

How to Create Google Alerts That Really Work

Although the idea of coming up with some words and creating an alert sounds easy, the fact is that it's rarely as easy as it sounds. Every alert you create will send you some "junk results" that are unrelated to the information you're seeking. Your job will be to tweak the search terms to improve the results and minimize the junk. Here's an example:

Suppose you want to keep up with the gardening community in Tampa. That's pretty straight forward. Create a Google Alert for [gardening Tampa].

Your Google Alerts

Search terms
gardening tampa
Delete

But to be sure you don't miss anything outside the city you also create an alert for the county as well so, you create this alert: [gardening Hillsborough].

Your Google Alerts

Search terms
gardening hillsborough
Delete

After you receive a few alerts you notice that some of them are coming from other states. It seems they have a county named Hillsborough as well. To minimize these "false" results you change the search terms to: [gardening Hillsborough -nc -"north carolina" -nj -"new jersey"]

Your Google Alerts

Search terms
<input type="checkbox"/> gardening hillsborough -nc -"north carolina" -nj -"new jersey"
Delete

The minus sign in front of nc will eliminate any results that have "nc" on the page. Notice that there's no space between the minus sign and the nc. The same logic holds for "north carolina," -nj and -"new jersey."

If it turns out that there are too many false results and not enough good results, then it's time to delete the alert and try something else.