



# Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

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This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Web sites that I have come across and that 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.

## Putting your place on the map

Platial (<http://platial.com>) enables you to find, create and use meaningful maps of places that matter to you. It can be used to connect people, neighbourhoods, cities and countries through a citizen-driven common context that goes beyond geopolitical boundaries. The idea originated more or less as a tour guide – favourite restaurants, hang-outs, markets, museums and other local amenities were added to maps for visitors. Taking it online meant that the idea could be extended and many other people could add their own favourite locales to maps.

All of the places you add to Platial go into 'Your Places,' but unless you specifically put them onto maps, they are not associated with any one particular map. Maps are essentially saved collections of places and can be created by one person or in collaboration with others. You can only add places to maps which belong to you or to maps which have the word 'open' next to their titles.

To create a map, you simply click on the 'Create a map' button which appears next to 'Add a place' on the map and on your home page. This will take you to the map creator in which you give your map a title, description and map icon and decide whether you want other Platial members to add to your map or not.

The site also allows you to explore recently created maps (e.g. of ice cream parlours in the US, sites where hip hop is happening, etc.), see individuals' maps and check out the most popular tags. You can also find out what is happening in a city near you today!

Another map service is Maplandia (<http://www.maplandia.com>) – a world map gazetteer based on Google Maps, which claims to be the most comprehensive online satellite imagery ever available. More than 2 million places all over the world are divided into many geographical categories according to continents, countries and administrative regions. You can search for a location or a region and get the relevant map – either as a normal map, a satellite image or hybrid. You can also register and add your own places on maps. One useful feature is that you can see where the latest world news (taken from BBC News) is unfolding on the map at <http://www.maplandia.com/news/> – clicking on the pop-ups will give the complete news story.

Maplandia also provides detailed regional maps, for example of South Africa and neighbouring countries. The comprehensive destination gazetteer enables users to explore South Africa quickly and easily through detailed satellite imagery. You can browse a list of administrative regions and follow the navigation through these regions to find populated places you are interested in. Check it out at <http://www.maplandia.com/south-africa/>.

### **Express yourself – whatever your mood!**

Now as you probably know, blogs are a relatively new form of Web content. Personal and highly opinionated, these journals have grown from just a handful in the late 1990s to tens of millions today. A national phone survey ([http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP Bloggers Report July 19 2006.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_Bloggers_Report_July_19_2006.pdf)) of bloggers found that most are focused on describing their personal experiences to a relatively small audience of readers and that only a small proportion focus their coverage on politics, media, government, or technology. Blogs, the survey finds, are as individual as the people who keep them. However, most bloggers are primarily interested in creative, personal expression – documenting individual experiences, sharing practical knowledge, or just keeping in touch with friends and family.

So if you want to express yourself and connect with friends online, then you could try a simple-to-use communication tool built on open source software called LiveJournal. LiveJournal can be used in several different ways: as a private journal, a blog, or a social network. You can share thoughts and images with one, many or all and you can keep up with your journal from anywhere. The most popular interests of LiveJournal participants include music, movies, reading, writing and friends – not surprising given that most users seem to be in the 16 to 21 age bracket and 68% of them are female. There have been over 11 million journals and communities since 1999 with over three million users being in the USA, followed by Russia (344000), Canada (256000) and UK (216000). So, if you are young at heart and interested in chatting online to hook up with others, go to <http://www.livejournal.com/>.

But that's not all. Bloggers using LiveJournal can report their mood at the time of writing a post and about 80% of posts do actually have a mood attached to them – and these moods can be tracked. MoodViews is a collection of tools for tracking the stream of mood-annotated text made available by LiveJournal. At present, MoodViews consists of three components, each offering a different view of global mood levels, the aggregate across all postings of the various moods. Moodgrapher tracks the global mood levels, Moodteller predicts them, and Moodsignals helps in understanding the underlying reasons for mood changes. A fourth component to be added soon is Moodspotter – a new type of search engine that tells you what moods are typically associated with a given topic. Why might one want to check the moods of LiveJournal posts? Well, not only is the number of blogs on the rise, but so is their influence in terms of their reach and number of readers. MoodViews' research aim is to develop novel methods for searching, discovering and retrieving blogs, and they believe that non-factual aspects of blog entries such as moods are an important part of what makes people read and navigate around blogs. Check out MoodViews and its graphs at <http://ilps.science.uva.nl/moodviews/>.

### **Where are your origins?**

A comprehensive study of 20,000 British surnames over five generations has enabled researchers for the first time to track the migration of people with British names and to see where the largest concentration of people of that name lives. A database of more than 100 million people's names in the United States, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada was used to track the British migration.

The authors of the study say that the size and extent of the big diasporas of British people living abroad, such as prisoners and settlers to Australia, and Scottish and English

colonialists in Ireland, were unknown until the latest developments in information technology. One conclusion is that many people generally think that people migrate randomly to another country whereas in fact migration flows are very specific. They tend to move from one part of one country to another part of another country at a specific time — Scots went to Tasmania in the 1890s, for instance, and people from Cornwall in England to Wyoming in the USA in the 1860s.

The reasons for names disappearing extend beyond migration. Researchers compiled a list of the 'most embarrassing' names that people have tended to change. To find out these and more about your possible British ancestry, log on to <http://www.spatial-literacy.org>.

### **What can I read next?**

For those people who enjoy reading but have difficulty choosing their next book because of the large selection in bookshops and not enough information on book Web sites, there is a new service called StoryCode (<http://www.storycode.co.uk/>). StoryCode attempts to take the pain out of choosing books by offering rational, impartial recommendations, based on a unique analysis of the 'DNA' of stories. Of course, Amazon suggests books to you based on what you have bought before and also includes reader reviews to help you decide whether to buy a book or not. But StoryCode is a unique database of structured story information built not simply on a minority viewpoint of experts but on the input and collective wisdom of many ordinary readers.

StoryCode is built by book lovers for book lovers and the company's goal is to reduce the risk of choosing new stories, giving greater reader confidence and satisfaction. It claims to be a unique source of inspiring book recommendations and a great way to find the next book to read. Its power comes from the collaborative passion of readers who have actually read the books they recommend. However, one limitation is that it only applies to readers of fiction. Non-fiction books cannot be coded.

The creation of a StoryCode is a five stage process requiring about five minutes of concentrated effort and the movement of a few sliders. Each stage asks some questions about the story that are answered by sliding the blue dot to a position that reflects your view of this part of the story. Clearly it might be helpful to have the book with you when you code it. Questions include how easy is it to read, does it have universal appeal, is it culturally related or region specific, and narrative drivers such as how much is the story driven by the plot or the characters, whether the development of the story is determined by things that happen to the characters or by decisions they make based on their own needs and desires. There are 40 such questions that need answers – though the company believes that once you are familiar with the process it takes only a couple of minutes to complete.

The recommendations page displays the main details of the source story, including its average reader rating, its average readability score and its rating for recommended age, and then a list of 20 recommendations ordered by those stories with the closest StoryCode. The venerable Foyles book shop in London has teamed up with StoryCode because they believe it is an innovative service that will make a big difference to readers. Choose what you will read next at [http://www.foyles.co.uk/foyles/sfp\\_027.asp?tag=&cid=](http://www.foyles.co.uk/foyles/sfp_027.asp?tag=&cid=).

### **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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ISSN 1560-683X

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