History TODAY A FRESH LOOK AT AMERICAN HISTORY ...The World's Premier History Magazine and Website

100 most useful websites

Cream of the crop

Thursday December 16, 2004
The Guardian

Millions of users now find it hard to imagine life without the internet - without email, instant messaging, web search engines and online trading or gaming.

Over the past decade since Online was launched, it's the web that has made the difference. It has made it easier to access all the net's facilities, and encouraged a huge explosion in the number and diversity of websites.

With the web still expanding, we have taken the opportunity to ask Online's readers, contributors, and some of the Guardian's journalists to suggest the 100 most useful sites.

It is a sign of the vast reach of the web that it was constricting to have to limit coverage to 20 categories with only five sites in each - a lot of great sites have not made the cut.

The Guardian has its own website which now has more than 9m unique users and delivers more than 100m page impressions a month.We have listed the most popular Guardian sites, and some Online readers' suggestions.

Today, almost half (49%) of British people now have internet access from home. With more and more information coming online, the benefits of being connected can only increase, and in the next decade, few lives will remain untouched by the web.

Activism

Using the web to motivate and encourage action is no longer just a pipe dream. While America's MoveOn.org is probably the most successful example of web activism, some useful ideas are coming from British hacktivists. FaxYourMP takes the hassle out of contacting

technophobic political representatives. Netaction is a rich resource for wannabe online campaigners, including The Virtual Activist, a superb manual for anyone looking to build and promote their cause online. Those interested in helping out in their local area might try Timebank, which finds organisations to which to donate spare time. AllAboutGiving tells you about charitable donations. Greenpeace has one of the most comprehensive cyberactivist sites.

www.faxyourmp.com

www.netaction.org

www.timebank.org.uk

www.allaboutgiving.org

http://act.greenpeace.org

Advertiser links

Get Blackberry 6710 Wireless Handheld

Switch your carrier, keep your number. We can help, Wirefly...
wirefly.com

Free Blackberry 7100T PDA, Phone, E-Mail

Free Blackberry 7100t with activation. New model 7100t color...
venicom.com

Blackberry PDA and RIM Sale

Get a Blackberry PDA Phone or RIM device with new...
cellularchoices.net

Art

The Internet Movie Database is the sine qua non for anyone interested in film. Easily searchable and full of information about any movie, plot, director, actor or crew member you could think of; reliably accurate. For opera lovers, Opera Base is essential. Check future schedules of singers or directors and find details of opera houses or festivals. The National Gallery's website is wonderful: you can search the entire collection with ease. Abe Books is the best and biggest place to look for and buy secondhand and rare books. All Music is a comprehensive database on all musical genres. Great for checking discographies and the like.

http://us.imdb.com

www.operabase.com

www.nationalgallery.org.uk

www.abebooks.co.uk

www.allmusic.com

Blogs

Typepad has unseated Blogger.com as our favourite personal publishing tool. Like Blogger, it will also host your site - although you have to pay - but it will let you transfer your own domain name over too. A high level of control over content and layout, plus decent default

templates top it off. Statcounter shows who's visiting your site, and helps you understand why they're there. Technorati lets you see who's linking to you. Blogdex shows what the blog community is obsessing about. Once you've mastered writing a blog, start the radio version with iPodder.org.

www.typepad.com

www.statcounter.com

www.technorati.com

http://blogdex.net

www.ipodder.org

Buying and selling

The theory used to be that the net let you spend less time shopping, freeing you up for more interesting stuff. Now it's become clear that the net has drawn many into the shopping experience more deeply. The old cliche about Britain being a nation of shopkeepers has been given a new twist at eBay and Amazon, where thousands run their own virtual market stalls. EBay remains the most amusing place to browse. The small sellers in Amazon's Marketplace are great for tracking down deleted/out of print items. The shopping search site Kelkoo allows you to research products, compare prices and find out if the stores are signed up with the Isis (Internet Shopping is Safe) trust mark scheme. The Apple iTunes Music Store could do with some tweaking pricewise, but it still looks like the future of music retail. For offbeat gifts and early adopter gizmos try Josh Rubin's Cool Hunting blog.

www.ebay.co.uk

www.amazon.co.uk

www.kelkoo.co.uk

www.apple.com/uk/itunes/store

www.joshrubin.com/coolhunting/

Community

You should be able to find a community for any interest, however niche, on the web - but for geek news, the best port of call is Slashdot. Orkut, a site that lets you communicate with friends of friends has replaced Friendster as the peer network du jour, but those wanting to focus on their local area might visit Craigslist, an eBay-meets-Loot which now has sites for London, Manchester, Edinburgh and Dublin. Del.icio.us is a

bookmark manager that lets you store and organise your web favourites and then share the sites you browse with others, while Flickr is an online photo gallery that lets other people look at (and comment on) your pictures.

