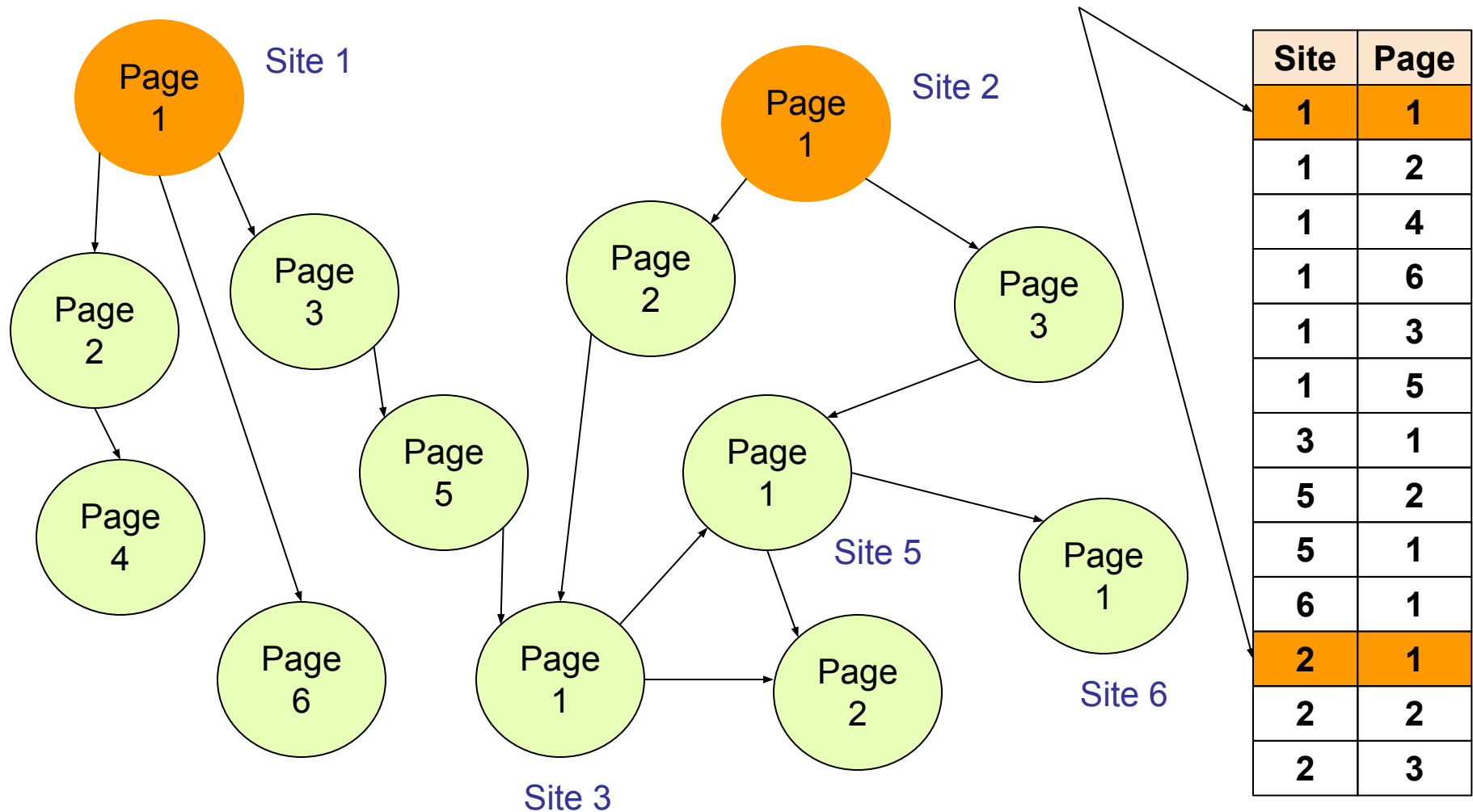
Depth first strategy

Pages initially available in the URL frontier



URL frontier with DFS

Pages initially available
in the URL frontier



BFS vs DFS

BFS frontier

Site	Page
1	1
2	1
1	2
1	6
1	3
2	2
2	3
1	4
1	5
3	1
5	1
5	2
6	1

DFS frontier

Site	Page
1	1
1	2
1	4
1	6
1	3
1	5
3	1
5	2
5	1
6	1
2	1
2	2
2	3

Searching the web

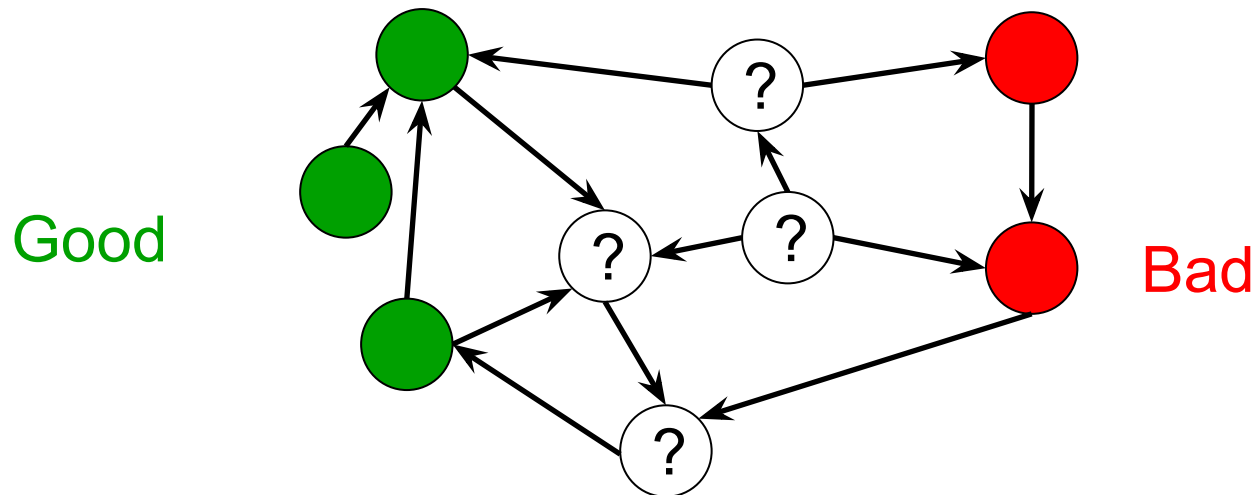
- There are thousands of billions of pages on the web, but most of them are not very interesting
- Suppose you have to visit the site for eBay and you don't know that www.ebay.com is the URL
 - There are millions of web pages that contain the term “eBay”
 - There can be websites with more frequency on the term “eBay” than eBay itself
- We need a notion of **popularity**, together with a notion of relevance

Web information retrieval

- With respect to traditional textual search engines, **Web information retrieval** systems build **ranking** by combining at least two evidences of relevance:
 - the degree of matching of a page: the **content score**
 - the degree of importance of a page: the **popularity score**
- While the **content score** can be calculated using one of the information retrieval models described so far
- The **popularity score** can be calculated from an analysis of the indexed pages' **hyperlink structure** using one or more ***link analysis*** models
 - Do the links represent a conferral of authority to some pages? Is this useful for ranking?

Simple link analysis

- Links are powerful sources of authenticity and authority
- The **Good**, The **Bad** and The **Unknown**, simple iterative logic
