

Man vs. Bots



They're annoying, persistent and take roughly

10 seconds out of your day. They're a necessary defense in the battle against bots.

CAPTCHAs are those colorful, distorted text images you're required to type when you forget a password, enter a username incorrectly, or fill out a web registration form. In computerese, a CAPTCHA is a program that determines whether its user is human or a 'bot,' an automated program that generates malware or spam.

Spammers trawl the web in search of email addresses they can spam using bots. As a rule, bots can't read captchas and can't navigate sites protected by them. Thus, when you type a captcha, you authenticate yourself as a human and perform a task a computer cannot.

Devised by Luis von Ahn and his colleagues at the Carnegie Mellon University, CAPTCHA stands for **C**ompletely **A**utomated **T**uring **T**est to tell **C**omputers and **H**umans **A**part. The Turing test was created by Alan Turing to test a machine's capacity for intelligent behavior. On the other hand, a CAPTCHA uses a reverse Turing test because a machine administers it to a human. Man's irrepressible sense of humor has transformed an otherwise bothersome activity into chuckle-inducing CAPTCHAart, like the images shown above and on the following pages. [Create your own CAPTCHAart!](#)

IN THIS ISSUE

It radar: [Read it later](#)

ReCAPTCHA

Ask Tony

READ IT LATER ON IT RADAR

So much to read, so little time! Now that you've unwrapped that new Kindle Santa left under the tree, you'll need an app that gives you access to anything on the web without having to rack your brain about where you saved what.

The ultimate bookmark, Read It Later does for web content what Tivo did for TV. It lets you read what you want when you want it. Unlike Tivo which is limited to TV, Read It Later crosses over to your gadget of choice, be it smartphone, tablet or desktop. It can also be used with different media. In fact, one of the most saved web addresses on Read It Later has to be watched rather than read - You Tube.

Check out [Read It Later](#) and save what you want to read or watch on your gadgets, then view it later when you're ready, even without an internet connection.

RECAPTCHA

CAPTCHAs with a mission

If over 200 million people the world over solved these mini-puzzles 10 seconds at a time, Luis von Ahn calculates CAPTCHAs would consume roughly 500,000 hours of a typical workday. How to repurpose captchas and harness all that manpower for the good? Enter ReCAPTCHA, a project conceived by von Ahn and his colleagues enabling mankind to help digitize books.



OCR

Archiving human knowledge to make it accessible on the World Wide Web requires digitizing both new and old information, even prior to the age of computers. A wealth of knowledge resides in old books whose text computers can't completely read. Each book page is scanned and then transformed into text using Optical Character Recognition or OCR (not to be confused with OCD!) The conversion to text is essential because scanned images are difficult to store, almost impossible to search, and costly to download. OCR has particular difficulty reading books where the ink has faded and the pages have yellowed.

Words OCR can't read are randomly sent as a ReCAPTCHA to be deciphered by a user, paired with another word the computer knows. When the user reads both words and types them, the system assumes the answer for the unknown word is correct if the user also types the known word correctly. The system then repeats the process with different users. If the outcome is the same, then the unknown word is positively ID'd. ReCAPTCHA went from being a project to a full-fledged company acquired by Google. Amazon, Twitter, Facebook, Ticketmaster and Google, of course, are a few of the companies who use reCAPTCHA. Take heart then! Whenever you give ten seconds of your time to type a reCAPTCHA, you're actually doing the world a noble service by helping to digitize books.

DeCAPTCHA

Can a CAPTCHA be cracked? Definitely. A team of Stanford University researchers developed a program that can decode CAPTCHAs. Elie Bursztien, Matthieu Martin and John Mitchell created DeCAPTCHA, which defeated captchas on Visa and Wikipedia's sites. It was however, unable to crack recaptchas and any captchas on Google's website. The team, which has no plans to release the software, developed Decaptcha as a tool mainly to improve captchas. In the battle vs. bots, Decaptcha in the wrong hands could turn the tide in favor of the bad guys.





Do not track

There's hope in the legislative horizon in the battle over 'Do not track.' Check out Call the PC Guy's December 2011 newsletter, "[Supercookies.](#)" In February 2011, Senate filed the Do Not Track Me Online Act that would allow internet users to block online advertising networks and social media sites from sharing their personal data with other businesses. The following April, senators introduced a bill that would make it mandatory for all websites to allow users to opt out of sharing personal information, to just say 'NO' to tracking.

| [follow on Twitter](#) | [friend on Facebook](#) |

Call the PC Guy, LLC. 6900 Six Forks Rd., Ste. 106, Raleigh, NC 27615 919.848.3259