

30th European Conference in Information Retrieval (ECIR 2008)

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1 Introduction

The 30th European Conference on Information Retrieval Research (ECIR'08) took place in Glasgow, Scotland, on 30th March – 3rd April, 2008 and was organised by the Department of Computing Science, University of Glasgow.

The ECIR series was initially established as the annual conference Information Retrieval Specialist Group of the British Computer Society (BCS-IRSG). Since 1998 its location has alternated between the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, in order to reflect the growing European orientation of the event. Since 2003, the conference has been known as the “European Conference on Information Retrieval Research” which reflects its European location and the nature of the event: a strong, peer-reviewed conference with an international audience. ECIR has been steadily growing in size, becoming a major international forum for the presentation of Information Retrieval (IR) research. In particular, since 2007, it has been attracting more and more people from outside Europe. ECIR 2008 further confirmed this trend, resulting in a large and truly international event. Indeed, more than 200 delegates representing over 30 countries and all continents attended the various events of the conference, making ECIR 2008 the biggest event of the series. In particular, ECIR 2008 has seen a very marked increase in participation from North America and Industry. The conference was labelled as a “Green Conference”, by pledging to offset as much as possible of the impact of international travel on the environment.

ECIR 2008 was the 30th anniversary of the conference series and was hosted by the Department of Computing Science at the University of Glasgow. The programme of the conference and its venue reflected the celebratory nature of ECIR 2008, with very rich scientific and social events. ECIR 2008 received 139 full paper submissions and a further 54 poster submissions. Many of these submissions came from outside Europe, and 25 countries are represented in the final ECIR 2008 full papers programme, reflecting the international popularity and reputation of the conference series. 33 papers were selected as full research papers and a further 19 were accepted as short research papers. Of these 52 selected papers, 26 had a student as the primary author indicating that the traditional student focus of the conference is still relevant today. The accepted papers themselves come from a mixture of universities, research institutes, and commercial organisations. The proceedings were published as volume 4956 of Lecture Notes in Computing.

Yahoo! Research sponsored three awards: Best Poster, won by Martin Potthast, Benno Stein and, Robert Gerling for the poster *Automatic Vandalism Detection in Wikipedia*, Best Student Paper won by Pavel Serdyukov for the paper *Modeling Documents as Mixtures of Persons for Expert Finding*, co-authored by *Djoerd Hiemstra* and Best Paper won by Kälervo Jarvelin, Susan L. Price, Lois M. L. Delcambre and Marianne Lykke Nielsen for the paper *Discounted Cumulated Gain based Evaluation of Multiple-Query IR Sessions*.

2 Keynote Presentations

ECIR 2008 included three keynote presentations from senior IR researchers. The conference started with a Keynote Presentation given by Nick Belkin (Rutgers University), entitled *Some(what) Grand Challenges for Information Retrieval*. Nick has contributed a paper outlining his presentation as a separate article in this issue of Sigir Forum.

Amit Singhal (Google) gave a second keynote, entitled *Web Search: Challenges and Directions*. In his presentation Amit outlined some of the many significant challenges facing commercial search engines including the scale of information made available for retrieval, the huge and diverse user base searching online collections and difficulties posed by malicious content providers. The presentation offered a fascinating insight into how Internet searching has developed traditional IR technologies into systems that were unimaginable only a few years ago.

Bettina Berendt (KU Leuven) also considered the nature of information on the Web but from a different angle; that of the use of web information for intelligent aggregation of information in new forms and for new purposes. Using a range of examples she promoted new ideas of information literacy based on “competencies that a citizen of an information society ought to possess to participate intelligently and actively in that society. Bettina’s presentation clearly demonstrated not only the vast potential of the Internet for information management but also the responsibilities we have as researchers to help people safely engage in Internet use.

3 The research contributions

A total of 33 full papers, 19 short papers and 28 posters were presented at the conference. As a whole they demonstrate the commitment of Information Retrieval to sound theoretical research allied with strong empirical evaluation. The topics cover core IR problems, such as evaluation and retrieval, and emerging topics such as social media and expert search.