 - **Good** nodes won't point to **Bad** nodes
 - If you point to a **Bad** node, you're **Bad**
 - If a **Good** node points to you, you're **Good**



Citation Analysis

- Citation frequency is an estimation of a researcher popularity
- Bibliographic coupling frequency
 - Articles that co-cite the same articles are related
- Citation indexing: as a tool in journal evaluation
 - Who is this author cited by? ([Garfield 1972](#))
- PageRank preview: Pinski and Narin '70s*
 - Asked: which journals are authoritative?

**[Citation influence for journal aggregates of scientific publications: Theory, with application to the literature of physics](#)*

PageRank

- The PageRank technique for link analysis assigns a **numerical score between 0 and 1** to every node in the web graph
- The PageRank score of a node depends on the **link structure** of the web graph
- Given a query, a web search engine computes a **composite score** for each web page that combines hundreds of features such as cosine similarity, together with the PageRank score
- This composite score is used to provide a **ranked list of results** for the query



The random surfer (1/3)

- Consider a *random surfer* Alice who begins a random walk on the web, starting from a page
 - Alice is extremely bored, she wanders aimlessly between web pages
 - Her browser has a special “**surprise me**” button at the top that will jump to a random web page when clicked
 - Each time a web page loads she chooses whether to
 - Click on a **random** link on the page
 - Click the surprise me button
 - Alice is sufficiently bored that she intends to keep browsing the Web like this forever

