



Internet applications, sites, trends and happenings

David Raitt

david.raitt@esa.int

This column aims to draw your attention to various interesting Websites that 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 essentially offers a personal selection rather than a 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.

Personalized search engines

There are a growing number of Web companies and sites that let you create personalized search engines and/or add code to your own sites. Check out <http://www.programmableweb.com/api/yahoo-search> for instance. You can find a list of them at <http://h2obeta.law.harvard.edu/173008>, but here are a couple for your edification.

Rollyo claims to be a fast, easy way to create personal search engines using only the sources you trust. With Rollyo, you can easily create your own custom-made search engines (called searchrolls) and explore, save and personalize those created by others. What Rollyo actually does, is to give you the tools to create your own personal search engines – with no programming required – that provide results from a hand selected collection of trusted sites on any given topic. All you have to do is pick the sites (up to 25) that you want to search, and Rollyo will create a custom search engine for you. If you are not quite ready for that or are feeling a little lazy, then you can get a starter kit of searchrolls that you can personalize yourself. In addition to rolling your own, you can also explore and save the thousands of searchrolls created by the community of Rollyo users and share your own knowledge on a particular set of topics. You can even edit searchrolls created by others.

Rollyo searches for the latest news articles and blog posts, giving you up-to-the-minute search results from the news sources you know and trust when it comes to a particular topic or area of interest. Because you can drag your Rollyo experience onto your browser, you can search any site, use your searchrolls wherever you are, add sites to your rolls on the fly, even create new rolls from the site that you are on. Another option is for when you constantly access the same site (e.g. eBay, Amazon, or a newspaper), then you can create a searchroll that includes just that single site so all your searches are in one place. Of course, you can always expand any search to include the whole Web. Roll your own roll or find out more at <http://www.rollyo.com/>.

Another approach, if you have a Website or collection of sites that you would like to search over, is to use Google's custom search engine to create a search engine tailored to your needs. Like Rollyo, you can include one Website, multiple Websites, or specific Webpages. You can also host the search box and results on your own Website and customize the colours and branding to match your existing Webpages. A custom search engine is a tailored search experience, built using Google's core search technology, that prioritizes or restricts search results based on Websites and pages you specify. Your custom search engine can be tailored to reflect your point of view or area of expertise. Once you have defined

your search engine index, Google will give you a simple piece of code for a search box to place on your site or blog. You then have various customization options to choose from to make the look and feel and functionality of your search engine your own. Try it out at <http://www.google.com/coop/cse/>.

Does the universe have a purpose?

The mission of the John Templeton Foundation is to serve as a philanthropic catalyst for discovery in areas engaging life's biggest questions. These questions range from explorations into the laws of nature and the universe to questions on the nature of love, gratitude, forgiveness and creativity. Each month the Foundation hosts an online exchange on a question that illuminates our philanthropic mission. 'Does the Universe have a purpose?' is the first in a series of conversations about the 'big questions' the John Templeton Foundation is conducting among leading scientists and scholars. They include: Lawrence Krauss, Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Case Western Reserve University; Peter William Atkins, Fellow and Professor of chemistry at Lincoln College, Oxford; Nancey Murphy, Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary; Bruno Guideroni, astrophysicist and the Director of the Observatory of Lyon, France; and Jane Goodall, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and a UN Messenger of Peace. Of course, some say 'Yes', some say 'No', some say 'Perhaps' – you can read their essays and see who says what at <http://www.templeton.org/purpose/>.

Other questions that the Templeton Conversations have addressed include:

- Will we ever build a super-intelligent spiritual machine or just a super-intelligent zombie?
- Is it good to be good?
- What role does spiritual thinking have in the 21st century?
- Can happiness be measured?
- Do we live in a multiverse?
- How can children develop a sense of purpose?

And then there is one that is perhaps of more interest to SAJIM readers: Will money solve Africa's development problems? Go direct to this one at <http://www.templeton.org/questions/africa/>.

Nothing to read?

If you are looking for an online magazine with something to say about everything in 500 exclusive new articles a week, then you need to open the door of Suite101. The site boasts that it plays host to seven million readers and 500000 members each month who delve into the 400 topics and 100000 articles written by 700 professional writers over the last ten years. Suite 101 is dedicated to delivering quality expertise and writing for its readers and visitors – including topical commentary, candid advice and answers to your burning questions. Subjects covered include business and finance, science and technology, film and TV, food and drink, travel, sports, history and so on. If you feel you are an expert on something and that you have something to say, then you too could join the team of Suite101 writers. Simply contact them and tell them about your field of expertise, writing prowess, publishing history and what you feel you have to offer verbally. Successful applicants will be given a contract and you will get paid for your articles and posts! Start writing – but visit <http://www.suite101.com/> first.

Mapping again

In the past I have covered a few sites having something to do with maps. The topic simply will not go away and so here are three more sites for you to peruse. OpenStreetMap (<http://www.openstreetmap.com>) is a collaborative project aimed at creating and providing

free geographic data such as street maps to anyone who wants them. The project was started because many maps you might think of as being free actually have legal or technical restrictions on their use, thus holding back people from using them in creative, productive or unexpected ways. On completion, OpenStreetMap will be an editable map of the whole world, which is being built largely from scratch using GPS traces, and released with an open content license. The [OpenStreetMap License](#) allows free (or almost free) access to map images and underlying map data to promote new and interesting uses of this data. Although the world map is not finished yet, there is complete coverage of some [places](#) (where people like you are most active) and individuals and commercial companies have already begun putting this data to good use.

Is your PC infected? This question seems to haunt people despite all the various protection programs available. However, there are still a goodly number of PCs that are infected and now you can see where the main trouble spots are on a world map. The infection map is based on PCs that were scanned by NanoScan and TotalScan over the last 24 hours. It only shows those countries in which sufficient PCs have been scanned in the last 24 hours to make a representative sample. The statistics are updated every fifteen minutes. Taiwan seems to be one of the worst areas affected with nearly 21% of PCs being infected. France, Mexico and Russia are also pretty bad. Sweden and the Netherlands seem to be among the best with just over 6%. Southern Africa does not seem to have enough PCs yet to show up on the map. See who is infected where at <http://www.infectedornot.com/>.

And here is a good map of the (night) sky. Want to know what is overhead now? Want to see where Mars is at the moment or what constellation that is? Then take a look at <http://sky-map.org/>. This site provides a detailed online sky map that is generated automatically using a database with the positions and basic characteristics of space objects. You can overlay constellations, search for objects and see real photographs of planets, nebulae and the like. Clicking on the Sloan Digital Sky Survey (SDSS) button generates a really high-resolution sky survey image of the area that you have been browsing. (SDSS is the most ambitious astronomical survey ever undertaken and, when completed, it will provide detailed optical images covering more than a quarter of the sky, and a 3-dimensional map of about a million galaxies and quasars. As the survey progresses, the data are released to the scientific community and the general public in annual increments. You can also download the SkyMap as a gadget for your Windows Vista sidebar.

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