

# **Communication with a Bang (and Few Whimpers): Teacher Web Pages in 10 Minutes or Less.**

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Banks do it.  
Bakers do it.  
Even educated kids do it.  
Let's build webpages.

The Internet has become a powerful communication device throughout society. We check our bank accounts on-line; buy cars, books, and tickets on-line; and locate information as wide-ranging as movie times, company profiles, and personal credit ratings on-line. Isn't it time that schools begin seriously using the web to help communicate with parents and their communities?

Parents and community members can have 24/7 "self-service" access to information about the school. Webpages can provide:

- ☐ Access to forms and communiqués needed by students and parents. This is convenient for both parents and teachers. It is more reliable than papers sent by "sneaker net" in backpacks. A well-organized site helps the teacher since materials can be accessed by parents right from the website. Even if parents don't have Internet access, teachers can easily locate newsletters, forms, or assignments to generate hard copies.
- ☐ Easy access to the teachers' e-mail addresses and other contact information. A staff directory is very helpful as well.
- ☐ A great way to show communities how expensive technology in a school is being used. This is a concrete example of how technology improves one aspect of education: communication.
- ☐ Relief for over-worked clerical staff in the school office.
- ☐ Quick and easy updates of school and classroom information.
- ☐ Opportunities to stress student responsibility for locating and accessing "lost" assignments and forms.
- ☐ A standardized interface for locating information. As their children move through schools in the district, parents can use school websites to get familiar with new schools.

While email is and will continue to be an effective and convenient way for parents and students to communicate with school staff members, school websites created by teachers that offer useful information to parents are rare. Why?

All of us have the problem of finding time to acquire the skills of webpage design and to actually upload the information to the web. While many commercial vendors and sites have been offering fill-in-the-blank templates for teachers, many districts have been reluctant to provide links to commercial sites from school web pages over which they have no influence regarding content. So what is a district to do?

Find below the approaches two Minnesota districts have taken to ensure that *all* teachers are using the web to help their students and teachers easily find important classroom-related information.

## **Hopkins, Minnesota**

The solution we found was for our district to provide templates for teacher web pages. A programmer in the district worked with our District Media Coordinator and other teachers and media specialists to determine exactly what information teachers want to share with their students, parents, and community. Within the district we now have a consistent format that community members can access to see how and what we are teaching their children. Each teacher's page includes his or her job assignment, e-mail link, and phone number. Some teachers are using these pages to provide homework assignments, permission slips, website links for their students, and links to websites they've already created. The district has purchased a site license for *Print to PDF* that easily creates a PDF file from a document.

Most teachers are using their web pages to let parents and students know what is happening in their classes. Elementary teachers may add their educational background, notes, a calendar, links to files or websites, assignments with specific forms or printable instructions, and a supply list. Secondary teachers may provide a detailed schedule as well. Teachers enter the data themselves from any computer with Internet access and it is updated immediately.

Teachers in my building were, with good reason, concerned about when they'd find time to enter their own information on these pages. My principal helped solve that problem by making the training and initial data input part of a routine staff meeting. The three media team members worked with all the teachers in two labs. Teachers left the training with individual webpages created and publicly accessible. As soon as a few teachers began to put their weekly newsletters on their pages and let others know how little time it took to do so, more and more teachers wanted the *Print to PDF* capability.

I have yet to hear any complaints about the extra work this project has created, and many teachers have told me how happy they are to have such an easy way to look really good on the web. You can visit an index to our teacher's websites at < <http://www.hopkins.k12.mn.us/pages/tanglen/p2.0/tanglen.lasso> > and clicking on the **Staff Directory and Webpage** link.

### **Mankato, Minnesota**

Mankato Area Schools' goal this year is for all its 400 plus teachers to each have a webpage that:

- has an attractive common format
- has basic contact and class information
- can provide links to other sites and other teacher-made pages
- can be easily updated
- takes less than 10 minutes to complete

By using a web form designed by VoyagerWeb <[www.voyageurweb.com](http://www.voyageurweb.com)>, we've found a way to accomplish that goal.

The form has easy, fill-in-the-blank spaces. When the "Create My Page" button is clicked, a page that looks like the one at <[www.isd77.k12.mn.us/~ssamp11](http://www.isd77.k12.mn.us/~ssamp11)> is automatically published. (Online teacher instructions with a screen shot of the form can be linked to from the bottom of this page.)

The teacher's page is automatically uploaded to a directory named "www" on the district's teacher and student file storage server. Each page is created so that its URL becomes the district website address plus a tilde (~) and the teacher's email username. Parents can also find teacher webpages using the same directory they use to search for teacher email addresses. Teachers can easily use the Macintosh Chooser or an FTP client to add additional pages to their www folder as well.

Our building media specialists have been inservicing teachers this year in after school sessions lasting less than

15 minutes.

Works for us!