www.slashdot.org

www.orkut.com

http://craigslist.org

http://del.icio.us

www.flickr.com

Education

UK learners can access a vast amount of superb web-based curriculum material; the best content, though, is only available on subscription. Free stuff tends to be thinner, but here are a few openly available sites worth a dip. Skoool.com is Irish, exported here by Intel; it covers a lot of ground (though has big holes), and will prove handy for pupils studying/revising at home. Nrich has a wealth of intriguing maths activities which extend and enliven the subject. National Archives (the government agency) has put together the huge and cleverly-presented Learning curve. The best new site, though shallow in content as yet, is the National Theatre's Stagework site: nice video clips to support drama. And the prize for neatest, simplest idea has to go to britkid.org, a resource for opening children's eyes to the diversity of our culture.

www.skoool.com

www.nrich.maths.org.uk

www.stagework.org.uk

www.learningcurve.gov.uk

www.britkid.org

Email

Hotmail is the free email service everyone knows. It's also dangerous, because Microsoft will delete all your messages if you don't log on every 30 days. However, it's an obvious choice for people who use Microsoft Messenger, MSN Spaces (Microsoft's new blogging service), and Internet Explorer, because they all work together. But if you just want web-based email, go for Yahoo. It is cleaner and faster, and you can forward email to a phone or pager. Yahoo only provides 100 megabytes of free space, whereas Hotmail provides 250MB, and Google's Gmail a gigabyte (1GB). One

drawback with Gmail is that you cannot sign up: you have to be invited. My first choice is Bluebottle. It's free, it offers 250MB of storage, and as well as web access, it supports POP3 and Imap, so you can use a proper email program from copy.

www.bluebottle.com

http://mail.yahoo.com

http://gmail.google.com

www.hotmail.com

www.walla.com

Gaming

For features and information about all past, current and future platforms and products, IGN is a good first stop, although the north American slant may put off the casual observer. UK gamers who want home-grown opinion should head to SPOnG. It has a great reputation among professionals and consumers for reviews, rumours and news. Slashdot Games is a good source for what's floating around the web. If you're stumped by a difficult puzzle, GameFAQs lists game player-created walkthroughs, plus links to cheats, reviews and previews. Finally, the Entertainment Software Ratings Board has a searchable list of games by age rating. It's a useful source for parents considering whether the content of a game is appropriate for their child.

http://ign.com

www.spong.com

http://games.slashdot.org

http://gamefaqs.com

www.esrb.com/esrbratings.asp

Health

There are more websites devoted to health than to almost any other subject, but some are more reliable than others. A slightly sceptical approach is probably healthiest, but the website of the National Electronic Library for Health brings together all the latest research evidence, safety and organisational concerns. There is even a "hitting the headlines" feature, where staff at the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination at York University assess the reliability of health correspondents' reporting! The Health Protection Agency (formerly Public Health Laboratory Service) has masses of information, including all the symptoms, facts and figures you could ever want

on infectious diseases, while the Food Standards Agency is commendably rapid at publishing agendas and minutes of scientific advisory committees, as well as food safety alerts. The British Medical Journal has been unusual among medical journals in allowing free access to all articles past and present, though some limited restrictions are coming inforce from January. Avert is the website of an international Aids charity which has brilliant statistical data and explanations of the science that anyone can understand.

www.nelh.nhs.uk

www.hpa.org.uk

www.food.gov.uk

www.bmj.com

www.avert.org

News

The BBC's strengths lie in its breadth of content. A mix of audio, video and text blurs the boundary between old and new media, while the low graphics version even works well on GPRS mobile phones. The New York Times has a huge site, and Google's news website gives old media editors sleepless nights. Headlines are scraped from around the world, with Google's computers deciding on the placement of stories. That means eccentric news selection, but lots of choice. Bomb in Baghdad? Look at coverage from Al-Jazeera to ABC, via Swissinfo and Australia's news.com.au. Ohmynews is a popular South Korean site that relies on 33,000 "citizen reporters". What they write is edited and fact-checked by professional journalists making the site an interesting hybrid between weblog and pro news site. Finally, the Scotsman's site continues to punch above its weight. Its latest addition is a premium archive search stretching back to 1817.

