



Instant Access

For a long time now, websites like iTunes and Rhapsody have offered instant access to music. So, when that familiar song starts floating through your head, you can get it at that moment from almost anywhere you are via computers, phones, and pocket pcs.

Videos are also available from anywhere, at anytime, both amateur YouTube productions as well as Hollywood feature films. Don't want to wait for your Netflix CD to arrive in the mail? Watch the video online or buy it and download it to your computer.

Books, however, were sort of the last frontier in terms of instant access. Certainly, Project Gutenberg (http://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Main_Page) has done a stellar job digitizing public domain books. If you haven't browsed its database recently, I would suggest a visit. The site now offers many audio books in addition to the print version. But, for those of us raised with books--you know, those things with covers and spines and pages and indexes--it was tough to get used to reading on a computer screen. So, books had to be ordered; granted, Amazon made ordering as easy as possible, but there was still a delay.

Enter the Kindle. Amazon's new ereader makes instant access to books (and magazines and newspapers) possible. Because it uses cell phone technology (Amazon calls it Whisprnet) to connect to the network, users can access the Kindle store from anywhere they can make a phone call. And, because the Kindle resembles a traditional book more than it resembles a computer, book readers like me can settle in comfortably, finding it easy to use the next and previous page buttons to navigate through the pages and set virtual bookmarks. It saves space, if nothing else. My bookshelves are bulging and sometimes I carry two or three books and a magazine or two with me on a trip. Now, all those things, including multiple issues of magazines and newspapers are available on something the size of a paperback book. And to top it off, the Kindle also includes a headphone jack so you can listen to audio books.

I must admit that I am hooked. I am taking advantage of the 14-day free trials of newspapers and magazines. I'm starting to wonder what the educational applications might be, and I encourage you to think about trying out a Kindle. There are drawbacks: I can't loan the book to others or donate it to the library when I am done. But, for now, I have plenty of other books for which I can do that. The Kindle allows me, along with the public library, to start making decisions about whether or not I need my own printed copy of a book. Visit the store online to learn more: <http://tinyurl.com/yvyjel>.

Conference Calendar

The best place to look for educational technology conferences is at T.H.E. Journal (<http://www.thejournal.com/>). Their searchable calendar is a comprehensive guide to national and international conferences. In this space, we'll be featuring conferences of particular interest to Virginia educators.

National Educational Computing Conference, June 29-July 2, 2008, San Antonio, Texas

This is the biggie! Thousands of people from all over the world, more presentations and events than you can imagine, and technology everywhere. Registration is open and there is a tentative schedule posted at the website. If you're planning on going, now is a good time to make your hotel reservations. Here's the website for more information: <http://center.uoregon.edu/ISTE/NECC2008/>

Free Webinar Series from Don Johnston

Having trouble getting out of the office? Then, attend a conference session online. Don Johnston, the assistive technology experts, offer a series of free monthly webinars. Last year's series has been archived as well. So, take a professional development break from whatever fires are smoldering and learn something new. Here's the site: http://www.donjohnston.com/prof_services/VIP.html. The topic for March is Finding the Technology that Supports Reading, Math and Writing Instruction, and it will be offered March 18th at 11:00 am ET & March 24th 3:00 pm ET.

K-12 Online 2007, October 22-26, 2007. Online

The second annual conference is over. But, I'm leaving this one up because you can still attend! And, you can attend last year's conference, too. It's archived at William and Mary. Go on, check it out. You can attend a conference that is over from your own desk. Don't you just love the web? Learn more at <http://k12onlineconference.org>.

Virginia Society for Technology in Education, February 22-24, 2008, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

The conference is over, and it was the best one ever! Plan ahead for next year in Virginia Beach now. Meanwhile, visit the VSTE Ning Site to read blog entries and listen to podcasts about the conference: <http://vsteonline.ning.com>



Good Reads



We can't be good technology ambassadors if we aren't well-informed. Each month, I'll be highlighting interesting, relevant sources from research projects to government reports and ezines to bloggers.

