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Web sites that review ... Web sites

James Turner

Considering the ever-expanding universe of Web sites, it was inevitable that we would eventually see sites whose only purpose is to rate other sites.

These review sites try to address one of the problems that mega-portal sites such as Yahoo! can't.

While the Yahoo! search engine will cheerfully return endless lists of companies doing business in your desired area, there is no way to tell the wheat from the chaff.

That's where review sites come into play.

One of the more recent players on the scene is Gomez (gomez.com). This service provides rankings and reviews for a somewhat limited number of online commerce areas, such as banking and gifts.

One nice feature is the ability to see the rankings weighted to a particular personality profile. For example, you can see which online brokers are best for you if you day-trade as opposed to stash funds into your 401(k).

With Gomez adding more and more categories each day, it's a must-visit site.

Another reviewer, Bizrate (bizrate.com) takes a different approach. You select a product (down to the manufacturer and model if you desire), and the system returns a list of vendors who offer that product, ranked by factors like ease of ordering and privacy policies.

Mini reviews of the companies are also provided.

One problem: The review scores seem awfully glowing. It's uncommon to find companies ranked under four on a scale of 1 to 5 stars.

Deja.com has a ranked review section as well, but the real power of deja comes from searching its exhaustive archives of Usenet discussion groups. I find this area to be especially helpful when shopping for new computer-related products. Here, you get the unvarnished experiences of users, especially in regards to installation problems, incompatibilities, and customer-support nightmares.

Finally, that granddaddy of product ratings, Consumer's Reports (www.consumerreports.org) has begun to rate Web sites. Unfortunately, the site currently only ranks in five categories (books, electronics, toys, catalogs, and small appliances) and a ridiculously small number of sites (just six for electronics). You'll pay \$3.95 a month to view the reviews as well.

*James Turner is a computer consultant and avid Web user.

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