

## The Accuracy of On-Line Information

In 2002 the amount of information stored on computers became larger than the amount of information stored in books. By May 2011 it was estimated that 38,000,000,000 (38 billion) web pages were on the world wide web.

With this volume of information it is unlikely that everything you read on the Internet will be true or accurate.

Some examples of false information are shown below.

### Urban Legends and Myths

Urban legends are popular stories that are made out to be true and passed from person to person by word of mouth or written (e.g. forwarded email) communication.

The story below is a classic example of an Urban Legend. The picture was created quite cleverly using computer software (Photoshop). In actual fact the dog is only half that size.

Hercules: The World's Biggest Dog Ever According to Guinness World Records

Hercules was recently awarded the honorable distinction of Worlds Biggest Dog by Guinness World Records. Hercules is an English Mastiff and has a 38 inch neck and weighs 282 pounds.

With "paws the size of softballs" (reports the Boston Herald), the three-year-old monster is far larger and heavier than his breed's standard 200lb. limit. Hercules owner Mr. Flynn says that Hercules weight is natural and not induced by a bizarre diet: "I fed him normal food and he just grew".... and grew. and grew.



Urban legends always seem to involve stories that happened to someone other than the story teller.

Below is an example of a popular Myth about computer systems.



Some people leave their computers on as long as possible. The belief is that, as your computer powers up, things get hotter and expand slightly (called "differential expansion"). This causes stress to the components inside the system and breaks them. This is very rare and in fact most failures inside a PC are due to overheating caused by poor ventilation. Hot components, like hard drives, can barbecue themselves into an early grave if not kept cool.

Current "green" PCs with power management features let you put your monitor, your hard drives, your processor and even the whole computer to sleep, and wake everything back up in a few seconds. From a differential expansion standpoint, this is the same as switching the computer off and on. But since differential expansion is unlikely to ever do anything bad to your PC, who cares?

## Hoaxes

A hoax is "an act intended to deceive or trick". The example below shows a website that published the death of a famous movie star.



A hoax web page announcing the death of action movie star Jackie Chan prompted a flurry of "Jackie Chan RIP" notices on Twitter this morning, which in turn prompted the following statement on Chan's Facebook page:

"Jackie is alive and well. He did not suffer a heart attack and die, as was reported on many social networking sites and in online news reports. Jackie is fine and is busy preparing for the filming of his next movie."

The hoax page, which convincingly mimicked the appearance of an actual TV news website but fell down somewhat in the English grammar department, even boasted a tribute from President Barack Obama.

## Opinion vs Fact

### Reviews

Many websites will ask their users to write reviews on something they have used, seen or experienced. When reading reviews you must always remember that a review is someone's opinion. Opinions are not facts! There is nothing wrong with your opinion being different.

Look at the two reviews below for the same film (Pirates of the Caribbean 4).

I had high hopes for this film as I loved the other 3 but was very disappointed. The film was way too long and drawn out and the humour from the others was sadly lacking. I wouldn't say avoid it completely but wait for it to hit DVD and its definitely not worth seeing in 3D. ★★☆☆☆☆



These films are so well made, with attention to detail being flawless. This latest film was no exception. I felt like I had just walked in when in reality I had been sat there 136 minutes. Every minute packed with adventure. Capt Jack .. perfection. Blackbeard .. just brilliant and the charismatic Barbaso is very amusing. Fans you will not be disappointed, in my opinion better than the third film. All the films follow a similar pattern and you will recognise this here, love rat story, elaborate sword fight, even more elaborate chase/fight seen with the additional holy grail type search ensuing. This is not a negative comment as all of this film is unique. You do not need to see the other films either to follow this, as it is a brand new story.

