

# Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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Don Hood, President

## Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruele Center

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No long articles or how-tos this month. *PC Magazine* has just released a list of what they consider to be the top 100 web sites of 2009. When you go to the *PCMag* web site (<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2350553,00.asp>) you can view a slideshow of all 100 picks. Here is a short list of sites you might find interesting or useful.

[docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)

Google's online office suite includes a presentation maker, spreadsheets, and, of course, a word processor. Use it to create and collaborate with anyone that has a Google account, and keep all the documents online where you can always get to them. It even helps you create Web forms for easily collecting info online.

[www.picnik.com](http://www.picnik.com)

An online Photoshop? Maybe it's not quite that powerful, but Picnik is amazingly robust for a Web-based image editor. That it has tight integration with lots of great photo sharing sites like Flickr, MySpace, and Facebook is a bonus.

[www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)

Does the site that's synonymous with micro-blogging need an introduction? Here's one anyway: Think of Twitter as a place where you can constantly keep people up to date on your life status, and where you and friends can publicly make with the witty banter all day (and night) long.

[www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Facebook is great for sharing your camera phone pics with friends, but more serious photographers will want a more serious photo-sharing platform. Flickr makes the chore of uploading and tagging photos as simple as possible, and offers plenty of great features for photo enthusiasts, pros, and people who just like to look at pretty pictures.

[www.mlb.com](http://www.mlb.com)

America's favorite pastime has the site it deserves in MLB.com, which has a ton of cutting-edge features and is adding more all the time. The site excels at what every sports site should be working toward: Making it easy to keep track of games and scores from your desk at work.

[www.pandora.com](http://www.pandora.com)

Bored with shuffling through your iTunes music? Pandora throws a bit of the unknown and unexplored into the mix. Enter a song or artist, and Pandora creates an Internet radio station with similar songs. Try putting in Weird Al's "Fat." It'll be fun—trust us!

[www.rottentomatoes.com](http://www.rottentomatoes.com)

Why rely solely on Roger Ebert's opinion when you could be drawing from the aggregate knowledge of the teeming masses? Rotten Tomatoes collects movie reviews from credible publications and draws a percentage from those scores, ranking them as either "Fresh" or "Rotten."

[www.someecards.com](http://www.someecards.com)

Someecards has a wry e-card for every occasion, from birthday wishes ("Happy birthday to someone I feel incredible close to when I'm intoxicated") to cries for help ("I can't handle the pressure of making my own salad.") You can even create your own cards, if you think you're clever enough.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

YouTube is synonymous with online video at this point. The site is expanding its offerings beyond homemade videos of people doing Beyonce's "Single Ladies" dance, however; now you can watch full-length TV shows and movies, like American Gladiators and She Gods of Shark Reef.

[maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com)

Google's mapping service keeps getting better and better, adding new features all the time. It's almost good enough to forgive them for the time the Street View camera took a picture of us coming out of a gentlemen's club in the middle of the day.

[www.kayak.com](http://www.kayak.com)

Traveling would be a lot more fun were it not for all of the, you know, traveling. But just because every other part of the process is a nightmare doesn't mean booking your trip has to be. Kayak crawls hundreds of travel sites and tracks current promotions to help you get the best fare for your flight.

[www.mint.com](http://www.mint.com)

It's a scary time to be thinking about money, so you may as well get a little bit of help from our Editors' Choice for online financial services. Mint can track your income and spending, and help you build a budget you'll be able to stick to.

[www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com)

Snopes is the go-to source for debunking urban legends. Please consult it before forwarding that chain e-mail, especially if it has anything to do with Barack Obama, Walt Disney, or a dying child who can only afford treatment if you forward the e-mail.

[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

Before you go checking this site, let us assure you that you don't have the bubonic plague. Heck, it's probably just a simple case of the Swine Flu.

[www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

College professors and newspaper publishers hate this online encyclopedia. The rest of you have probably already spent half your day going further down the Wikipedia rabbit hole.

[bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk)

For the news of the world—in 32 languages, no less—the British Broadcasting Company is second to none. It doesn't hurt to read it in an English accent either, for extra gravitas.

[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

Some think the Old Grey Lady ain't what she used to be—and well, if you're thinking about that 17-pound mass of paper delivered on Sundays, maybe that's true. The Times Web site, however, is where the real breaking news of the day is found, along with all the great extras you'd expect in Arts, Style, Travel, and other sections.

[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

The online shopping behemoth just keeps getting bigger. From dead-tree books, CDs, and DVDs to their digital equivalents (e-books, MP3s, and movie streaming), Amazon has it all.

[www.consumerist.com](http://www.consumerist.com)

Stand up for your consumer rights, and if those dastardly companies don't heed your complaint, take it to The Consumerist. The consumer-rights blog, recently bought from Gawker by Consumer Reports, offers catharsis by taking big companies to task for all kinds of shady behavior.

[www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)

This Craig fellow sure is swell! His list lets you hunt for a new house or apartment, buy and sell used stuff, and even [find your long-lost love!](#)

[www.arstechnica.com](http://www.arstechnica.com)

The standard practice for news sites these days is to be a mile wide and an inch deep—write as many short posts as possible. Ars has always gone in the opposite direction, with refreshingly insightful reporting and commentary on the tech industry.

[www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com)

CNET's recent acquisition by CBS hasn't dampened its moxie. It still has great tech news and reviews, and this gargantuan technology network is also breaking new ground in Web video, live broadcasting, and audience interaction.

[www.pcmag.com](http://www.pcmag.com)

We have to pat ourselves on the back here—our expert tests and reviews of tech hardware and software are still the best in the business. And stay tuned for some big changes to the site in the coming months.

[www.phonescoop.com](http://www.phonescoop.com)

I don't know of another site that covers developments in the mobile/wireless world with as much depth as Phone Scoop. And if you're in the market for a new handset, check out the site's cool Phone Finder.

[www.sourceforge.net](http://www.sourceforge.net)

Looking for that one free PC utility that will save your life? Building a utility that will save others' lives? Whether you're a giver or a taker, SourceForge has you covered by offering a huge library of free, open-source software, and the opportunity to upload your own projects.

[www.aviary.com](http://www.aviary.com)

This site is giving Picnik a run for its money, offering online, Flash-based image editing, color editing, vector editing, image hosting, and even image capture of Web sites (using a Firefox add-on) which you can instantly open in the image editor.

WordPress blog.

[www.1000awesomethings.com](http://www.1000awesomethings.com)

You know what's awesome? Thinking it's Thursday when it's really Friday. Or the light turning green just as you get to the intersection. Or placing the last piece of the puzzle. This happy blog doesn't have 997 more awesome things just yet, but it counts down another bite of awesomeness every weekday. And that's awesome!

[www.bookarmy.com](http://www.bookarmy.com)

This social network site for readers features a recommendation engine and user reviews geared toward finding you a good book to read next.

[www.grooveshark.com](http://www.grooveshark.com)

There are a lot of sites, like Songza and Skreemr, that let you stream whatever song you want; Grooveshark is probably the best, though. It's got a slick UI, has a multi-faceted search function, and lets you make playlists of just about any song you can think of.

[www.interfacelift.com](http://www.interfacelift.com)

It might seem like a throwback, but we still love browsing through sites of beautiful, free desktop wallpaper art. And InterfaceLIFT is one of our faves. Pick your wallpaper for any screen size, including mobile devices and dual- or triple-monitor setups.

[www.shorpy.com](http://www.shorpy.com)

Shorpy is not a photo site for the LOLcats crowd. This blog features retro photographs taken between 1850 and 1950. Get a glimpse of what the world was like before camera phones—or any phones!

[www.worldwidetelescope.com/webclient](http://www.worldwidetelescope.com/webclient)

The Web client version of the WorldWide Telescope project puts the entire known universe right into your browser window. The site lets you travel around Earth, space, and other planets, sight-seeing via photos from ground- and space-based telescopes.

