

Wolfram|Alpha

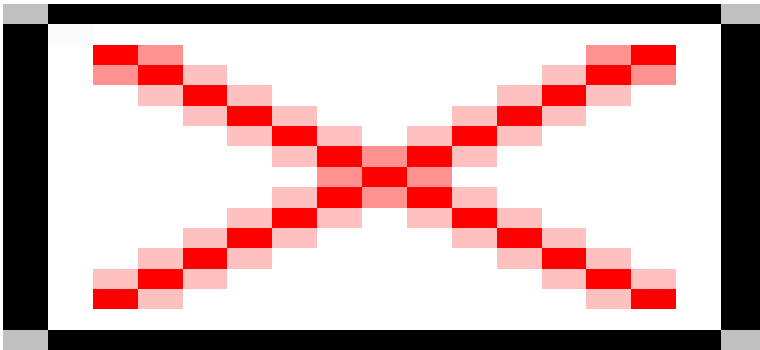
Wed, May 20, 2009 | Posted by [Jonathan Stewart](#)

[Wolfram Alpha](#)

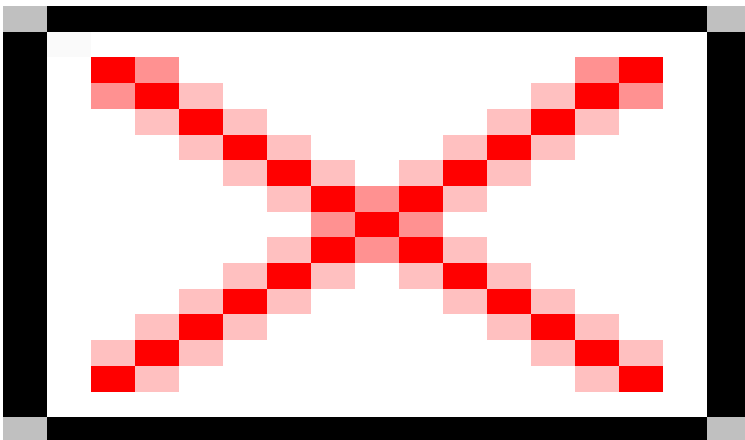
is the new computational knowledge engine that everyone is talking about. If you've had your head in the [SEO](#)

sand for the last month, Wolfram is the latest supposed Google killer - it is an online service that answers factual queries directly by computing the answer from structured data, rather than providing a list of documents or web pages that might contain the answer as a search engine might, [according to Wikipedia](#).

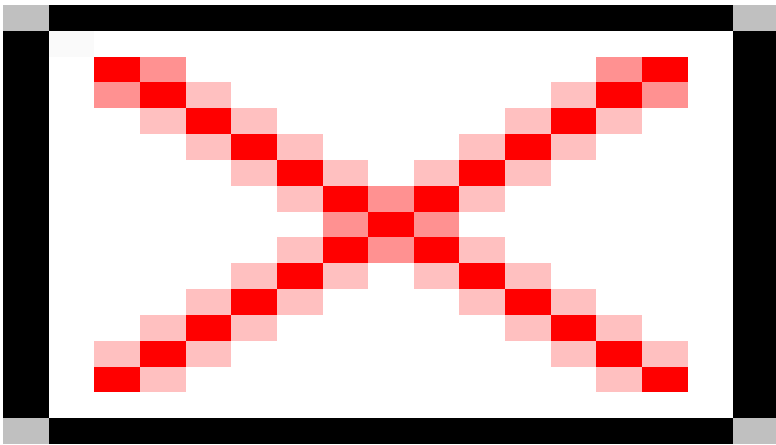
So what does that really mean? Well, pose it a purchase related query, and you get the following response:



Wolfram really doesn't know what to do - it's not a search engine in the traditional sense. It doesn't use spiders to crawl the internet - its knowledge is managed by a team of experts. But then this isn't what Wolfram is for. I studied Maths at University, so I'm going to show off a bit here. I'm going to ask it to do some relatively simple Calculus:

