

infotech by annette lamb and larry johnson

the virtual teacher-librarian: establishing and maintaining an effective web presence

As a new media specialist, I want to have a positive influence across the curriculum. I feel comfortable with technology and the vast array of Web 2.0 tools, but I'm overwhelmed by all of the options. I want my resources and services to be available 24/7. Where do I start?

After 10 years as a teacher-librarian, I'm ready for a change. I want to energize my program, rethink my use of technology, and really influence teaching and learning in my building. How do I look at my library media program with fresh eyes?

Many of our students want to access library resources and services from home. Our school has begun offering online courses. How can I support these teachers and students? I'd like to form virtual book clubs and encourage parents to read with their children. How do I extend library services beyond the walls of my school?

These teacher-librarians are talking about establishing a "web presence." Much more than a static library web page, a web presence provides an ongoing, virtual connection with students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. As a busy media specialist, you're often pulled in many directions as you try to meet the diverse needs of your patrons. While you can't clone yourself, you can create an online environment providing virtual resources and services that are available even when you're busy with other professional activities. For instance, while you're comparing different versions of Cinderella with 3rd-graders, members of a 5th-grade class might be using a pathfinder on your library web site to investigate alternative forms of energy.

THE VIRTUAL TEACHER-LIBRARIAN

A parent accesses a list of books for emergent readers from your library web site, a local historian uploads photos to your town history wiki, a high school math teacher directs students to your collaboratively created webquest on mathematicians, and a pair of middle school students are contributing a book review to the library blog. While your Second Life avatar answers a question from one of your science teachers, you're supervising a group of students who are using a mixture of books, magazines, and electronic databases to access information for an inquiry exploring social issues.

Although this scenario may seem like a fantasy, the technology tools are available right now. Build your web presence with seven easy steps.

STEP 1: GO VIRTUAL

While some services can be provided by the "virtual you," others are most effective in a face-to-face environment. Create a list of those activities that could be video recorded and shared digitally. For instance, could you turn your "Library Orientation for Freshman English Students" into a required, Web-based minicourse? In other words, rather than spending the first few

weeks of every year introducing the new class to all of the library resources, create a series of short instructional videos along with practical ideas and strategies that can be placed on your web site. Then, design an assessment quiz to determine whether young people are able to demonstrate the required skills. You will still want to provide a short, motivating introduction to the library, but by using Web-based materials you will be encouraging young people to use the virtual resources as well as the physical library materials.

At Underwood Elementary School, students participate in the Mark Twain Award Book Club (<http://uwe.leesummit.k12.mo.us/lmc/awardbooks/marktwain/marktwain.htm>). The materials for this program are online, including forms, audio clips, brochures, activities, and quizzes.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Keep your videos short and to the point. Most digital cameras will record short video clips that can be uploaded directly to your web server without the need for editing software. Also consider other formats. For example, VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com>) is a great tool for creating collaborative projects that include audio, images, text, and comments. Use online tools such as Quia (www.quia.com) for creating quizzes.

STEP 2: PROVIDE ONGOING SERVICES

Whether you work in a large building or not, a fixed class schedule limits access, or security issues limit movement, and so it is often difficult for young people to get to the library. Traditionally, school libraries have only been available during regular school hours for the school year. Beginning readers, at-risk students, and college-bound young adults are just a few of the students who would benefit from access to the school library 24 hours per day, 7 days

per week, 365 days per year. In order to support ongoing reading, free inquiry, and student research, make as many library resources as possible available online. Provide round-the-clock access to online databases and the online catalog (OPAC) of the library collection.

