

Reach Out and Touch Someone



Student-produced multimedia broadcasting keeps a Washington community up to date on school news and activities.

By Eric Oderman

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(<http://www.iste.org/standards/>)

In middle school, I began using the Internet and video production to communicate with fellow classmates, teachers, other schools, the community, and even the world—whether it was designing a Web site for a semester project or broadcasting a daily newscast to the school on closed-circuit television.

The latter example is where I first was introduced to the world of technology and multimedia. When I entered Washington Middle School in Olympia, Washington, as a sixth grader, I remember sitting down in my first period class and watching with amazement as peers presented school-related announcements in an entertaining and informative format. Something clicked in my head, and I knew I wanted to be a part of it.

Weeks later, I spoke to the librarian who ran the program, “WMS Channel 2 News,” to see how I could get involved. I was put on a waiting list, and when a crew vacancy finally opened up, I became part of the team. Under the leadership of our advisor, Rich Bakala, we would arrive each morning an hour before school began to write scripts, create graphics, and rehearse our program until the eight o’clock bell rang and we broadcasted live in front of the entire school of 750 students and staff. As the years continued, we pushed the envelope with the limited technology and budget available to us. Somehow, we managed to take a program that used two very old VHS camcorders from a simple news broadcast to a full-fledged news service that used green-screen techniques for weather reports, employed Web cams of the campus, and even maintained a Web

site for better access. The Web site included more detailed information on news stories we had covered as well as a behind-the-scenes look at our studio. For about seven minutes every morning, we were able to communicate via closed-circuit television with our school community using some secondhand equipment and a lot of dedicated teamwork. The skills I learned from participating in Channel 2 helped me work much more efficiently on group projects in other classes, such as Social Studies, and improved my technical writing skills for English class. I also learned ways to become more organized in long-term projects my teachers assigned.

As a freshman entering Olympia High School (OHS), I joined a program that provided better equipment and a bigger budget. Like its middle school counterpart, the OHS multimedia program offers a live daily broadcast on closed-circuit television to keep the student body informed. After spending three years doing this in middle school, I was eager to join the high school program. As with the middle school format, this daily program broadcasts upcoming events and highlights revolving around the school and local community. This helped students stay informed regarding their own extracurricular activities. For example, school clubs could announce meeting times and what to be prepared for at that meeting, so students could spend more time discussing other things. But as I found out, “OHS Daily” was just the icing on the cake.

As a high school junior, I am proud to see how effectively the medium of television and multimedia is used to keep students and staff in-

formed. It has become so much a part of our daily lives at school that it’s sometimes taken for granted. Every month, a group of about 15 students produces a half-hour television magazine that highlights school and community events such as sports, music, and drama productions. We also incorporate some comedic talent from time to time to keep the audience entertained. Olympia News Network (ONN) doesn’t just air at the school, however. In addition to running regularly on our community’s public access channel, it can be viewed around the world over the Internet!

Under the guidance of our technology department head, Jeff Waddington, our high school utilizes the power of streaming video content on our Web site (<http://olympia.osd.wednet.edu>) to let the world know what’s going on at OHS. That way, grandparents across the country can log onto the Internet and watch archived episodes of ONN to see what’s happening at their grandchildren’s school. We were also asked by the NECC organizers to film segments covering their conference in Seattle. These short films produced by students covered different vendors and were also uploaded to our Web site so educators could see some of the events and activities that happened during the conference.

Another example of the usefulness of streaming media on the Internet is in training staff. Recently, our school ordered a shipment of laptops to be issued to every classroom. There were many teachers who were totally unfamiliar with the concept of mobile computing and had never before touched a laptop. Instead of taking time out of their already busy

schedules to teach them the basics, we used our Web site once again.

Fellow students and I hosted and produced several 10-minute instructional segments on the basics of using the computers. We covered everything from turning on the laptop to changing the battery. Filming the segments conventionally, we imported them into a computer, converted them to a special Web format and uploaded them to the school’s Web site so that teachers could access the tutorials as they needed them and at their convenience. Best of all, they could always go back and review the tutorials—unlike a one-time training seminar.

As time goes on, we continually find more uses for streaming video. We’ve discovered that anything is possible, and the simplicity of turning multimedia into streaming content means ingenuity is the only limiting factor.



Eric Oderman is a 16-year-old junior attending Olympia High School, located on the east side of Olympia, Washington. He has been involved in the school’s daily newscast “OHS Daily” since he was a freshman—filling roles behind and in front of the camera. He also works as a member of the monthly television program “Olympia News Network,” which offers an in-depth look at school and local events.



Dr. Dennis Harper has spent the past 35 years helping students, teachers, and schools throughout the world infuse technology to improve student learning. As a former high school teacher, university professor, district technology director, ISTE board member, researcher, speaker, and presently the founding director of the Generation YES organization, Dr. Harper continues to contribute to a wide variety of educational technology agendas.