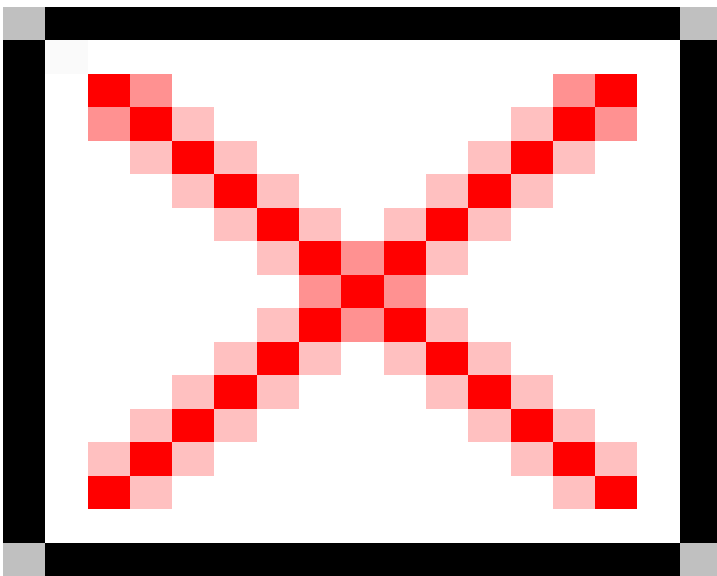


Wolfram has answered my query perfectly, and this is exactly when this computational knowledge engine comes into its own. Compare this to the result that Google returns:

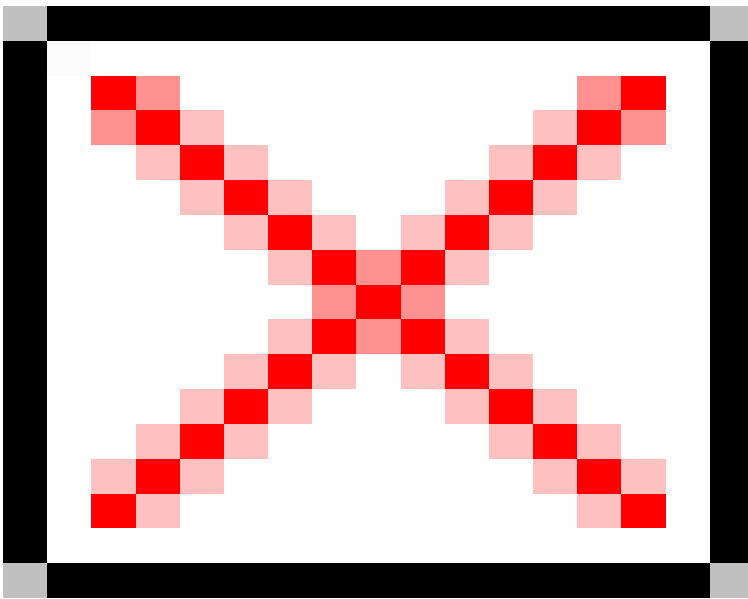


Here Google appears old and confused ? not quite sure how to answer my query, it returns a muddled result. I still love Google BTW, it'll just never be able to do my Maths homework.

So what does this mean for a wider set of queries? Ask it something simple like [?cat?](#), and it returns a great deal of information ? scientific name, taxonomy, other members of order carnivore, members of family Felidae, and the taxonomic network:



One of the nicest queries I've seen is when you start asking about your family relationships, and Wolfram presents you with a family tree:



So, what does this mean for search? Well, Wolfram Alpha is certainly a nice tool, but it's more on a par with the likes of the Wiki or Encarta Encyclopedia than Google. I'll still go to Google to find 'cheap hotels in Boston', but I'll definitely go to Wolfram next time I need help doing a complex [differential equation](#). And this is where Wolfram will come into its own - as a research engine, with its team of experts helping hundreds of students with their GCSEs, A-Levels and Degrees.

Wolfram will become the place to go for scientific informational based queries, for which I currently have no stats as to how much of the search pie this group of queries relates to - I imagine it will be small though! Google killer it isn't. In the long term, Google acquisition it might be. But for now, you should make sure you give it a try, and check out [these Wolfram related Easter Eggs](#).

Like what I've said here? Read more from [Jonathan Stewart on Twitter](#)