

Lights, Camera, Action: The Internet Movie Database

Michael Devitt

Are you a fan of the movies? If so, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) is the place for you. IMDb is an international organization that was created with a simple, yet nearly impossible objective in mind: to provide free useful, accurate, up-to-date movie information on line for movies from all over the world.

The site was first honored by *PC Magazine* in 1997 as "the single best film resource on the web."¹ From what I've seen after thoroughly browsing the site more than three years later, I still agree with their opinion. It's one of the most extensive and well-designed websites I've encountered in any category. If every website were designed with this level of quality and sophistication, much more enjoyable. Surfing the World Wide Web would be much more enjoyable.

Covering All the Bases

The Internet Movie Database (<http://us.imdb.com>) contains information on more than 100,000 movies, ranging from some of the earliest motion pictures of the 1890s to films that are currently in release or still in production. IMDb contains an additional 1,500,000 filmography entries, with sections on actors, actresses, writers, directors and just about anyone else involved in motion pictures.

Searching for information on a particular film or celebrity is easy. Each page of IMDb has a gold ticket in the top left corner, next to a toolbar for navigating the site. Included on the toolbar are a number of options, such as Movie/TV News (which provides the latest stories about television and motion pictures), Now Playing (which lists movies opening either on the big screen or on videotape that week) and Showtimes (which lists the movies and playing times in a particular location). Clicking on the ticket returns you to the IMDb home page.

Directly below the gold ticket is the IMDb's search engine. Users can conduct a simple search of the database using a person's name or the exact title of a movie, or they can choose from a number of advanced search options. Browsers can search by the year a film was released, by the name of the company that made the film, by the name of a movie's character (Dirty Harry, for example), or a particular genre (western, horror, romance, etc.), among other options.

The site also makes it easy to find information on a person or film, even if you don't know the full name or title. IMDb lets you conduct a common name or title search. For example, if you were searching for a particular actor and typed in the last name Grant, you'd get a listing of everyone with that name. You could then search the list and click on the actor in which you were interested.

Taking IMDb for a Test Run

As a test of the database's capabilities, I did a search for information on the movie Chinatown. After typing in the title of the film, I was presented with a page that listed biographical information on everyone involved with making the movie, from the director and lead actors down to the film's

gaffer and assistant propmaster. There were more than 200 related links to *Chinatown*.

Among the links, I found web pages that contained a summation of the film's plot; sound files and animated movie clips; official (and unofficial) reviews of the movie; and financial information on how much money *Chinatown* grossed in its initial film run. There was a section to order copies of the film on videotape or DVD, movie posters, and other related merchandise.

This would be enough information for most people, but the site contained much more: a "goof" area that listed continuity and editing problems in the film; a "locations" page that described where and how certain scenes were shot; and a trivia section on how the film came into being. I could even rate the movie (from 1 to 10) and submit a vote by e-mail. There were enough links that I could have easily spent a couple of weeks just learning about one movie.

Extra Features

For those of you who are interested in browsing the database rather than searching for specific information, IMDb offers users the chance to take a tour of the site (<http://www.imdb.com/help/tour>). This added feature, usually missing from many websites, is one of those special touches that makes IMDb stand out among other movie-related information sources. Among some of the special options users can find along the tour:

- A *Fun Features* page, which includes a section that lets users find out if they have the same birthday as other famous celebrities and a chart of the top 50 films of all time;
- A *What's Hot* page that provides short reviews of movies that are in release, about to be released, or have just debuted on video;
- A separate *Fun and Games* page, in which users can solve crossword puzzles, answer trivia questions for money, or take interactive polls;
- A series of message boards for users who have questions about particular movies or actors, or would like to share information and opinions with others;
- The *IMDb Shop*, an online store that offers discounts for videos, DVDs, soundtracks, movie scripts, toys and other memorabilia;
- *IMDb University*, a catch-all page that provides a wealth of information about the site itself, including a FAQ page, a history of the database, and tutorials on how to navigate the site effectively.

The Internet Movie Database has recently added two new features. The first, Photo Galleries, contains links to film clips and stills from hundreds of movies and television shows, as well as shots of individual actors, actresses and directors. The second feature, Independent Film, features news and reviews about movies made outside of the traditional studio system and is a valuable resource for fans seeking information on lesser-known or short-run films.

Whether you're one of those movie fanatics who can recite 70 years' worth of Oscar winners alphabetically, or just a fan who wants more information on a favorite film or personality, the Internet Movie Database provides a treasure trove of facts for film buffs of all ages. The combination of vital information packaged in an easy-to-use format makes it a site worth visiting again and again.

Reference

1. Online's top 100 web sites. *PC Magazine*, February 1997.

Michael Devitt,BA
Huntington Beach, California

JULY 2000