http://news.bbc.co.uk

http://nytimes.com

http://news.google.co.uk

http://ohmynews.com

http://scotsman.com

Offbeat

Easily Amused is a guide to fun sites albeit a shadow of its predecessor, the Center for Easily Amused. The Weird Site is another source, but less family-friendly. Still,

there's a nice web ring with links to 106 Unusual Museums of the Internet, including the Virtual Toilet Paper Museum, Kilokat's Antique Light Bulb Site, and the Burlingame Museum of Pez Memorabilia; another 106 sites are awaiting approval. For an amusing and educational browse, it's hard to beat Snopes, the Urban Legends Reference Pages. The site analyses and debunks all those false claims and hoaxes circulating on the net and elsewhere. Otherwise, for today's five minutes of fun, try browsing B3ta. This UK site sends out a weekly newsletter of cool links and runs a message board where people post amusingly manipulated pictures, some rated NSFW (Not Safe For Work).

www.snopes.com

www.theweirdsite.com/Otherlinks.htm

www.b3ta.com

www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=museum;action=list

www.easilyamused.com

Phones

Mobileburn is an excellent news and reviews site focusing on new and high-end devices. GSM Arena is a comprehensive site on GSM handsets, where review scores are compiled from reader votes. Yahoo has a straightforward Wap search engine, which also provides a quick menu of selected games, logos, wallpapers, news and finance sites. WGamer is the site for the latest mobile games. It's US-based but the reviews are more in-depth than any on the web. Japan produces some of the most advanced mobile phones, so if you want to know the features that will be available in Europe a year from now, Mobile Media Japan is the place. Finally, the cellphone section of gadget blog Engadget has news and pithy comment on the latest handsets.

www.mobileburn.com

www.gsmarena.com/

http://wgamer.com

wap.yahoo.co.uk

http://cellphones.engadget.com/

Politics

Tony Blair's official website is a good place to start if you want to find out what the government is up to. TheyWorkForYou lets you search Hansard by MP and issue. For predictions, forget the official opinion poll

sites, City forecaster Martin Baxter's is the best. Electoral Calculus illustrates what the polls mean, and to see what the blogs are saying, look at UK Poli Blogs. If you want to become active, the Google directory has the best list of campaigns, parties and pressure groups.

www.number-10.gov.uk/

www.theyworkforyou.com/

http://electoralcalculus.co.uk/

www.voidstar.com/ukpoliblog/

http://directory.google.co.uk

Public services

Directgov is the best place to start looking for information if you don't know which organisation it comes from; which, for normal people, is most of the time. The NHS Gateway is a breakthrough in navigating the health service, and carries information on waiting times by speciality and postcode. You can report crime online at police.uk, or at least that's the theory. At the National Archives you can read the Magna Carta or find out what granddad did in the war. The parliament website is stodgy, but contains lots of information - and finally, the Inland Revenue. No, really: the tax collector is getting the hang of this web thingy.

www.direct.gov.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk

www.parliament.uk

Radio

Streaming radio is one of the fastest-growing areas of the web. The BBC outdoes its rivals by providing 11 stations to suit all tastes. The corporation's Radio Player gadget also allows you to listen to anything broadcast over the past week. If you're looking for new stations, you could drop by Radio-Locator or look at Live-Radio.net, which lists thousands of broadcasters around the globe. Last.fm drops tailor-made radio into your lap, and Traffic Island Disks is a downloadable radio programme which is both engaging and surprising.

www.bbc.co.uk/radio

http://radio-locator.com

www.live-radio.net/

www.last.fm

www.traffic-island.co.uk/

Reference

The web is often the quickest place to look something up - if you know where to go. If you don't, you can always start with Jim Martindale's Reference Desk, an astonishing collection that has been 10 years in the making. Usually, however, you will probably want to look up a word, a phone number, a place or whatever. For words, try Onelook, which indexes more than 6m words in 981 dictionaries. It also has a "reverse lookup" to find words from their meanings. For longer items, the Concise Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia is online (the Britannica costs money). There are links to the world's online phone books at Teldir, which is now on the Infobel site. Finally, there are maps of just about everywhere at Multimaps.

www.martindalecenter.com

www.onelook.com

www.multimaps.com

www.infobel.com/teldir

www.encyclopedia.com

Science

Yahoo can be worth checking two or three times a day. Eurkalert was deliberately created by the American Association for the Advancement of Science as a forum for formal science press announcements, and that, too, merits a daily visit: over the years, it has become a research resource in itself. Space.com is an impressive, eclectic place. But the best for almost a decade has been, and is still, Nasa.gov. There's plenty of government, but also a wealth of delicious arcana, including the Lunar Surface Journal, a transcript of all the conversations on the moon, annotated by the Apollo astronauts themselves.

