



# Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Web sites which I have come across and which might appeal to you, and to keep you up to date with news and views on Internet trends, developments and statistics. It offers essentially a personal selection rather than comprehensive coverage.

## Adware, badware, stopware

There are several commonly recognized terms for specific kinds of malicious software that track your moves online and feed that information back to dubious marketing agencies so that they can ambush you with targeted advertisements. You might know it as badware, spyware, malware or adware. If your every move online is checked by a pop-up advertisement, it is highly likely that you, like some 60 million Americans, have spyware or other malicious badware on your computer. What is particularly tricky about badware is that you may not know that you downloaded it. Some badware manufacturers bundle it with other programs without disclosing that it is part of the package. Others put their programs on your PC when you visit certain Web sites or play online games.

StopBadware.org is a 'neighbourhood watch' campaign aimed at fighting badware. It seeks to provide reliable, objective information about downloadable applications to help consumers make better choices about what they download onto their computers. The organization aims to become a central clearinghouse for research on badware and the bad actors who spread it, and become a focal point for developing collaborative, community-minded approaches to stopping it.

StopBadware.org was founded by Jonathan Zittrain, Professor of Internet Governance at the University of Oxford and co-founder of Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. The effort is being funded by Google, Sun Microsystems, Lenovo and others. Read more about it at <http://www.stopbadware.org/>.

## Uploading and sharing videos

If you want an open online video marketplace where you can search for, watch and even buy an ever-growing collection of TV shows, movies, music videos, documentaries, personal productions and more, then a couple of sites should be able to help. Google claims to be the first such site to let you upload and share your own videos. You can view them online or download and play them back. See for yourself at <http://video.google.com/>. Founded in February 2005, YouTube is a consumer media company for people to watch and share original videos world-wide through a Web experience. Prior to YouTube, there was no easy way for individuals to share videos on the Web because, dealing with hundreds of

multimedia formats, massive file sizes and difficult uploading methods made sharing personal video clips on the Web a daunting task. However, with its revolutionary technology, YouTube has given people the ability to easily upload, tag and share video clips across the Internet and through e-mail as well so as to create their own personal video network. With over 25 million videos served up daily and investment support from Sequoia Capital, YouTube reckons it is set to become the Internet's premier video service. Have a look at <http://www.youtube.com/>.

The Living Internet site was developed from 1996 through 1999, posted on the Web in January 2000, and is updated regularly. The site has more than 700 pages, 2000 intra-site links, and 2000 external links. It is the second known book-length work to be integrated with the Internet and the first to be published on the Web. Chapters include The Internet; World Wide Web; Usenet Newsgroups; Electronic Mail; Internet Relay Chat (IRC); Multi-User Dungeons (MUDs); and Mailing Lists – and clicking on any of these will lead into more in-depth articles.

An interesting table on the home page gives the chapters down the left-hand side and across the top there are more generic terms such as History, Design, Use, Security. Clicking at the intersection of the rows and columns gives a different entry to the information contained on the site. Live a little at <http://www.livinginternet.com/>.

### **History – no longer so boring?**

Things have come a long way in the teaching and presentation of history and there are now all kinds of topical and interesting Web sites, which aim to make history more fun. Take a look at <http://www.roman-empire.net/> – here you can get short pieces about the founding of the empire, its early rules, its religion and why it declined. You can get interactive maps and see where the various tribes held sway and where prominent towns and geographical features are located. You can take an online quiz to see how much you have learned. You can make a cut-out Roman helmet, see photos of ancient Roman sites as they are today, find out about re-enactments and even send a friend a postcard.

Another new site is that of the History of Nations (<http://www.historyofnations.net/>), which claims to have the history of every nation in the world as well as many non-sovereign territories. Divided into six world regions, each country is covered by a brief essay, which gives the highlights of that nation's history, as well as an image of the national flag. Much of the history data on this site is from public domain text at the US Department of State. This information has been modified, however, with data from other public domain sources to make the information more accurate, reduce pro-American bias, and to keep each national history current. History of Nations has partnered with Art.com to offer a selection of history themed posters.

### **Aliens have landed**

Do you want to know exactly where UFO sightings are taking place as you read this? Then surf over to <http://www.ufomaps.com/> right away. The site is a mapping project done by Poly9 Group Inc., a software research and development laboratory located in Quebec City, Canada, that uses PolyMap as a quick and easy way to make any Google Maps application work using MSN Virtual Earth.

