

How long is an Internet Day?

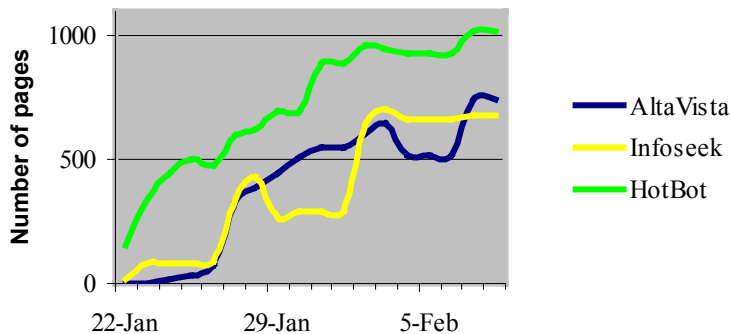
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On January 19th, 1998 Internet columnist Matt Drudge introduced a new term into the American lexicon: "Monica Lewinsky." What ripples would this new pebble of information create in the vast ocean of information media?

The broadcast and print media picked up the story overnight. According to the Dow Jones News/Retrieval service, the popular press published more than 500 articles about Lewinsky on January 22nd. The next day they printed more than 900. The torrential pace of coverage left little time for fact checking. The *Dallas Morning News*, for example, published a Lewinsky story on their Web site, which was retracted only hours later, but not before being repeated by a number of broadcast news shows.

But how rapidly would the Lewinsky story appear in the "new media" of the World Wide Web? How would the new kids on the block compare to the old pros? To find out we used a common gateway to the Web: search engines.

Three days after the story broke we began daily queries of a number of search engines for how many Web pages contained the phrase "Monica Lewinsky." (See Fig. 1.) On that day many of the engines had none. HotBot had the most with 156. By this time the Internet host names MonicaLewinsky.com and LindaTripp.com had already been registered. By the 25th, 6 days after the story broke, HotBot had more than 500 pages, while some of the others still had none.



On the 27th the popular press feeding frenzy peaked, with over 1000 Lewinsky stories on that day alone. On February 9th, three weeks

after the story broke, the Web search engines began returning thousands of hits. From the point of view of the search engines, Lewinsky had finally arrived. While the story broke in the conventional media overnight, it took the search engines three weeks to reflect the tidal wave of coverage. Figure 2 shows the number of Lewinsky stories in the print press and pages on the search engines during the first three weeks of the story. Never underestimate the old pros.

