

[First Time Visit? Start Here!](#)

- [Home](#)
- [Members Only](#)
- [News](#)
- [Features](#)
- [Columns](#)
- [Newsletters](#)
- [How To](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Events](#)
- [Community](#)
- [About Us](#)

[Spock: People Search With A Man + Machine Approach](#) [MEMBER LOGIN >](#)[BECOME A MEMBER >](#)

Sep 19, 2007 at 4:29pm ET by [Vanessa Fox](#)

Last week, I wrote about the [overall people search landscape](#), which, while not new, has been recently expanding and making full use of all that is shiny Web 2.0. [Spock](#) is the latest of these services to leverage social networks, intelligent web crawling, and community involvement. Spock launched in private beta in April, then in public beta in August.

With Spock, you can search on a person's name or a keyword that may be associated with a person, and are returned a list of people with associated tags, photos, and web sites. From there, you can drill into more information about any of those aspects, add information of your own, or browse to people who are related in various ways.

Spock CEO Jaideep Singh says that their crawling and indexing infrastructure has the unique ability to identify people-specific data on web pages and extract only this information. Their algorithms combine natural language processing with machine learning and they augment this with human involvement—both community input and editorial oversight.

Tagging provides a unique twist on the search for people. As Singh points out, your search can turn into a discovery. You may initially search for information on Kristen Dunst, but then might follow the tags to see others associated with *Bring It On* and notice that several of those listed are also tagged with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, including Christophe Beck, who choreographed the music for both the awesome cheerleading movie and the kick ass TV show about the blonde girl with the pointy stick. Click “related people” for a list from another perspective.

In the case of Kristen Dunst, this gives you mostly a list of ex-boyfriends rather than costars. You view people in a larger context and can gain more insight with this type of system. You can also search directly over tags. For instance, a search for “Buffy fan” returns, well among other people, me. Singh says that only half of people-related searches are for names and the rest are topical, so having a way to categorize people into a variety of topics can be very useful.


Both in *Bring It On*

Kirsten Caroline Dunst [Vote on Kirsten Caroline Dunst's tags](#)

Tags [Learn more](#) [ADD TAG](#)

[Spider-Man actor](#) [mona lisa smile](#) [movie actor](#) [Mary Jane Watson](#) [spider-man](#) [actor](#) [People Magazine Celebrity 100](#) [bring it on](#) [spider girl](#) [crazy/beautiful](#) [interview with the vampire](#) [Spider-Man film series](#) [German-American](#) [child actor](#) [Swedish-American](#)

[More tags](#)



[All 1 picture](#)

Names: [Kirsten Caroline Dunst](#) [Kirsten Dunst](#) [Add name](#)


Gender: [Female](#)

Eliza Patricia Dushku [Vote on Eliza Patricia Dushku's tags](#)

Tags [Learn more](#) [ADD TAG](#)

[punk'd by Ashton Kutcher](#) [faith](#) [tru calling](#) [Buffy the Vampire Slayer cast and crew](#) [bring it on](#) [Tru Calling actor](#) [from Middlesex County, Massachusetts](#) [View Askew actor](#) [television program](#) [Albanian-American](#) [Eliza Patricia Dushku](#) [Faith Lehane](#) [American](#) [wrong turn](#) [film actor](#)

[More tags](#)



[All 4 pictures](#)


Names: [Eliza Patricia Dushku](#) [Eliza Dushku](#)

Eliza worked on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* with Joss, who's a Buffy fan with me

spock **BETA**


[Search](#) [Advanced](#)

[Control Your Web Identity](#)

 **Vanessa Fox** female, 35 years old (Seattle, WA, United States)
[Zillow](#) [buffy fan](#) [Google Webmaster Central](#) [founder](#) [Vanessa Fox. Nude.](#) [Vanessa Fox](#) [Add tag](#)

Vanessa Fox (born 1972) is the founder and product manager of Google Webmaster Central, as of 2007, and is a well-known blogger and public speaker....

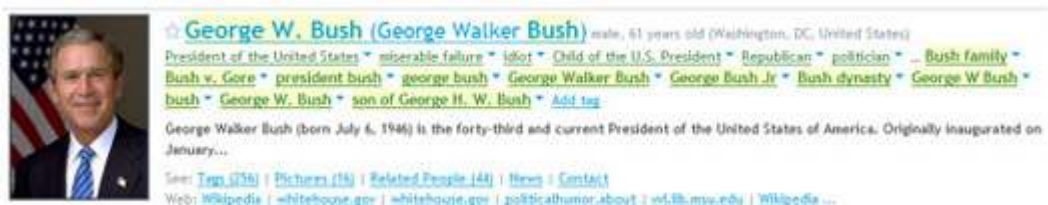
See: [Tags \(17\)](#) | [Pictures \(4\)](#) | [Related People \(2\)](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#)
Web: [Blogspot](#) | [Wikipedia](#) | [vanessafoxnude](#)

 **Joss Whedon** male, 43 years old
[Screenwriter](#) [Buffy the Vampire Slayer cast and crew](#) [American television producer](#) [Feminist](#) [film director](#) [comic book writer](#) [... Buffy the Vampire Slayer](#) [Buffy the Vampire Slayer creator](#) [Buffy](#) [Kitty Pryde fan](#) [Add tag](#)

Joss Hill Whedon (born Joseph Hill Whedon on June 23, 1964 in New York) is an American writer, director, executive producer, and creator of the...

