

# The New York Times

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## **Factory Labs Makes Other Search Engines Look Incomplete**

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Most text excerpts that appear on search results pages aren't very useful. Imagine if instead your search engine showed a list of clear sentences summarizing the contents of each link on that search result page. That's what a new service called Factory Labs aims to provide for any service that utilizes the API it's launching today.

You give Factory a list of links and a keyword and it will build an index of all the facts asserted in those links about your topic of interest, delivered in XML or JSON format. The service can run on top of a search engine but could also be used in any number of other ways. I've been feeling unsatisfied with other search engines all day since seeing a Factory demo Monday morning.

After building that "fact index," Factory ranks the links submitted by the quality and density of facts related to query on the page. Compare the search results page on Google News for "Paul Allen" to the information that Factory extracts from links being shared on Twitter about Paul Allen. The Google News page tells you nothing, except that Paul Allen has cancer - over and over again.

Compare that with the Factory results page - I don't even need to click through if I don't want to, I feel like I got a great overview of the story just from my search page. Perhaps that's a problem - for a publishing industry that already says it's scared of search engines - but as a reader it sure isn't my problem, it's great. Why would I want Google News to tell me where I can go to find information if someone else will just give me the information?

The company's test demo searches Twitter and Yahoo Boss - neither search is as exciting as I'd hoped 100% of the time, but it's often remarkably good. Factory is also testing an interesting integration with Silverlight stream reader Sobees, in which linked pages from Twitter or Facebook are annotated with automatically extracted highlights via Factory.

I expect a whole lot of companies are going to at least try this API out and I'm excited to see the results.

## **How This is Unlike Other Real-Time Search Services**

Factory is talking a lot about its ability to analyze links shared over Twitter, but that's probably just because Twitter is easy for people to understand. The fact is, the service can perform on-demand analysis of text behind any set of links. That's what differentiates it from other real-time search engines like OneRiot, which also analyzes the text of pages linked to on networks like Twitter and offers an API to display real-time search results on other sites. Competitor Collecta analyzes Twitter streams in real time and offers an XMPP API to push new search results live to any page.

Factory is a different kind of animal, though. It's more like a smart search inside any other search. It doesn't even have to be search, though. The company talks a lot about how they make mobile reading more efficient by pulling the salient information up to the surface of a page, instead of requiring mobile readers to load multiple pages.

I thought of five or six different ways I'd like to use it just while talking to the company on the phone. (I'm not going to share those here, either. I think some could offer an important competitive advantage.)

## **I'd Love to See This Work Everywhere**

Yesterday I was testing a new Android app from the Sunlight Foundation that lets you track members of congress. One tab in the app is a search for your congressperson in the news. Unfortunately, the page excerpts give no indication why the politician you searched for appeared in that news story - just that their name did, somewhere. That search is powered by a Yahoo API, probably BOSS, but it's not any fun to use at all. How unsatisfying, I thought, when I could have a list of key facts concerning my search query in the list of links that the search brought back. But that was yesterday, and Factory is just launching today.

The possibilities are truly endless. That's probably why Ron Conway, one of the leading investors in the real-time economy, joined others in investing in the company. With \$1.2 million in the bank, Factory is a modest developer play with a whole lot of potential.

Give Factory's API a try and let us know what you think. It's free to use; the company says it may start inserting "sponsored facts" (isn't that an interesting phrase) into results later but things like business model and to a lesser degree de-duplication are still works in progress. I sure do love this idea.