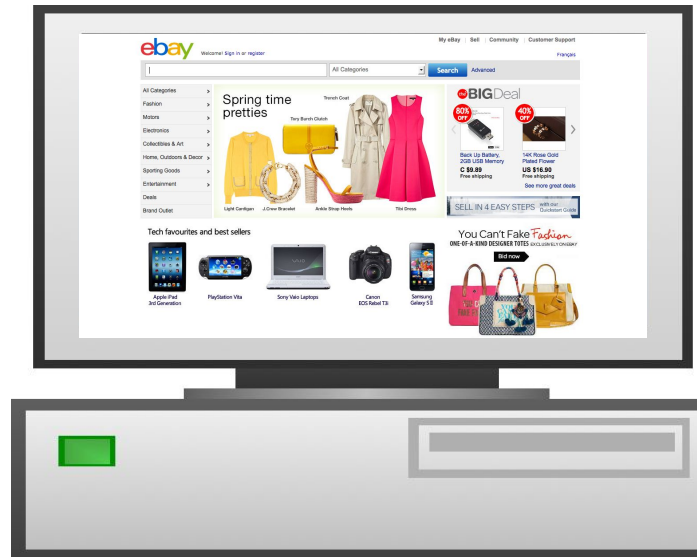


The random surfer (2/3)

- Let provide a more formally definition: Alice browses the Web using this algorithm:
 1. Choose a random number r between 0 and 1
 2. If $r > \lambda$:
 - \Rightarrow Click the “surprise me” button
 3. If $r \leq \lambda$:
 - \Rightarrow Click a link at random on the current page
 4. Start again
- Because of Alice’s special “surprise me” button, we can be guaranteed that eventually she will reach every page on the Internet

The random surfer (3/3)

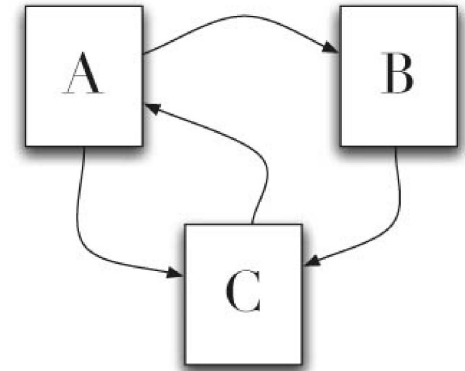
- Now suppose that while Alice is browsing, you walk in and glance at the web page on her screen. **What is the probability** that she will be looking at the eBay website?



- That probability is eBay's **PageRank**

PageRank calculation

- The PageRank calculation corresponds to finding the stationary probability distribution of a *random walk* on the graph of the Web. A random walk is a special case of a *Markov chain* in which the next state depends solely on the current state



- If the web consists of the 3 pages in figure (A,B,C), the PageRank of C depends on the PageRank of A and B:

$$PR(C) = \frac{PR(A)}{2} + \frac{PR(B)}{1}$$

- The PageRank conferred by an outbound link is equal to the document's own PageRank score divided by the number of outbound links
- We start by assuming that the PageRank values for all pages are the same, then we iterate the calculation. After few iterations, the PageRank values converge to the final values of
 - $PR(C) = 0.4$
 - $PR(A) = 0.4$
 - $PR(B) = 0.2$



Use of PageRank in Google

- PageRank is now **only one of the many** factors that determine the final score of a Web page in Google
- It is now a part of a much larger ranking system that it is believed to account for more than **200 different “signals”** (ranking variables):
 - **language features** (phrases, synonyms, spelling mistakes, etc.)
 - **query features** that relate to language features, [trending terms](#)/phrases
 - **time-related features** (e.g., “news” related queries might be best answered by recently indexed documents, while factual queries are better answered by more “resilient” pages)
 - **personalization features**, which relate to one’s search history, behavior, and social surrounding