http://dir.yahoo.com/Science/news_and_media/

www.eurekalert.org/

http://space.com/

www.palaeos.com/Timescale/

www.nasa.gov/home/

Search

Search is still the jewel of the web: the ability to extract information on any subject in a fraction of a second. Search engines can now scour hard disks, news groups, images, blogs, emails and peer-to-peer sites as well as the web. Some can do nearly all of these simultaneously. Google remains king of the jungle but Yahoo - which now owns Overture, AllTheWeb and AltaVista (number one choice in the pre-Google era) - is snapping at its heels, leaving MSN Search a distant third. One of the most interesting new sites - though the consumer experience doesn't yet live up to the hype - is Blinkx. It claims to search more sources simultaneously (including hard disks, video and peer-to-peer) than anyone else, using artificial intelligence to interpret the context of what you are saying rather than Google's page rankings (PCs only until January).

www.google.co.uk

http://search.yahoo.com

http://beta.search.msn.co.uk

www.blinkx.com

www.searchenginewatch.com

Sport

Do you urgently need to know who's leading the Slovenian Liga? The latest results from Bulgaria? Soccerbot has more football stats than you can shake a geek at. Meanwhile, Cricinfo, the online branch of the cricketing authority Wisden, covers most aspects of the world game, and it has a searchable facts and figures database to die for. Howzat? If you want to wager online, Blue Square is your best bet, while One Mick Jones is best read if you (a) like Leeds United, (b) always wear a leather jacket bought before 1978, or (c) think Popbitch is like, so passé. At the First Church of Tiger Woods, however, "pastor" John Ziegler wonders whether Tiger Woods is God. Well, clearly not - but suspend your golfing agnosticism awhile and marvel at evidence of his divinity, the Ten Tiger Commandments, Tiger news and a kitsch screensaver. Just don't call him Eldrick.

www.soccerbot.com

www.cricinfo.com

www.bluesq.com

www.onemickjones.com

www.tigerwoodsisgod.com

Travel

Travel Jungle does an excellent job of tracking fares by searching 23 airlines and nine travel agents simultaneously and also has a decent hotel search. If the capital's transport network were half as efficient as Transport for London's journey planner, black cabs would be out of business. It serves disabled passengers and brisk walkers equally well. Let's hope that the national public transport portal Transportdirect.info will catch up when it gets round to integrating cycling routes. In the meantime, a small team at Xephos are doing it a lot better. The downside is that they start charging once the free allocation of seven days' use or 100 hits is used up. Michelin's database, on the other hand, is still free and its maps of Europe and hotel and restaurant recommendations are unmatched on the web. Bringing up the rear is Seat61, a labour of love devoted to European rail travel.

www.traveljungle.co.uk

www.viamichelin.com

http://journeyplanner.tfl.gov.uk

www.internet.xephos.com

www.seat61.com

· Contributions from Sarah Boseley, Michael Cross, Tom Happold, Charlotte Higgins, Colin Hughes, Bobbie Johnson, Dan Jones, Victor Keegan, Aleks Krotoski, Neil McIntosh, Jim McClellan, James Meikle, Tim Radford, Keith Stuart, Jack Schofield and Ros Taylor

100 most useful websites

Guardian websites

News and Politics Twenty-four hour news and political coverage.
www.guardian.co.uk
http://politics.guardian.co.uk
blogs.guardian.co.uk/news

Sport Incisive, witty commentary and daily football email The Fiver .
http://football.guardian.co.uk
http://sport.guardian.co.uk

Arts Sites for the arts, film and books.
www.guardian.co.uk/arts
http://books.guardian.co.uk
http://film.guardian.co.uk

http://education.guardian.co.uk
www.learn.co.uk

Media Dissecting the media - from TV and radio to advertising and the internet.
http://media.guardian.co.uk

Public Services News and comment
http://society.guardian.co.uk

Online
www.guardian.co.uk/online
blogs.guardian.co.uk/online
blogs.guardian.co.uk/games

Readers' favourites

www.wikipedia.org
"I needed information on Hallowe'en for one of my classes. I first went to Encarta - they had no information at all. I then went to Wikipedia: everything from food that is eaten to a detailed historical background."

www.cursor.org
"Political commentary monitoring US politics and foreign affairs with consistent and civilised viewpoint."

www.limmy.com
"Anyone from Glasgow, or with an understanding of the Glasgow sense of humour and ned culture etc should definitely check it out."

www.yell.com
"Very simple, fast and efficient. Never fails to deliver phone number and address, as long as you know the name and town."

www.musicplasma.com
"Type in the name of a band you like and it creates an inter-connected universe of other acts you might also enjoy."

remogeneralstore.com
"It's very slick - well designed, extremely stylish and really creates a sense of a community and loyalty."

www.moimoimoi.co.uk
"They do a great little range of toys that are not the usual fare."

www.wearewhatwedo.org/default.aspx
"A great site with really useful links and something for all the family to get involved in."

www.thedvdforums.co.uk
"Registration needed, but for anything film related (DVD, TV or cinema) including technology, it is excellent. Also

thousands of bargains from big and little retailers - this site is pretty much the best of the web."

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