

Xerox DocuShare Sets the Standard for Interactive Web Sites at John Hopkins University's Center for Technology and Education

Creative thinkers all over the world are looking for new ways to harness the potential of the World Wide Web. Pushing the limits of the Internet is one of the missions of the Center for Technology and Education (CTE). Operating out of John Hopkins University in Maryland, in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, the group is developing new models and strategies for using technology to enhance education. Recently, CTE was asked to lead the coordination of the Southeast Cluster of Technology Innovation Challenge Grants. The Challenge Grant program was introduced by the Clinton administration to serve as a catalyst for positive change in schools. "The grants focus on enhancing teachers' skills and their professional development to use computers and advanced learning technologies in their classrooms," said U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley. "Students will benefit from teachers who are familiar with these rapidly changing technologies and are able to effectively integrate them into their teaching curriculum."

To build support networks for the grant programs, the U.S. Department of Education grouped projects into four national clusters, but like all grant programs, there is a tremendous amount of administration involved. The CTE development team decided to design an interactive Web site to facilitate the Southeast Cluster's grant program development, documentation, evaluation and dissemination of information. The challenge facing the team was they did not have a technology solution that allowed real interactivity on the Web. "We needed a way to be able to exchange measurement tools and evaluation information between our Challenge Grant projects. However, at the time, we were not aware of

any solutions that would support this kind of information exchange on the Web. We launched a research effort and found DocuShare," said Betsy Lowry, Program Director for the distance education and on-line learning initiatives at CTE.

"I began looking for a software solution that would allow our users to share resources via our Web site. We needed simple search features, an easy way to organize resources and information, and most importantly we needed a solution that would work across different platforms. I found DocuShare on the Internet and was able to immediately download and evaluate a demo copy. I began to work with the product and think of ways it could be used with our interactive Web sites. In light of the timeline pressures we were under, I was very enthusiastic about finding such a versatile, easy-to-implement solution for providing Web-based resource sharing," said David Peloff, Program Coordinator and Web Developer at CTE.

The grant projects vary from developing multimedia and telecommunication curriculum strategies to staff development and training programs. Many of the projects will span more than five years and account for millions of dollars. Because the projects demand close collaboration and require limited resources, face-to-face meetings are impossible, making an interactive Web site that uses DocuShare ideal. "As a tool, DocuShare allows groups of geographically distributed people to collaboratively share information and documents," said Roger Ellefson, the Xerox DocuShare Sales Manager for the mid-Atlantic region.



CTE is pushing the envelope with its innovative use of Web technologies to enhance education.



CTE has seamlessly integrated DocuShare into their existing web presence.



Clicking on the DocuShare icon immediately brings users to the DocuShare site, where they can add, view and edit content using any standard Web browser.

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"DocuShare was the only solution I found that allowed users to upload files and create a shared hard drive of resource data. We were able to use the bulletin board as a way to post information to help keep everyone up to date. Instead of sending out e-mail to a list server and hoping everyone reads it, the bulletin board allowed everyone to check the site at their leisure for current information," said Peloff.

The technology grant Web site is only the beginning of this Internet story. What began as a need to coordinate ten states in the Southeast Cluster group is evolving into an entirely new on-line community. "The Southeast Cluster Web site became a natural springboard to integrate what we learned from the Challenge Grant projects into our new Electronic Learning Community projects," said Lowry.

In its fifth month of development, the on-line learning team is laying the foundation for a new way for educators to use the Internet. DocuShare allows educators across the country to collaborate and share resources. The Electronic Learning Communities include synchronous and asynchronous discussions and feature searchable databases, and will integrate a DocuShare Web site with multimedia features, databases and distance learning projects. Courses offering technology-based collaborative learning have already been put on-line using DocuShare technology. Although the project is in its early phases, the potential for its ability to impact education is extraordinary.

"Our business is education and the support and development of education professionals. CTE believes that providing an electronic community of collaboration and exchange among educators, can be an effective means of solving common problems, supporting and encouraging innovation and sustaining an ongoing dialogue around common issues and challenges. Over the next year, we will be collecting and analyzing data relating to Electronic Learning Communities, and DocuShare is a key component," said Lowry.

DocuShare provides technology that is creating the next on-line evolution. When the World Wide Web was designed, the excitement was all about putting information out on the Web. The second evolution had to do with transactions giving users an opportunity to log information and download files. With DocuShare the evolution of interaction has arrived, allowing for real-time collaboration and sharing of resources. "The whole concept of the Web is changed when people can actually share and interact with data," said Peloff. "The Internet began as sort of a one-way format. However, new technologies like DocuShare are creating more interactivity on the Web, allowing users to contribute to Web sites. Giving people an opportunity to contribute to and be part of the Internet, and sharing in that sense of ownership, is very important to the CTE on-line projects."

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John Hopkins University's CTE

CTE'S DOCUSHARE CONFIGURATION

At CTE, DocuShare resides on a Dell PowerEdge 4200 server with 256 MB RAM, with a Windows NT Server 4.0 hosting Microsoft Internet Information Server 4.0 (IIS) software. Also installed on the server are O'Reilly's Web Board 3.5 and Allaire's Cold Fusion 4.0.

Users at CTE access the system from a variety of Macintosh and PC systems (which are not centrally managed), using Netscape Navigator or Windows Explorer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ORDER DOCUSHARE

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