ECIR 2008 had a high concentration of papers on theoretical topics (modelling, representation, classification) but also welcome contributions on new and emerging topics. For instance we had a session on social media, including social networks, opinion mining and social bookmarking, a session on the use of Wikipedia as an information resource, a session on e-books and book searching and a session on expert search.

Ryen White of Microsoft Research acted as Poster Chair, running an excellent posters committee who selected a high-quality set of posters for presentation at the conference. The posters also covered many interesting areas of IR research – including mobile search, question answering, topic tracking, music IR, geographical IR – and stimulated much discussion at the conference.

4 Workshops

For the first time in its 30 year history, ECIR included a programme of workshops and tutorials. The aim of the workshop and tutorial programme was to provide the ground for exchange of ideas and discussion on new developments in the field of Information Retrieval (IR) in an informal but in a focused setting.

We received in total nine workshop proposals and three tutorial proposals. All the submitted proposals were reviewed by the members of the workshop and tutorial programme committee: Claudio Carpineto (FUB, Italy), Nick Craswell (Microsoft Research, UK), David Losada (Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Spain), Josiane Mothe (IRIT-UPS, France), Jian-Yun Nie (University of Montreal, Canada), Andrew Trotman (University of Otago, New Zealand), and Justin Zobel (NICTA, Australia)

The programme committee was formed to represent a range of areas in IR with members from Europe and other continents. All the committee members reviewed all the submitted proposals. The reviewing of the proposals was followed by a phase of discussion among the committee members to finalize the ranking of the proposals. Then, the ranked list of proposals was approved during the meeting of the general ECIR programme committee. The notifications were sent to the workshop and tutorial organizers more than three months before the conference. The selection of the workshops and tutorials was made considering various aspects of the

proposals such as originality, organization and design, diversity and possible participation. We selected the following six workshops and tutorials:

Workshops:

- Workshop on novel methodologies for evaluation in information retrieval
- Efficiency Issues in Information Retrieval Workshop
- Exploiting Semantic Annotations in Information Retrieval

Tutorials:

- Advanced language modeling approaches (Case study: Expert search)
- Search and Discovery in User-Generated Text Content
- Researching and building IR applications using Terrier

The workshops had diverse aims, from focusing on well-established topics of interest in IR, such as evaluation and efficiency, to emerging and multi-disciplinary topics such as the use of semantic annotations. Similarly, the tutorials addressed various topics, from offering an overview of language modeling to presenting novel topics such as the use of user-generated content, or an introduction to a platform for IR experimentation. In total there were more than 100 registered participants in the events.

5 Industry Day

The final day of ECIR – Industry Day - was devoted to the interests and needs of Information Retrieval practitioners. Previous BCS IRSG Industry Days have been a great success. The ECIR 2008 Industry Day event follows a similar format, where a number of invited speakers involved in developing search solutions for leading companies present their latest developments and share opinions and expertise. Craig Macdonald from University of Glasgow chaired the event.

The Industry Day was devoted to designing and developing practical solutions for information retrieval products and services, and aims to build bridges between IR specialists in industry and academia. This forum presented an opportunity for commercial organisations and individuals to share their work with a wider audience, and for researchers to learn more about the issues and problems faced by IR practitioners in developing practical solutions for the information search and retrieval industry. Over 50 delegates attended the Industry Day event. The programme included 12 talks by leading practitioners from Europe and the USA, working in industry companies of various sizes. Indeed, we heard a wide range of contributions from Yahoo! Research, Endeca, Bitext, Microsoft Live Search, Google, GlobalSpec, Thaesis, Lemur Consulting, Matrixware, Memex Technology, Expert Systems and a welcome contribution from a practitioner community, the Netherlands Public Library Association.

6 Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the programme committee members for helping to select the accepted papers, posters, workshops and tutorials. We would also like to thank the local organizing staff of ECIR 2008 who helped to run ECIR 2008 and to the delegates for a helping to create a great conference. We are particularly grateful to our sponsors, Google, Yahoo! Research, Microsoft Research and Matrixware Information Services, for their generous financial support.

Next ECIR will be held in Toulouse (<http://ecir09.irit.fr/>) organized by IRIT with Mohand Boughanem acting as conference chair.