Think about frequently asked questions (FAQs) and common problems faced by students and teachers. If a number of students and/or teachers encounter the same problem, create an online tutorial that takes patrons step by step through the process. Troubleshooting tips, equipment "how-tos," and sample searches are just a few of the possibilities. Whenever you find yourself answering the same question more than a few times, it's time for a "quick reference" sheet to address that issue. Rather than spending your time answering these routine questions, you can focus on developing new resources and materials.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Most documents can be converted to PDF (portable document file) format for easy distribution. You can use Adobe Acrobat to create your files or apply one of the many free online converters. The advantage of the PDF format is that end users do not need specific applications such as Microsoft Word or Publisher to view the files. PDFs are easy to use, accessible, viewable, and printable on any computer platform. Finally, the files look exactly like their original documents, including text, images, and web links, so the end user doesn't need special software or fonts.

STEP 3: SUPPORT DIFFERENTIATION WITH LEARNING SCAFFOLDS

From summer reading lists to instructional guides, young people need scaffolds for learning. In recent years, emphasis has been placed on the importance of meeting the needs of all learners. Your web presence can provide support materials that go beyond traditional curriculum support. For instance elementary school librarians may highlight books, web sites, and other resources to support beginning readers during the summer break. At the high school level, the library web site could provide resources for

English-language learning.

Anticipate needs. Teachers work their way through the same curriculum year after year. Build pathfinders to support common topics. If you know the high school psychology class does a project on mental illness every spring, collaborate with the teacher to identify resources to support student investigations.

Explore the pathfinders at John Newbery Elementary School Library at <http://nb.wsd.wednet.edu/lmc/pathfinders/pathfinder.htm> and Walter Johnson High School Media Center at <http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/wjhs/mediactr/resproj2.htm>.

TECHNOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Media specialists have been posting book lists and web sites for more than a decade. It is important to build in a strategy for enhancing and updating these materials. Rather than long lists of resources, consider providing focused pathfinders to meet very specific needs. For instance, your pathfinder might include background information, search strategies, keywords, project ideas, anticipation guides, and glossaries, along with a variety of resources such as images, audio, and video. If you have limited access to your school's web server, use a free service to host your work such as Google Page Creator (<http://pages.google.com>).

STEP 4: ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION

Classroom teachers are often unaware of the resources and activities of the library program. Use your web presence to communicate events and opportunities to students, educators, and the larger learning community. If you currently circulate a newsletter, save the paper and the printing costs by placing it online. Better yet, get young people involved in providing ongoing communication through a library blog. A web presence insures that information and ideas are accessible to everyone.

Think about how you might use blogs in your library. Explore a couple of examples:

- Huntington High School Library

Media Center (www.hhsmedia.blogspot.com)

- The NMH Library (<http://nmhlibrary.typepad.com>)
- The Unquiet Library (<http://theunquietlibrary.wordpress.com>)

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Blog software is now built into Macintosh web servers. If this isn't available, consider adding software, such as the open source (<http://wordpress.org>) tool. Another option is to use a free service, such as <http://edublogs.org>.

STEP 5: COORDINATE COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

Use your web presence to showcase exemplary student projects and encourage teachers to share their lesson ideas. Integrate a schoolwide information inquiry initiative into your school library web presence.

Whether collaborating with a teacher in your building, coordinating student projects, or connecting with community members, a wiki can serve as a wonderful tool for synthesizing and sharing information online. For instance, the Wordless Works (<http://wordless.wikispaces.com>) wiki is designed for teachers to share their favorite wordless books and activities. The ReadWriteWiki (<http://readwritewiki.wikispaces.com>) wiki focuses on ways to use children's books in the classroom.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers100K) provides free public or protected wikispaces for school projects. If you choose to make your wiki public, be sure to select the notification option so you can track all postings.

STEP 6: MODEL INNOVATION

The easiest way to get teachers excited about technology is through modeling its use. If you want to encourage teachers to use such technology as iMovie or PhotoStory for classroom projects, use it yourself to create booktalks for state-



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WEB SITES <

MONEY: FOR STUDENTS

Change maker.

www.funbrain.com/cashreg. Practice making change using currency from the United States, Australia, Canada, Mexico, or the United Kingdom.

