Notes on Technologies

Learning Benefits of Podcasting

Podcasts, which can be video, audio, stills and text, give learners the ultimate gift of mobility.

For trainers/teachers, this fast, convenient, and low cost way to extend the use of learning materials beyond the training room has attracted significant interest. From simply recording existing training lectures to developing deeper supplementary course material, instructors and learners can realise many benefits using downloadable content. While podcasting cannot be a complete replacement for face-to-face education, the potential uses of podcasting in traditional and distance education include:

- The ability to listen or view a lecture multiple times any time, anywhere

- Flexibility in learning schedule - no more "missed training"

- Increased interaction with the instructor (pre-learning possible prior to face-to-face instead of focused note taking)

- Supplement to traditional class notes

- Audio and visual resources for distance education students

- Portability (using personal media players)

- Beneficial to auditory and visual learners, and

- Multi-tasking (e.g. exercising while listening to content).

Web logs in education

Weblogging is a practice that has grown exponentially across the world in the last few years. It's essentially a practice of quickly and frequently posting short items, articles or comments on a simple website or blog ("web log"). The term blog is a blend of the terms web and log, leading to web log, weblog, and finally blog. Authoring a blog, maintaining a blog or adding an article to an existing blog is called blogging.
Individual articles on a blog are called "blog posts," "posts" or "entries". A person who posts these entries is called a blogger.
A blog entry typically consists of the following:
      Title - main title, or headline, of the post
      Body - main content of the post
      Permalink - the URL of the full, individual article
      Post Date - date and time the post was published.

A blog entry optionally includes the following:
   Comments - comments added by readers
   Categories (or tags) - subjects that the entry discusses
   Trackback and or pingback - links to other sites that refer to the entry

Alongside the regularly updated entries, a blog site often has a less frequently updated list of links, or blogroll, of other blogs that the blog author (blog-master) reads; and/or, with whom he or she affiliates.

Blogging for non-IT savvy educators
Though the use of weblogs or 'blogs' in education has been around for a while, there are still groups of students who have never heard of blogging. However, we should now consider whether this form of communication could enhance the learning experience. Blogging is about **communicating effectively,** so if we want to improve our learners' skills in this area and encourage interactive learning, we should give them a chance to blog.

Blogs have been used successfully in courses that require students to develop their writing skills - specifically they give students the opportunity to easily publish their own writing and graphics on the Web, eg photos. Therefore, for any reflective writing or descriptive assignments, blogging is perfect. However, note that blogging can be a useful teaching and learning tool even if you are not teaching a language class or a specialist IT unit. If you're conducting group work or wanting to support peer interaction and assessment, blogging is a tool that helps students stay connected and share their progress. Though discussion boards also allow this type of interactive learning, they do not allow the author to control the space. It is this control of web space by the author of a blog that is one of the key differences between blogging and posting to a discussion board in WebCT, for example. This opportunity for autonomous creative expression and dialogue with others in cyberspace further allows for student-centred learning.

Wikis in education

Where a blog is (usually) the writings of one person to be read by many, a wiki (pronounced 'wicky' or 'wikee') is a website 'that allows a user to add content... but also allows that content to be edited by any other user' (*Wikipedia*).

Wikis have been around since the mid 1990s, but there has been recent interest in the learning benefits of online communities. There has also been an increase in the number of products available that make it easy to establish, maintain and support wikis.

There are many ways in which wikis can be and are being used in education. Where a class or organisational unit, or any other group, has a need to access workshop material for publication, or to collaborate on an idea, wikis can provide a useful vehicle.

RSS @ Your Library

There is now so much information available on the Internet that it can be quite difficult to keep up with it all. You may have heard the term 'RSS', and wondered how it might affect your use of the Internet.

Many websites, including blogs, now publish RSS feeds. RSS stands for *Really Simple Syndication, Rich Site Summary*, or *Really Stops Spam.* A site's RSS feed alerts readers to any updates or additions to its content. To automatically receive feeds on your computer you need to download an RSS reader - also known as a newsreader or aggregator. There are plenty available free on the Web. An RSS reader will allow you to collect or subscribe to RSS feeds. The RSS reader will allow you to see any new content that has been added to each site. This is a very useful and efficient way of keeping up to date with new information, as you do not have to visit each site to check for updates.

Instant messaging for learning

There are two particular features with great potential for learning. The first feature is the nature of instant messaging - essentially messaging is like email but much faster. Communications are typically brief and appear immediately in sequence within the application window, unlike e-mail where each communication must be 'opened'. Also, messaging can take place between more than two people - whole groups can be in the same 'conversation'.
The second feature, currently in MSN, is the interactive whiteboard: participants can share a whiteboard window, and each one can add and edit text and graphics. This is how some students are collaborating on assignments already - at a distance. New features are being added to these tools all the time - some have Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) capabilities, which allow participants to have audio chat - just like the telephone - as well as use web cameras for vision. The level of use is only limited by the participant's level of technological equipment - and bandwidth of course!