Clicking on a sighting on the map (USA only at the moment) brings up a window with a brief description of what the viewer saw – with the full report. Besides the map, a satellite image of the earth is also available with the sightings (indicated by flying saucers) superimposed. Variety is the spice of life!

## Words and their combinations

VIEW is a language program that can calculate how often and in what combinations words appear in a variety of English language categories. Short for 'Variation in English words and phrases,' the Web-based project was developed by Brigham Young University professor Mark Davies.

The Web site allows you to quickly and easily search for a wide range of words and phrases of English in the 100 million word British National Corpus (BNC). As with some other BNC interfaces, you can search for words and phrases by using the exact word or phrase, wildcard, part of speech, or combinations of these. You can also search for surrounding words (collocates) within a ten-word window (e.g. all nouns somewhere near *paper*, all adjectives near *woman*, or all nouns near *spin*).

One unique aspect of the corpus is the ability to find the frequency of words and phrases in any combination of registers that you define (spoken, academic, poetry, medical, etc). In addition, you can compare between registers. For example, verbs that are more common in legal or medical texts, or nouns that are more common in fiction than in non-fiction.

What Davies has done is to manipulate these words to represent how they are actually uttered or printed in real life. Users can input a word or phrase into the search box and choose the variables – frequency or genre – they would like to investigate and then view the results as a table or chart. This dictionary with a difference will certainly help those learning English to get to grips with the nuances of the language. Davies has also done something similar with Spanish, Portuguese and historical English. Look it up at <http://view.byu.edu/>.

## I can hear music

The latest offering for music lovers is for a system to choose tunes and songs for the listener based on known elements that the user likes, such as a honky tonk piano or sultry sax. As part of the Music Genome Project, which is the most comprehensive analysis of music ever undertaken, a team of thirty musician-analysts have been listening to music, one song at a time, for the past six years while studying and collecting literally hundreds of musical details on every song. It takes 20 to 30 minutes per song to capture all the little details that give each recording its special and unique sound – melody, harmony, instrumentation, rhythm, vocals, lyrics – in fact almost 400 attributes! This work is carried out every day to keep up with the incredible flow of great new music coming from studios, stadiums and garages around the world.

Now an interface has been created to make this information available to music lovers so they can use this musical 'connective-tissue' to discover new music based on songs or artists they already know. Pandora™ is the doorway to this vast trove of musical information. Just enter the name of one of your favourite songs or artists into Pandora and the system will do the rest. It will quickly scan the entire contents of the Music Genome Project database of analysed music, almost a century of popular recordings – new and old, well known and completely obscure – to find songs with interesting musical similarities to your choice, which it then puts into your own personal music station. It guides you as it goes along, asking you to be more specific in the event of ambiguous titles, and playing samples, which you can accept or reject. You can create as many stations as you want and refine them as necessary. Listen away at <http://www.pandora.com/>.

## Back to the future

The Retrofuture is a concept based on a simple question: What happened to all that

futuristic stuff which was supposed to change our lives by the year 2000? Stuff such as rocket belts, flying cars, food pills and inflatable homes. So, if you want to learn more about some of these great inventions and ideas such as perpetual sunlight, two-way wrist radio, sex in space, never-ending skyscrapers, living underwater and much more, then go back to <http://www.retrofuture.com/>.

### **Just give me the facts, ma'am**

This site purports to provide a collection of damn interesting things. The site's writers have been working since 1 September 2005 to prepare daily articles about all manner of subjects. The site is often mistaken for a news site, but that is not what the originators are aiming for. Though they occasionally post bits, which qualify as news, their primary aim is to collect and dispense interesting facts and ideas, whether they appeared in the past, present, or the (anticipated) future.

The site is broken down into a number of sections including alternative energy, automotive, disasters, history, medical science, space exploration, world of tomorrow, wonders of nature, your tax dollars and more. Clicking on one of the categories yields a number of short snippets of recent information together with the date. The full article can be viewed together with additional sources and references – and the possibility is there to leave comments on the items. Readers can also suggest stories for inclusion. Get your facts straight at <http://www.damninteresting.com/>.

### **About the author**

Dr David Raitt is senior technology transfer officer with the European Space Agency in the Netherlands. His work involves finding applications for space technologies in non-space sectors, particularly those useful for improving everyday life. An information scientist by education and training, David is also editor of *The Electronic Library* and chairman of the Internet Librarian International conferences.

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