[www.youshouldhaveseenthis.com](http://www.youshouldhaveseenthis.com)

Don't take this site too seriously, though it could be quite useful. Youshouldhaveseenthis.com is a primer of the 100 Web memes you should definitely, absolutely have already seen by now. E-mail the URL to your parents, or to that one guy in the office who always forwards two-year-old links.

[www.academicearth.org](http://www.academicearth.org)

Scholars and professors from top U.S. universities such as Harvard, Stanford, Yale, and more offer up free video lectures on a large spectrum of subjects on Academic Earth.

[www.destinationrx.com](http://www.destinationrx.com)

DestinationRX aims to simplify the world of health insurance and prescription drugs with a number of handy online tools, like a pricing calculator for figuring out what your medications should cost.

[www.legistalker.com](http://www.legistalker.com)

Track your government representatives the way you track your favorite celebrities (it's probably more important). Legistalker provides a way to keep tabs on politicians in the media and on YouTube and Twitter.

[www.meehive.com](http://www.meehive.com)

Let's face it, *The New York Times* just doesn't get you, does it? MeeHive lets users build customized online newspapers based on their personal interests.

[www.smarthistory.org](http://www.smarthistory.org)

Smart History is like an interactive, multi-media art history book, covering artistic movements from ancient cultures through today.

[www.wdl.org](http://www.wdl.org)

Check out a treasure trove of some of the world's most important artifacts from 8,000 B.C. to 2009 A.D. World Digital Library features high-res images and a plethora of information on a number of priceless treasures, maps, and documents.

[www.carcomplaints.com](http://www.carcomplaints.com)

If your 1979 Pontiac Trans Am is making strange noises like it's haunted by angry ghosts, you could take it to a mechanic, or you could go to CarComplaints.com to see if it's a common ailment and how much it might cost to fix. The site has a database of complaints searchable by make, model, and year, and even has special sections for the worst and most amusing complaints.

[www.giveawayoftheday.com](http://www.giveawayoftheday.com)

Everything is better if you get it for free. Giveaway of the Day is a site that—surprise, surprise!—gives away free licensed software every day. Not a trial version or a limited release, just full versions of software, free, every day. And if you're a gamer, you can check out [Game Giveaway of the Day](#) for the same deal—but with games!

[www.goodguide.com](http://www.goodguide.com)

If you're looking for a site to help you buy disposable Styrofoam beer cozies and as many products containing high-fructose corn syrup as possible, GoodGuide is not what you're looking for. What it is good for, though, is finding ratings and deals on a variety of safe, healthy, and green products.

[HotPads.com](http://HotPads.com)

Despite its name, HotPads.com is not your resource for natural relief of back pain, it's a real-estate resource! Just enter in your ZIP code and you'll find a handy map full of listings for rentals, sales, foreclosures, and even vacation rentals and hotels.

[www.voyij.com](http://www.voyij.com)

Sometimes the price of a getaway is more important than the destination. Just tell Voyij what airport you want to leave from and it'll provide you with a list of the cheapest flights going anywhere. For the absolute best deals, leave your travel dates flexible, too.

[www.alternativeto.net](http://www.alternativeto.net)

Who has money to spend on software nowadays? Skip the pricey software packages with AlternativeTo, which lets you search for free software alternatives. The site makes it easy to find free replacements for Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Nero, Microsoft Office, and just about any other Windows, Mac, Linux, or online application.

[it.usaspending.gov](http://it.usaspending.gov)

The new Federal IT Dashboard tracks how federal money is being spent on U.S. infrastructure updates and government IT projects. You can track spending by department (Health and Human Services, for instance, or Department of Defense) and see how good each department is at staying within project deadlines and budgets.

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We have an election coming up in August. If you're interested in becoming personally involved in your club by running for President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, or a two year Board position, call Don Schatz at 855-0710.

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 probably be a wait. We now have three stations for members and one for nonmembers.