

What the Tech?!: Smart Sites by Joe McCormick

Let's face it, the Internet is an amazing informational resource. Some of us may have come to know it as a place to network with others, be entertained, or waste time - myself included - but outside of that the Internet has some really great websites to visit. If you're doing research or just want to learn something new, remember that Wikipedia is only the most popular source, not the best.

Just a few of many, I'm going to talk about three websites I think are not given enough attention: TED, Fora, and Academic Earth. Each of these sites is what I would consider an excellent spot to enhance your knowledge. Not to mention, if you are in a specific field looking for unique perspective or a source to cite in your paper, these websites can be invaluable.

TED can be found at www.ted.com and is filled with an eclectic collection of presentations on video. The name stands for Technology, Entertainment, and Design. TED conferences are held once a year and feature great new thinkers in all fields of work. The speakers generally give a PowerPoint presentation or speech that ranges anywhere from five to thirty minutes. I've watched TED videos for more than a year and can't say I've been disappointed with one.

Fora can be found at www.fora.tv and is filled with many interesting interviews. Most of their videos are categorized by economy, environment, politics, science, technology, and culture. The site features free videos and, for an extra fee, you can view entire interviews using their premium service. Instead of just one annual conference like TED, Fora collects its videos from literally hundreds of partners. Also, the interviews tend to be around an hour long on average, and are divided into named clips so you can watch it all or just specific parts.

My experience has been that the videos on Fora have more of an academic tone to them, but the content is always interesting. The speakers tend to be more well-known in their fields; Noam Chomsky, Rick Steves, and MythBusters host Adam Savage all have videos on the site. I really like Fora because it tends to be up-to-date on current events; if something major happens that you're interested in, you can probably find an interview related to it on Fora.

Finally, there's Academic Earth which can be found at www.academicearth.org and offers a wholly different experience for the student. Instead of simple conversations and one-time presentations, Academic Earth offers alternative education opportunities. On this site you will find a vast collection of university-level classes on practically any major field of education, aside from language classes. One thing that piqued my interest was that you can take classes for credit through the site, with a fee of course. In fact, some schools, like Gonzaga, Notre Dame, and Maryland, offer Bachelors and Masters degrees, as well as select certifications. While it is sometimes difficult to find the time for extra-curricular curriculum, Academic Earth is always a great place to waste an hour or two listening to a lecture on your favorite subject.