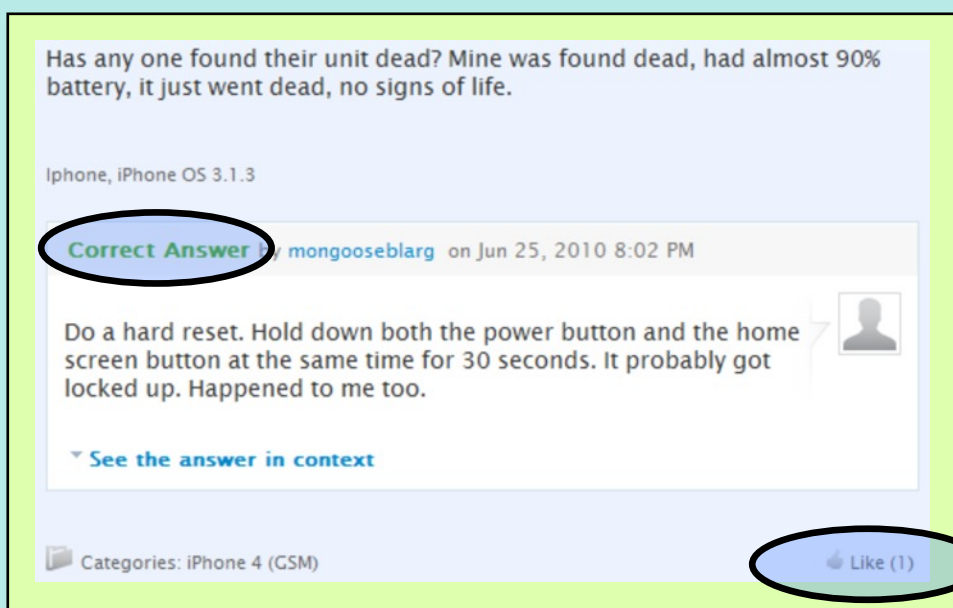
I cannot recommend this film enough. Love it, love it, love it! More please. ★★★★★

## Forums

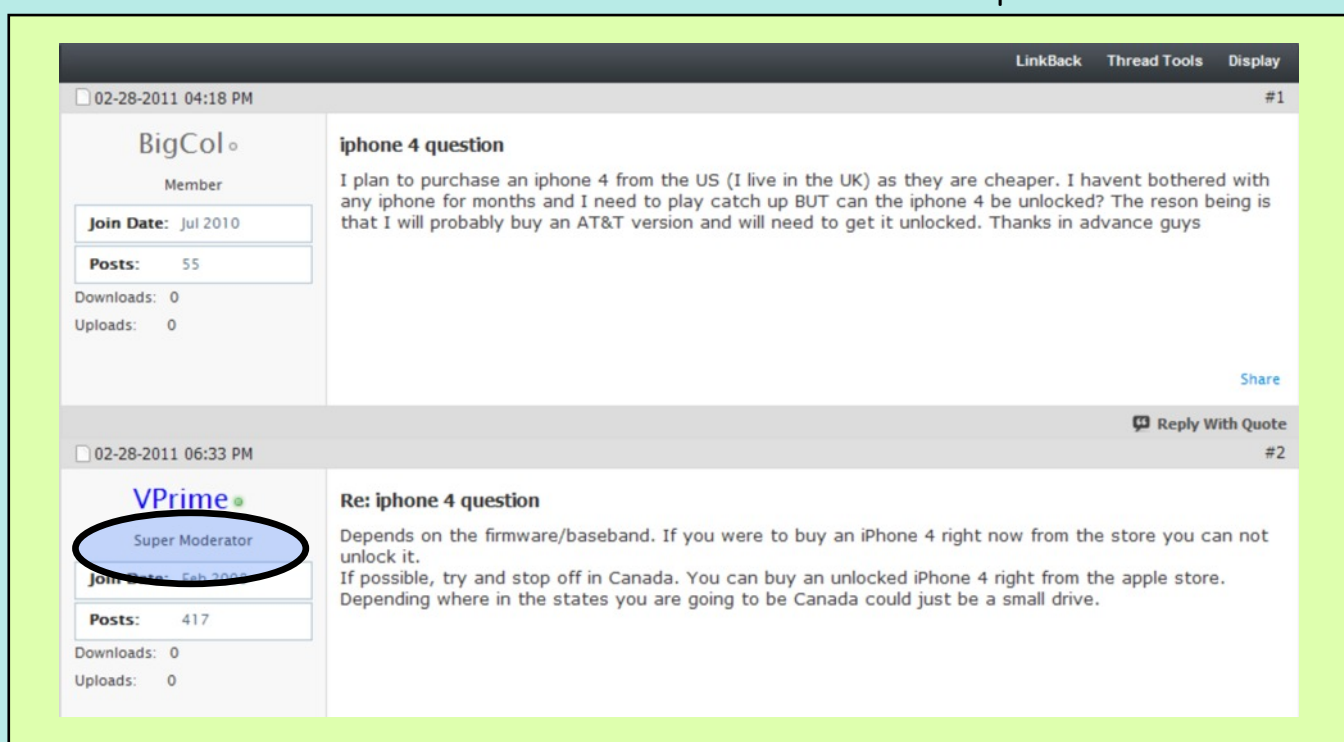
Millions of forums exist on the Internet where anyone can voice their own opinion on particular subjects. Forums are used by people to discuss interests or ask for advice, "what's the best game's console to buy for an 8 year old boy?", "what's the best way to grow tomatoes?" etc.

