



# THIS, THAT AND THE OTHER THING

Mental Floss samples a variety of topics with bite-size chunks

**M**entalfloss.com has been a website for 20 years. That's a long time in internet years. Many players — think AOL, MySpace or Napster — have risen and fallen in the 30 years that the web has been a significant part of our lives. Maintaining a place in the constantly shifting, highly competitive realm of cyberspace for two-thirds of its popular existence is no small feat.

Mental Floss didn't achieve this longevity by being an essential tool for searching the web or communicating with others. It has survived by being

a good place to kill some time. The site features a collection of articles, pictures, videos and podcasts covering a wide range of topics in easily consumable chunks. Not everything on the site will interest you, but there will definitely be some content that does. There really is something for everyone.

The home page is a dizzying array of type, images, videos and ads that is visually overwhelming. As you scroll down the page to get your bearings, the layout constantly changes, and ads intrude into the features. There's an attempt to organize the content with headings, but they lack visual unity and don't stand out very well among all the clutter. As a result, the page looks like a random col-

lection of unrelated items in no particular order.

A much better way to navigate the site is by using the menu located in the upper right of the page. Clicking it calls up a list of topics organized under the broad headings of Sections, Topics and Biographies.

The features under the Sections heading are a little vague, with names like Big Questions, Kennections and Retrobituaries. But they tease you enough to make you click to see what they might reveal.

The Topics heading is more straightforward. Content is organized under clear topics, like Art, History or Science. This section is the most useful if you're looking for features on a specific subject that you are interested in.

The Biographies section is also clearly organized by topics, such as Scientists, Artists or U.S. Presidents. Again, you can search through topics you have an interest in rather than rolling the dice with random subjects.

There is some overlap between the sections. Some articles fall under more than one category, so you may come across the same one under different headings. I also suspect that the website has commercial relationships with different vendors because there are a lot of articles that are basically advertisements for products or services.

There are navigation links across the top of the page that also provide a more structured way to explore the site. The links, Big Questions, Quizzes, Biographies, Lists, Amazing Facts and

Store, offer more guidance than the hodgepodge of features on the home page.

The overall tone of the site is upbeat and light. The features in the various categories run the gamut from silly to interesting to serious. As I explored the different sections there was always a mixture of stories I had no interest in, and a few that caught my eye. Similarly, as I read the ones that interested me, some did not live up to the hype but others were interesting and informative. There's a lot of content on the site, and while all of it won't be your cup of tea, there will be enough that you like to keep you occupied for a while.

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