See: [Tags \(56\)](#) | [Pictures \(3\)](#) | [Related People \(2\)](#) | [News](#) | [Contact](#)
Web: [Wikipedia](#) | [whedonesque](#) | [imdb](#) |

Anyone can add a tag to anyone else. Spock is confident that the ability of the community to [vote on tags](#) will bring a Digg-like democracy to the results and will present an accurate picture of not only how people view themselves, but how the web views them as well. Singh notes, for instance, that while Google created an algorithm to [keep George Bush from being returned as a top result for “miserable failure”](#), that’s a relevant result for Spock because it reflects the views of the community. (It’s currently the second tag listed for Bush.)



But tagging has not been without criticism. A Digg-like democracy can give power to the collective people or it can be a ripe environment for gaming, and in typical web fashion, that has already begun. Singh claims the malicious use of tagging has been extremely low and notes that anyone can request removal of a tag once they’ve claimed their profile. And then there’s [Spock Power](#), which gives more or less weight to votes based on a person’s history (how often contributions have been voted up or down). They also point to their transparency. Since everyone can see how everyone else tags and votes, I know exactly who’s tagging me as a Buffy fan.

Spock is incorporating other community aspects as well. Once you’ve created an account and claimed your profile, you can add friends and mark people as favorites. It seems that Spock marks favorites for you as well based on matches it finds from your connections on social networks such as LinkedIn. You can also import your address books and start building up a full network of contacts. You can add information to each profile that only you can see, such as phone numbers and notes. With features like this, you can see a bit of Spock’s roots as the ultimate contact management system (after the founders become frustrated with the limitations of Outlook). Since Spock can be a combination of contact information you add about people and the information that Spock finds about them from the web, you can potentially do more useful searches over those contacts. Rather than just search by name, you can look for all your contacts who like to play golf or are experts in link building.

Creating an account and registering your profile not only enables you to take part in the community aspects of the site, but it allows you to engage in a bit of reputation management as well. Information that you add about yourself is weighted more heavily than information others add about you. Also, you can sign up for alerts about when others add information to your profile.

How relevant are the results? Spock is going after quality over comprehensiveness and are slowly expanding. They don’t include offline data, but are ambitiously aiming to crawl the entire web and extract all useful people-related information. They’re not there yet. Flickr photos are visibly missing, for instance, but they’re working on adding more data sources over time.

Singh acknowledges that extraction and aggregation are hard problems. They feel they have an advantage over Google regarding extraction because while Google is agnostic to the page type, Spock tries to identify pages and information specifically about people and then processes over that. Aggregation requires that you not only can classify the data as people-related, but can identify when data from disparate locations is about the same person. So far, Spock seems to be primarily concentrating on grouping profiles from social networks and adding links from blogs, news stories, and sites like Wikipedia.

They feel their “man plus machine” philosophy is a scalable and effective way to combine smart approaches to algorithmic classifications with crowdsourcing. While this multi-faced approach seems promising, they certainly have an uphill battle. Can they engage the community to add valuable information? Can they become comprehensive—both in the total number of people they profile and in the information about each person? Can they introduce a paradigm shift around where people search and how people manage their contacts that will trigger a move away from Google and Outlook for people-related data? And maybe most importantly, will all of these plays give them an edge over the other people search services in the space?

All of that remains to be seen, but certainly they’ll be expanding in these areas over time, so they’re well worth watching. Stay tuned in the coming weeks for the rundown on some of the other services and their approaches to winning the battle of the people search vertical.

Vanessa Fox is product team lead for [Zillow.com](#). She was product manager for [Google Webmaster Central](#) before joining Zillow in mid-2007.



[Vanessa Fox](#) is a Contributing Editor at Search Engine Land. Called a “cyberspace visionary” by Seattle Business Monthly, she is an expert in understanding customer acquisition from organic search. She shares her perspective on how this impacts marketing and user experience at [ninebyblue.com](#) and provides authoritative search-friendly design patterns for developers at [janeandrobot.com](#).

