



Grapevine

GOOGLE THIS

Microsoft hopes its new search engine, Bing, launched in June, will wrest some of the search market from Google, with features including SafeSearch, 'infinite scroll' and fuller answers on the page. Will we stop googling and start, um, binging? Unlikely. Google currently has about 90 per cent of the search market and, admitted Joe Pollard, nineMSN's chief executive, 'We want to take two per cent next year, and two, three, four per cent the year after.' According to Alex Parsons, director of MSN Products, Bing will be promoted through the Nine TV network and ACP Magazines. 'For instance, at the end of *Sea Patrol*, we would have a pointer telling people to go to Bing to find out how ET died,' she said. ET died? Omigod.

STRIKE AT MOWBRAY COLLEGE

More than 100 teachers across three campuses at Mowbray College in Melbourne took protected industrial action to stop work – aka strike – in June. It's believed that this was the first ever strike at an independent school in Victoria. The strike followed staff claims that the school had refused to honour an agreement to ensure salaries remain at least equal with those of government school staff, and to backpay them to the start of the school year. According to the general secretary of the Victorian Independent Education Union (VIEU), Deb James, the board of the school has also dismissed or made redundant senior staff under the guise of a restructure. Meanwhile, Victoria's WorkSafe authority is investigating alleged bullying and intimidation of staff at the school in breach of Victoria's *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*. VIEU is keen to meet with the college to resolve outstanding issues.

STRESS

Do android teachers stress about electric students? Primary school students in Tokyo are being taught by the world's first robot teacher, according to London's *Telegraph*. At least, they're in the same classroom as a

robot called Saya, developed by a team led by Hiroshi Kobayashi at the University of Tokyo. Saya can take the rollcall, set tasks and make facial expressions using 18 motors hidden behind her latex face – including that expression where you use the corrugator, orbicularis oculi palpabraeous superior and inferior, masseter, triangularis, procerus nasi, quadratus labii inferioris and platysma muscles, aka anger – and never mind that we use 43 muscles for expressing emotion. The careful reader may question whether teaching involves merely calling the roll or setting tasks. The even more careful reader might question whether Saya is the first robot teacher. After all, RUBI – sentimentally named by Javier Movellan's robotics team at the Machine Perception Laboratory (MRL) at the University of California, San Diego, after 'robot using bayesian inference' – has since 2005 been teaching songs to pre-schoolers and, through a touch-screen on her tummy, presenting them with interactive games, although the MRL researchers describe RUBI only as an *assistant* teacher. Movellan told *ScienceDaily*, 'We have a long way to go yet, but it is our belief that to be useful to people, in education settings or elsewhere, robots will have to get better at what humans do brilliantly without thinking – recognising a voice, for example, or smiling back at just the right time... What's difficult is what we underestimate and take for granted, like emotional expression or correctly picking out an object regardless of light conditions. Genuine interaction will have to go far beyond computing capacity or a sterile cognition. It will have to be about forming relationships.' By the way, did you really read 'her tummy'?

PANIC

Professor Brian Caldwell, the Managing Director of Educational Transformations and former University of Melbourne Dean of Education, called in May for a boycott of national tests that would collect data enabling the publication of league tables of schools. In an article in *Professional Educator* in June, he also described the Com-

monwealth government's \$14.7 billion fund for school infrastructure as a 'commendable initiative,' but, 'In the longer term...we need to triple this expenditure over 10 years in a combined effort of state, territory and Commonwealth governments,' he wrote.

DIRECT RECRUITMENT SAVES \$60 MILLION?

Following 'a lengthy and rigorous European-wide competitive tendering exercise,' England's Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) gave the contract for its new Schools Recruitment Service (SRS) to recruitment specialist, Tribal. Launching this month, SRS will give England's schools access to 'talent pools' that enable them to make direct contact with candidates at the local, regional or national level. The DCSF estimates 100,000 teaching vacancies and about 50,000 support staff vacancies are advertised each year. According to the DCSF, direct access to candidates would 'substantially reduce the need for paid advertising.' The DCSF estimates that the annual saving would be £30 million – \$60 million – if every school used SRS, but that depends on the success of TES Hire Wire, launched in April by TES, Britain's major player in school recruitment and receipt writer for much of that £30 million in advertising.

RELAX

Forget *The Lost and Damned*, yet another episode of *Grand Theft Auto* from Rockstar Games. The *Slate*'s Chris Suellentrop has discovered 'a little marvel of a game' called *Flower* from thatgamecompany that, well, aims to create emotion, but not aggression. According to Suellentrop, playing *Flower* isn't spectacular, but that's the point. You simply tilt the controller to soar. According to Kellee Santiago, president and cofounder of thatgamecompany, 'There's no score, there's no time limit, there's no death.'

The Grapevine is written by Steve Holden, Editor of *Teacher*.

*With apologies to Philip K. Dick.