

Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

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Like it or not the Holiday season is fast approaching. As computer users you have the option to shop online. Is it safe to shop online? Absolutely, if you follow a few guidelines. Know who you're dealing with. Look for a physical address and phone number. Shop at web sites such as those for brick-and-mortar businesses, sites that your friends or relatives have used, or sites that are recommended by major publications. If you go to a site that you're not sure of, take note of the web pages and the overall design of the site. If it looks like it was designed on someone's home computer, use caution, you might be dealing with an amateur working out of their spare bedroom. You might want to check with the Better Business Bureau or see if the company is listed in the Internet yellow pages. You could also check for a customer satisfaction rating at bizrate.com or resellerratings.com. If you type in a web address and the site doesn't load almost immediately, move on. When you get ready to check out, make sure you're on a secure page. Provide only the information necessary to complete the purchase. If they ask for your social security number, go somewhere else. Don't give them your real email address; use a Yahoo, Hotmail, or Gmail email address. Use a credit card to pay for your purchase. You might consider obtaining a credit card from one of the local banks and use it only for online purchases. Don't let the web site remember your password or credit card number. Print and save a record of your purchase, especially the page that shows the order number, description of the merchandise, and the total cost to include handling and shipping.

Here are a few web sites recommended by *Smart Computing* in their December 2008 issue.

My Create-A-Book Publishing

www.mycreateabook.com

If you have a child on your holiday gift list, you're no doubt wondering which gift will bring a smile to his face. Why not give a book that's all about him? On this site, you can have a book custom-made for your child, with his or her name right in the story. To place an order, browse the books and choose which story you'd like your child to be a part of. Next, provide a few details about your child, such as his name, age, and gender, and then click Order Book. Books are \$12.97 and can be gift-wrapped for an additional \$3.

The Cheesecake Factory

www.thecheesecakefactory.com

The holidays are a time for sweet treats. This year, give someone you love a unique treat from The Cheesecake Factory. Choose from several cheesecake flavors such as Key Lime, Oreo, Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough, Tiramisu, and Snickers. You can have your gift sent directly to your special someone, or, if they live near a Cheesecake Factory restaurant, you can send them a gift card in denominations of \$10, \$25, \$50, or any amount up to \$500.

Shopping.com

www.shopping.com

Lighten the blow of holiday bills by shopping around for the best prices. But instead of driving from store to store or visiting countless Web sites to find the best deals, point your browser to this site. When you search for a product, Shopping.com will create a list of places your product is available and compare prices. You can search by entering the name of a product or type of product into the Search field or by selecting from categories such as Home, Computers, Electronics, or Shoes.

Buzzillions.com

www.buzzillions.com

Your son and daughter-in-law would love a new digital camera for the holidays, and you'd love to give it to them so they can keep you up-to-date with all the pictures they'll take of your grandkids. But which camera should you choose? This site gives you valuable buying advice in the form of reviews that are written by people just like you. Buzzillions.com rates the product on a scale of one to five stars based on its reviews and helps you make confident, well-informed purchases. Buzzillions.com also recommends places to buy products and lists the varying prices at each location.

PersonalizationMall.com

www.personalizationmall.com

It's always a struggle to find the perfect gift. For something unique, visit this site, where you can personalize almost anything. Put your best friend's name on a T-shirt, jewelry, or a blanket or your pet's picture on a mouse pad or coffee mug. You can search for gifts by occasion, recipient, or price. Choose a gift and fill in the personalized message to create a one-of-a-kind gift that your special someone won't soon forget.

Bytes 'n Grins

www.bytesngrins.com

If you're looking for a gift for the geek, teacher, or school bus driver in your life, take some time to browse this site. You'll find dozens of gifts made just for teachers and electronics enthusiasts. You can search categories such as Stocking Stuffers or Cubicle Companions by clicking the Products link on the main page and then selecting a product category from the menu on the left. Or, use the site's Fast Search feature. Simply type a keyword in the Search field, press ENTER, and browse the list of results in the Bytes 'n Grins Yahoo! store. Products include T-shirts, jewelry, treats, Christmas ornaments, and gifts for babies and pets. ■

Compiled by Kris Glaser

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Just a reminder, there will be a meeting in December (December 8th). The presentation will be on using your digital photos to make a slide show with music. You will also see some interesting power point presentations.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor. There has been a significant increase in the number of people taking advantage of this service. If everyone arrives during the first hour there will probable be a wait.