[See more articles by Vanessa Fox >](#)

Share, Bookmark & Discuss This Article

More:

 Keep Updated: [News Via Email](#) | [News Via RSS Feed](#) | [News Via Twitter](#)



See more stories like this in the [Members Library](#)! Check out the [People Search](#), [Search Engines: People Search](#) sections of the Members Library where this story is filed. Members also get access to exclusive video content, a members-only weekly & monthly newsletter, plus more. [Check out all the benefits!](#)

Comments are closed.

[TODAY ON SEARCH ENGINE LAND](#)

TOP STORIES

- [Liveblogging The Yahoo “It’s You” Press Conference](#)
- [Yahoo Goes Live With New Search Format](#)
- [Two Weeks Left Until SMX East – Register Now](#)

[See All »](#)

SEARCH NEWS BRIEFS

- [SearchCap: The Day In Search, September 22, 2009](#)
- [Google Requests Hold On Book Settlement Hearings To Retool The Agreement](#)
- [What Do Y!ou Think Of Yahoo’s New Branding Campaign?](#)

[See All »](#)

FEATURES & ANALYSIS

- [Just Because You Can Doesn’t Mean You Should: Why DIY SEM Isn’t The Answer](#)
- [Google: Stop Suing Over The Meta Keywords Tag, We Don’t Use It](#)
- [Google’s Schmidt: Independent Yahoo Still Important To Competition](#)

[See All »](#)

RECENT COMMENTS

- [Garrett French said](#) " Thanks Julie! That breakdown came from Ben Wills' work to get us thinking about link outreach like s"
- [Ian Macfarlane said](#) " I was thinking the other day that Baidu should potentially look at buying Ask Jeeves - they'd get a "
- [Julie Joyce said](#) " Very nice post sir. In particular, I like the breakdown of how to deal with the less-than-a-yes resp"

[See All »](#)

[See How To Articles And More In Our Members Library »](#)

FREE DAILY SEARCH NEWS RECAP!

Stay on top of all the search news with our daily summary, the SearchCap newsletter. [View a sample »](#)

Subscribe Now

ENTER EMAIL ADDRESS

STAY CURRENT THROUGHOUT THE DAY



The Search Engine Land feed keeps you informed as news happens. [SEE ALL FEEDS »](#)

[SEARCH ENGINE LAND SPONSORS](#)

[Advertise With Us »](#)

[UPCOMING SEARCH ENGINE LAND CONFERENCES](#)

Search Engine Land produces SMX, the [Search Marketing Expo](#) conference series. SMX events deliver the most comprehensive educational and networking experiences - whether you're just starting in search marketing or you're a seasoned expert.


[SMX Web Site »](#) | [SMX Difference »](#) | [SMX News »](#)

Join us at an upcoming SMX event:

- [SMX East - October 5-7, 2009](#)
- [SMX Stockholm - 12-13 October, 2009](#)
- [SMX Mexico - November 11, 2009](#)
- [SMX West - March 2-4, 2010](#)
- [SMX Advanced - June 8-9, 2010](#)



UPCOMING SEARCH ENGINE LAND WEBCASTS

 Learn more about search marketing with our free online webcasts and webinars from our sister site, [Search Marketing Now](#). Upcoming online events include:

- [Web Analytics: Easy or Hard?](#) - September 29, 2009
- [The American Attribution Index](#) - October 1, 2009
- [PPC Negative Keywords](#) - October 13, 2009
- [PPC Bid Management Rules That Actually Work](#) - October 20, 2009

[See more webcast topics »](#)

TRACK US SOCIALLY

[Search Engine Land News App on Facebook](#)

[Search Engine Land on Facebook](#)

[Search Engine Land Facebook Group](#)

[Search Engine Land on Flickr](#)

[Search Engine Land LinkedIn group](#)

[Search Engine Land Twitter Feed](#)

BRAGROLL

- [Wall Street Journal Recommended Reading](#)
- [Ad Age Power 150 Blog](#)
- [Technorati Top 100 Blog](#)
- [Techmeme Leaderboard Source](#)
- [Best Search Engine Community/Forum](#)

[See more awards and reviews »](#)

BLOGROLL

Featured sites from our Blogroll

- [aimClear Search Marketing Blog](#)
- [ClickZ Experts](#)
- [Master of 500 Hats](#)
- [SEO Book.com](#)
- [TechCrunch](#)

[See more blogs on full blogroll »](#)

Get Your Search Engine Land Premium Membership!

Become a premium member today and receive:

- Express commenting privileges & photo.
- Exclusive videos & newsletters.
- Discounts to our SMX conferences.
- Access to "How To" & Other Archives.

[Learn More](#)

[En Espanol](#) | [Contact](#) | [Members Info](#) | [RSS Feeds](#) | [Email Subscriptions](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Advertise](#)

45976 readers

BY FEEDBURNER



© 2009 Third Door Media, Inc. All rights reserved. Google, Yahoo & Microsoft logos trademark respective companies and used with permission.