Tim Magner's Reading List

Tim Magner is the Director of the Office of Educational Technology at the United States Department of Education. In the October 22, 2007, Wall Street Journal online, Magner shared his reading list. It included *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*, by Will Richardson; *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, by Ken Robinson; *Beyond the Bake*

Sale: The Essential Guide to Family/School Partnerships, by Anne T. Henderson, Vivian Johnson, Karen L. Mapp and Don Davies; *Don't Bother Me Mom — I'm Learning!* by Marc Prensky; *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, by James Paul Gee; *The Flickering Mind, Saving Education from the False Promise of Technology*, by Todd Oppenheimer; *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, by Don Tapscott; and *Redefining Literacy for the 21st Century*, by David Warlick. You can read the whole article here: <http://tinyurl.com/2hos6a>

Just for Fun (and maybe some learning, too!)

Prongo

It is in games that many men discover their paradise.

~Robert Lynd (Irish journalist)

This website offers access to a variety of educational games for ages 3-12. I started with Fish World, where users can create their own fish tank. It was billed as a game to help students learn to use a mouse, and I was reminded of the mouse tutorial on the original Macintosh computer. One of the things you did was drag a fish bowl along a table top. The other games range from online versions of paper/pencil games such as word finds to interactive math games such as mathematics baseball. They are mostly drill and practice but could be a fun way to practice necessary skills. And, sometimes, it's OK just to have fun while you learn, right? Here's the link: <http://www.prongo.com/>

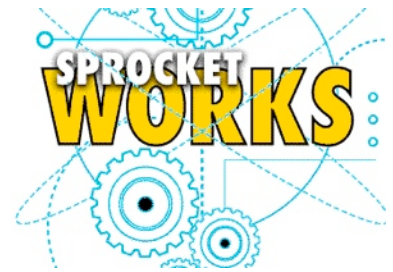


Just Great Science Websites

As I was looking for games, I stumbled upon several great science websites so decided to make that the topic for this month. I don't mean to sound too old, but when I think back to what the web looked like just 10 years ago, the progress has been amazing. Bandwidth has a lot to do with it, but also clever designers harnessing the power of the web.

SprocketWorks

This site is a great example of what can happen when professional animators put their efforts into education. SprocketWorks is the product of Animatrix, a company that creates interactive projects for businesses like Kodak, Microsoft and Disney. Their modules cover a variety of science topics including oceanography, chemistry and flight. The space module was particularly well developed and included a nice night sky simulation that pointed out constellations. There are several non-science modules, including one devoted to music. The history of music is presented as an interactive timeline; when users roll over musician's names, they hear a snippet of music. Start here and have fun: <http://www.sprocketworks.com/>



Bitesize Revisions

From the BBC, a test review website. There are review areas in English, Maths (remember, it's British), and Science. The science review include living things, materials, and physical processes. These general areas are divided into different topics and each topic is addressed through an interactive activity, a "revision" or content review and a quiz. The activities are engaging, often simulating science experiments. The modules include lesson plans for the teacher. In addition, if a teacher has her own website, the code is provided so she can embed activities in that webpage. Start here:



<http://tinyurl.com/3ysc8e>

Science Friday

If you're a public radio listener, you've probably heard Science Friday. For two hours each Friday afternoon, science buff and journalists Ira Flatow reviews the world of science in all its magic and mystery. One recent programs focused on the global seed vault near Longyearbyen, Svalbard, in the Arctic Ocean. (Go ahead...type it into Google Earth.) It's a part of Norway even though it is some 600 miles north of the Norwegian mainland. Podcasts of the program are available for listening any time. There are also a variety of videos. For teachers, there are materials related to each program that are aligned to state standards. The tagline for the program is "Making Science User Friendly" and that is certainly the case. Have fun: <http://www.sciencefriday.com/>