There are a couple of ways to tell if a forum post is likely to be accurate or not.

1. Some forums allow other users to rate the quality of each answer. These forums often show an agreed "correct answer" or the rating for each reply will be shown.



2. You can also look at who is doing the posting. Many sites will have icons or text to show if someone is a website administrator/moderator or a known expert.



## How old is it?

Another factor to consider when using the Internet is the age of the website you are looking at. The vast majority of websites are not regularly updated or contain old information.

Why is this?

People often create websites as a short term hobby or project. Many of these websites are forgotten about after they are created and not kept up-to-date.

This is a very nice looking website created by a group called friends of Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline.

A closer look however reveals that the website news was already a year out of date when this image was captured and put in this worksheet.

You may not want to turn up for the plant sales in October!

Companies (especially newspapers etc) will often archive old web pages. This means that there will not be a current link to them on their website but you would be able to search for the pages.

A quick search on the BBC website for "PS3 launch" comes up with around 20 articles going back to 20th Feb 2006.

Make sure that when you read these articles you remember when they were written.

14 Mar 2006

### Speculation mounts over PS3 event



Technology / 14 Mar 2006

... year, and Nintendo's Revolution, which is due later this year. The date of the PS3's launch has been the subject of heavy speculation, with doubts...

20 Feb 2006

### Sony fears on PlayStation launch



Business / 20 Feb 2006

PS3 were not decided soon "the launch could be pushed back". Sony's PlayStation 3 console may miss its spring launch if industry specifications...

## Some Tips to Remember

If you want to ensure that you find accurate, up-to-date information, try to remember the following basic rules:

### 1. Find a date

If you can find when the information was put on the Internet you will have a better idea of whether or not it is up-to-date.

Site last updated. »»»-Sun 29th May 2011

### 2. Opinion or fact

Examine the type of information and decide if this is someone's opinion or whether it's a fact that is definitely true.



### 3. Large or Small

Website created by large companies are more likely to be accurate as their content will be discussed and researched by a team of web designers and editors.

Small personal websites may well be very accurate but it depends on the knowledge of the single person who created them.



### 4. Look at the web address

Some web address suffixes will give you an idea of the source of the information.

.gov = a government website

.edu = a educational site

(Universities, Colleges etc)

Scottish Government. devolved Government  
Scottish government news and information covering g  
consultations from the Scottish Government (Scottish  
www.scotland.gov.uk/ - Cached - Similar