



Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Websites that I have come across and which may 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. Although some sites may not cover products or services available in South Africa, they are included because they may inspire you to either contribute missing data or become an entrepreneur and create a similar local site.

What's your word score?

I like to keep my brain in shape by doing crosswords and puzzles and this site allows me to indulge my word prowess while at the same time doing a little bit of good. The FreeRice home page provides words for which you have to give the meaning selected from a choice of four. Once you have given your answer, you get given a new word. For every word you get right, the site will donate 20 grains of rice through the UN World Food Programme. A counter is given so that you can see how much rice you have helped donate. To date some 40 billion grains have been donated. FreeRice has two goals, namely to provide English vocabulary to everyone for free and to help end world hunger by providing rice to hungry people for free. So become a wordsmith and start donating at <http://freerice.com>.

Want a good laugh?

The study of humour is a clearly no laughing matter! TV network company TBS, who brought programmes like *Seinfeld*, *My Name is Earl* and *Family Guy* to our screens, has set up a very serious Department of Humour Analysis and has created a natty and quirky Website to promote their work. It comprises a humour lab full of amusing short film clips about this fictitious department, all presented and narrated by John Cleese. There's stuff on lost jokes, funny animals, anagrams, a periodic table of humour, analysis of *Seinfeld* and more. You can create your own future sitcom and take a survey to help define new humorous situations. You can also meet the Department staff. So if you want to amuse yourself for a while, head on over to www.tbshumorstudy.com.

English.com has been chosen as one of the ten funniest sites on the Web by *PC Magazine*. The site consists of many, many examples of the humorous English mistakes that appear in (especially) Japanese advertising and product design. Categories include buildings, cars, chocolate, instructions, signs, posters, toys and many others. There are also examples from other countries (such as Chinglish) but for some reason the Japanese mistakes are the most amusing. The site also has a shop where you can buy T-shirts, cards and the like. Have a laugh at other people's linguistic gaffs at <http://www.english.com>.

Architectural design

Deputydog is a frequently updated Website dedicated to showcasing incredible examples of the world's most fascinating architecture, green living, inspirational design and phenomenal natural oddities. If you poke around the site you will find the most popular posts, archives and news feeds. Topics are imaginative and inspiring – there are seven 'damn fine' wineries of the world (not one in South Africa unfortunately – but since readers are encouraged to

send material in, then you could take care of this omission!). There are four incredible and existing uses of energy harvesting and the blogger skilfully talks about the theme while providing suitable images of architecture relating to them. Get a different world outlook at deputy-dog.com.

Weird and wacky science

Null Hypothesis, the Journal of Unlikely Science, essentially pokes fun at the world of science and technology to highlight all the weird and wacky stuff out there. As the FAQ says, the site presents articles that are often so far-fetched that you can't believe they can possibly be true. But the content is not all made up. Some of the articles are utter drivel but the writers also highlight real research and real news stories, with a liberal pasting of opinions and comments from our readers. You can see which are spoof articles and which are not by the label at the top indicating which section you are in. These sections include Spoof, Strange, Straight, News, Interact, Shop and Jobs. There are random facts, question of the week, plus caption competition. Be amazed or amused at <http://www.null-hypothesis.co.uk/>.

How do you do that?

Have you ever wondered how to do this or that – make a lensless microscope for remove fingernail ridges or customize a DVD? Well, WonderHowTo is a search engine and directory to over 100000 videos that show you just how to. The Website encourages content providers and users to upload videos that are intended to instruct others on any topic. WonderHowTo provides content from more than 500 specialized sites spanning some 40 vertical categories and more than 400 sub-categories. The site also offers a blog, weekly e-mail, the Wonder Weekly, Clip of the Day showcasing celebrity how-to's, in depth member profiles, user testimonials, and even how-to exposés featuring fake videos. Want to change your engine oil or spark plugs? Learn how here. Want to make votive candles or fold an origami rabbit? See how here. Fancy a Harvey Wallbanger but don't know how to mix the ingredients? Find out how to shake up your own. You'll never be able to say you don't know how again after you've visited <http://www.wonderhowto.com/>.

Most engaging South African Websites

For those of you who haven't seen the press release, Nielsen Online, a service of The Nielsen Company, revealed the most engaging South African Websites and sectors as measured by average time per session. The survey found that, in June 2008, employment was the most engaging sector online – averaging almost 13 minutes per session. This was followed by personals and dating (almost 10 minutes) and real estate (just over 9 minutes). The lowest was healthcare with somewhat under six minutes being the average session duration. Although e-mail or messaging and chat was slightly above this, the number of unique browsers amounted to some 1,4 million, compared to almost 459000 for employment and only 123000 for personals and dating.

As for the most engaging South African Websites, top spot was won by iAfrica chat with an average of over 32 minutes per session – though it had only 1000 unique browsers. Despite employment being the most engaging sector, overall, there was only one employment Website among the ten most engaging Websites, namely CareerJunction, which averaged just over 14 minutes per session. However, the site did have almost 300000 unique browsers – by far and away masses more traffic than all the other sites put together. The second most engaging sector – personals and dating – actually accounted for four of the ten most engaging Websites. All the Websites and the figures are contained in http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_080707_ZA.pdf.

Ten sites get one third of UK use

Over the last year, Britons spent a total of almost 34 billion minutes on Websites and

Internet-related applications on average each month. However, Nielsen Online has just revealed that only a select group of ten Websites and applications have averaged at least 500 million UK minutes per month over the last year, with three of them (MSN Messenger, eBay and Facebook) averaging over one billion total minutes each month. The research showed that Facebook, YouTube and Second Life were the fastest growing sites in terms of total UK minutes.

Besides MSN Messenger (instant messaging) and eBay (auctions), the top ten include two social networks (Facebook and Bebo), two e-mail sites (Hotmail and Yahoo! Mail) and two media players (Windows Media Player and iTunes). MSN Messenger had the highest average monthly share of UK minutes with 7,8% followed by eBay at 4,8%; Yahoo! Mail was lowest at 1,5%. The statistics show that despite the diversity of the Internet, just these ten sites and applications alone account for 30% of all online-related time. Get the full figures at http://www.nielsen-netratings.com/pr/pr_080702_UK.pdf.

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.

ISSN 1560-683X

Published by [InterWord Communications](#) for Department of Information and Knowledge Management,
University of Johannesburg