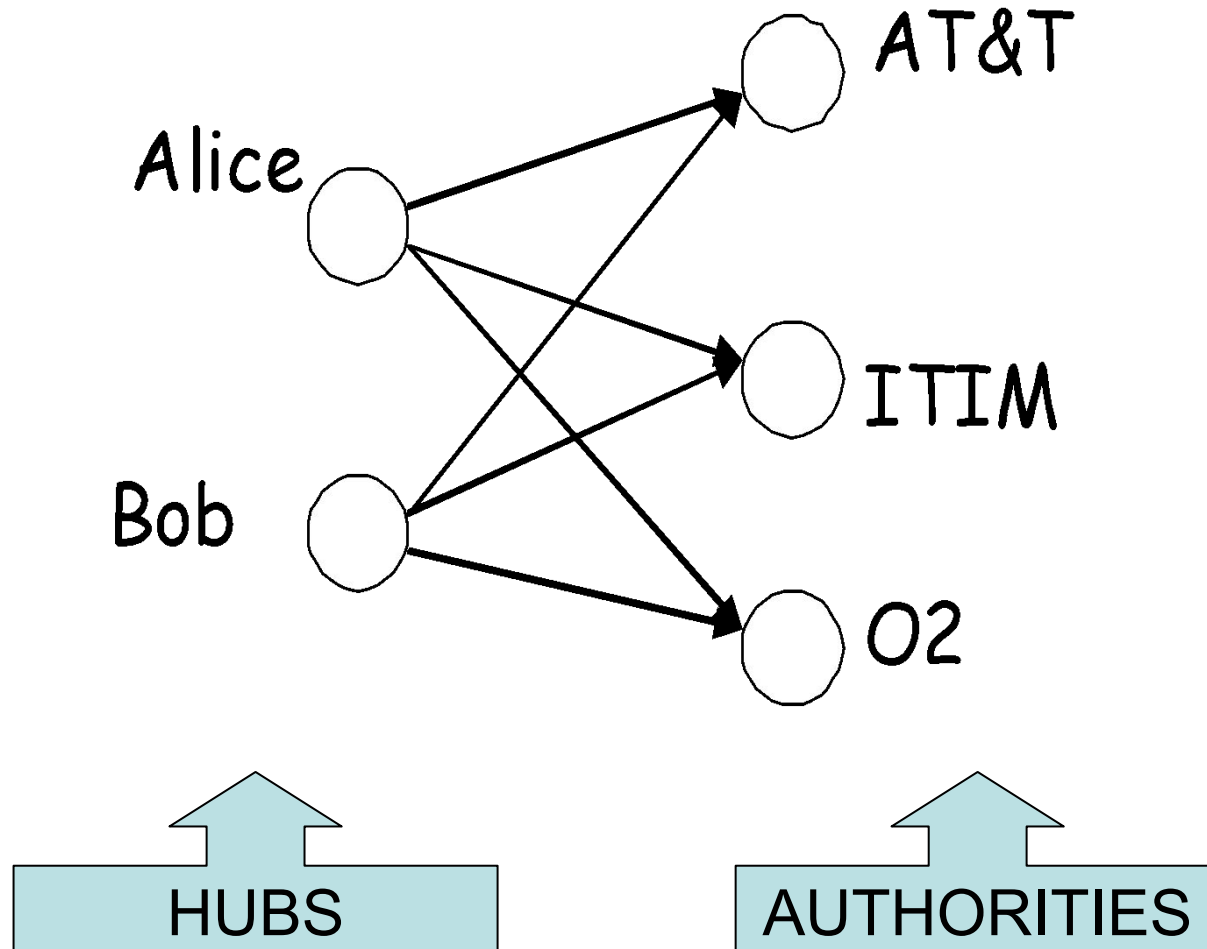


Hyperlink-Induced Topic Search (HITS)

- In response to a query, instead of an ordered list of pages each meeting the query, find **two sets of inter-related pages**:
 - ***Hub pages*** are good lists of links on a subject
 - e.g., “Bob’s list of cancer-related links.”
 - ***Authority pages*** occur recurrently on good hubs for the subject
- Best suited for “broad topic” queries rather than for page-finding queries
- Gets at a broader slice of common *opinion*

HITS Example

Query: “*Mobile telecom companies*”



Hubs and Authorities

- Thus, a **good hub page** for a topic *points* to many authoritative pages for that topic
- A **good authority page** for a topic is *pointed* to by many good hubs for that topic
- Circular definition - will turn this into an iterative computation

Semantic Search

- The name “information retrieval” is standard, but as traditionally practiced, it’s not really right
- All you get is **document retrieval**, and beyond that the job is up to you
- **Semantic Search**: doing graph search over structured knowledge rather than traditional text search:
 - Google Knowledge Graph
 - Facebook Graph Search
 - Bing’s Satori
 - Things like Wolfram Alpha



References

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- Christopher D. Manning, Prabhakar Raghavan and Hinrich Schütze **Introduction to Information Retrieval** Cambridge University Press. (2008)
- Stefano Ceri, Alessandro Bozzon **Web Information Retrieval** Springer. (2013)