

NORTH POLE BOUND



Website invites kids and parents to pay a visit to Santa's secret village

Now that December is here I feel like I can finally start getting into the Christmas spirit. While the retail world constantly pushes to start the holiday season earlier every year — I saw some Christmas decorations going up in a store before Halloween this year — I refuse to think about Christmas until after Thanksgiving has been given its rightful due.

Of course, the holiday shopping season is of vital importance to the bottom line for many companies and their employees, but let's not lose sight of the fact that it's also a magical time for young children.



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InSites

For many kids, that Christmas magic is embodied in that philanthropic, late-night intruder known as Santa Claus. **NorthPole.com** provides kids with a digital connection directly to the jolly old elf's headquarters.

Visit Santa's workshop

The website is geared toward children who believe, and the parents and teachers who are looking for activities to enhance the kids' enchantment with all things related to Kris Kringle.

An animated illustration of Santa's secret village at the North Pole is at the top of the home page. Clicking on the buildings will take you to different sections of the site, such as Santa's mailroom, the toy shop, the reindeer barn, Mrs. Claus' kitchen, the weather station and more.

Each section of the village that you visit has a variety of stories and activities in which kids can participate. Kids can choose between reading the stories themselves, or having the stories read to them by the site. The activities include coloring pages, word searches, flash cards, puzzles,

crosswords and more.

There are animated, interactive illustrations at the top of each section. When you move your mouse over the art, certain areas will be highlighted. Clicking on those areas reveals the stories and activities. There also are illustrated lists of the activities below the main art.

In the mailroom, they can write a letter to Santa, which will be answered by the big man himself. There's a link for parents to provide information if they want St. Nick to send a more personalized reply. Kids also can send animated postcards to their friends, and parents can sign up to have Santa send birthday cards to their children. You have to register to use some of the services.

Toys, food, games and more

In addition to a few holiday stories, Mrs. Claus' Kitchen also has a cookbook. The book has a surprisingly wide variety of recipes for main dishes, sides, desserts, soups, appetizers and more. The recipes all have a list of ingredients and instructions, and many have photos of the finished dishes as well.

The Toy Shop section has links to Amazon.com for unique, popular and educational toys to help parents with their shopping. Santa's Den has links to buy holiday music, books and videos. The Elf Blog, which is geared more to adults, has information on games, crafts, gifts and more.

There is room for improvement on NorthPole.com, but it serves its target audience well. While the stories I read on the site weren't especially inspiring or original, young children will probably be entertained by some of them. And they will certainly enjoy many of the activities. The illustrations on the site are well done, and the design, while somewhat cliché, is organized and functional.

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