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D. ROSS CAMERON -- Staff
UC Berkeley computer science doctoral
student Sam Madden pulls up a plot on Gore
and Bush campaign contributions from the
Bay Area using Telegraph, a deep-Web
search engine.
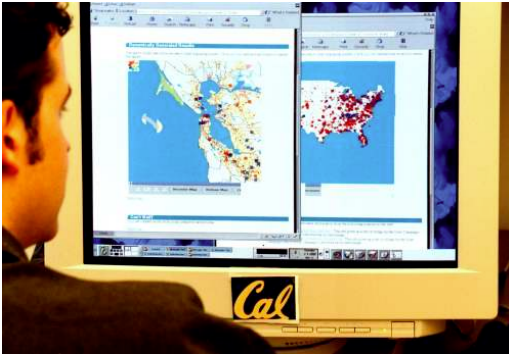
Deep Web tracks money

Search site shows who gets most

By William Brand
STAFF WRITER

BERKELEY -- OK, the election is Tuesday and you're wavering. George Bush or Al Gore? Al Gore or George Bush? What to do?

Follow the money, some people say.

But how?

To find out -- you need the "deep Web." Go straight to Telegraph.

The deep Web is information on the Web not readily available through an ordinary search -- like federal election campaign contributions. A standard search engine such as Hotbot or Google can take you to each site, but once there the user usually has to fill out a search form, then copy the data from each Web page, then move on to the next site.

But Telegraph does it all for you: And yes, it can follow the money and it knows where the stars are -- politically.

Telegraph Facts and Figures Federation is the name given to an unusual Web search site created by two computer science associate professors at the University of California, Berkeley (Joseph Hellerstein and Michael Franklin (and a team of students.

"We called it Telegraph -- because here in Berkeley you can find out a lot on a walk down Telegraph Avenue; it's a place where people from all over the world come," Hellerstein says.

Telegraph, the street, is no ordinary place, and Telegraph, the search site, is no ordinary search engine.

Type in a query and the software sends out queries to many places, automatically fills out the required forms and retrieves and assembles the info on your screen.

About the money.

Truth is, a Telegraph search discloses, both candidates are into the money people, but Bush gets the most. A check of contributions by political action groups, known as PACs, reported to the Federal Election Commission, shows heavy contribution to Gov. Bush from energy, health care, finance and insurance PACs.

The Vice President's PAC contributions lean heavily toward organized labor. No real surprises there.

But what about Hollywood? It's here that Telegraph becomes fun.

Judging by individual contributions alone, Hollywood loves Al Gore. According to the most recently posted federal election commission records, actors love Vice President Gore and avoid Governor Bush.

Records show only two people who listed "actor" as a occupation and donated cash to Bush: Jerry Doyle of the television series "Babylon 5" and Victor Mature, star of Cecil B. DeMille's 1949 epic, "Samson and Delilah." Mature died Aug. 4, 1999. Apparently his last wishes included $1,000 cash for George W.

But Gore struck gold in Hollywood. Oakland's own Tom Hanks gave $1,000; Nicolas Cage gave $2,000; Kevin Costner, Chevy Chase, Barbra Streisand, Robert DeNiro, Richard Dreyfuss, Harrison Ford, Jerry Seinfeld, Sharon Stone, Gwyneth Paltrow -- it's a long list.

Professor Hellerstein explains that Telegraph actually is an experiment in Web technology.

"Basically, we're geeks," he says with a smile. "We were working with running queries, searching for lots of data.

"There's an amazing amount of data out there on the Web these days -- but nobody controls it and it's hard to find. So we wanted to post an experiment. But we wanted it to be fun so a lot of people would try it out," he said.

The presidential election was the perfect place, he said. "There are lots of facts and figures, but they're hard to find."

The term "deep Web" was coined this summer by a Sioux City, S.D., company, BrightPlanet, which sells deep Web-searching software called LexiBot.

Bryan Bjerke, company spokesman, says their study shows the deep Web contains almost 550 billion individual documents. At least 95 percent is publicly accessible info, not subject to fees or subscriptions. But standard search engines index only about 1 billion documents, Bjerke said.

"If you're looking for an entry about internal combustion engines, a Web search engine is perfect. But if you're looking for a breakdown of campaign contributions by state, by gender and by ethnicity, you need to comb the raw data," he said.

This is what Telegraph does, Hellerstein said.

"We think this is the major direction for Web research. In 10 years, a simple query will yield a mixture of facts and figures, photos and video.

Yes -- there are vast implications for personal privacy, the computer experts agree. With the technology it's possible to learn a lot about people: where they live; how much their house cost. This technology may cause people to rethink the balance between freedom of information and privacy, Hellerstein believes.

But for now -- it's all there. There's one caution: To use Telegraph or LexiBot one must either have the patience of Job or a fast Internet connection. On a normal 56k phone line modem, a data query can take half an hour. But with DSL or a similar fast hookup -- the data pops up fairly quickly. It's the same story for LexiBot, Bjerke says. Deep Web searches take patience.

The address for Telegraph is: http://telegraph.cs.berkeley.edu/ . A trial version of LexiBot is available at: www.lexibot.com .