H.I.P. pocket change.

www.usmint.gov/kids. Play games, watch cartoons, and learn the latest news about coins from the U.S. mint. Dress the part, then travel through time to learn about coins from 1667 to today, including why American shillings minted in 1667 were stamped with the year 1652.

Hollywood stock exchange.

www.hsx.com. Instead of investing in Fortune 500 companies, use your \$2 million Hollywood dollars to buy shares of actors and movies. If Will Smith's latest movie tanks, so will your stock portfolio! Site requires registration to play.

Lemonade stand.

www.coolmath-games.com/lemonade. Start with \$20 for ice, lemons, sugar, and cups. Then fine-tune your lemonade recipe, use the weather forecast to set a price, and watch your business grow or fail based on whether you keep your customers happy. Java animation and new twists update this classic game.

Rags to riches game.

www.headbone.com/wtvrags. Your band has just 10 weeks to earn \$5,000! Book tours, write new songs, and decide how much to charge for tickets. Site requires a log in; teachers may create a group login for their classes.

nominated books. Share these booktalks on your web site so teachers can see your work. Then suggest other uses for the technology, such as science safety slide shows, student tall tale retellings, or public service announcements.

A great example of this approach can be found at the Runkle School Library. Their Brookline Book Reviews Podcasts (www.runkle.org/Podcasts) are audio programs created by and for students and teachers. In addition to the podcasts themselves, the librarian provides links to resources about podcasting to encourage teachers and parents to learn more about this technology.

Also, consider model projects using new technology such as social technology and wikis. For instance, the Goofy Global News (<http://ggn.wikispaces.com>) involves collaboration between a media specialist and a language arts teacher. They turned a paper-and-pencil activity into an engaging collaborative project.

Explore school library web sites that are making use of Web 2.0 tools, such as Creekview High School Media Center (<http://webtech.cherokee.k12.ga.us/creekview-hs/mediacenter>).

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As you discover new technologies, give them a try, and share your experiences on your web site. For instance, explore ways you might use Google Earth across the curriculum. Then locate a project to replicate or join such as Google Lit Trips (<http://googlelittrips.org>). Be sure to share your successes and encourage others to join the fun. Suggest other ways that teachers and students might use this resource.

STEP 7: PROMOTE YOUR PHYSICAL LIBRARY

Many young people live on the Internet. Use their interest in online communication as a bridge to your physical library resources and services. Advertise services, post programs, seek volunteers, poll students, and get young people involved with engaging online activities.

How do they connect their physical and virtual resources? As you think about the

possibilities, explore some school library web sites:

- Bessie Chin Library from Redwood High School (<http://rhsweb.org/library>)
- Blue Valley West High School (www.bv229.k12.ks.us/bvw_lmc)
- Chico High School Library (<http://melvil.chicousd.org>)
- Esquimalt High School Virtual Library (<http://esquimalt.sd61.bc.ca/Pages/Library/Library.htm>)
- John Newbery Elementary School Library (http://nb.wsd.wednet.edu/lmc/lmc_index.html)
- Grandview Library Blog (www.grandviewlibrary.org)
- Springfield Township High School (PA) Virtual Library (www.sdst.org/shs/library)
- University Laboratory High School Library (www.uni.uiuc.edu/library)

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Constantly update your web presence. If you don't have skills in web development, involve student or parent volunteers. Consider the following approaches to make it happen:

- Start today. Make your web presence a priority. It's one of the most important ways to promote your program.
- Don't reinvent the wheel. If you find good resources, link to them or get permission to duplicate such resources as booklists, "how-tos," and pathfinders.
- Involve others. Start with an idea, and seek out suggestions from students, teachers, and parents. Students can build content, post to your blog, and draw in readers.
- Be realistic. You can't do everything. Prioritize your projects. Start small and plan for growth.

LEARN MORE

- High Tech Learning, <http://eduscapes.com/hightech>
- Information Architecture for the Web, <http://eduscapes.com/arch>
- A WebQuest About School Library Websites, <http://schoollibrarywebsites.wikispaces.com>

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