

Simple TechIntegration Newsletter First Six Issues (Master Copy)

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For an email newsletter launched and published by InfoSource, Inc., in 2008. Eldon also created and designed the HTML newsletter layout. The newsletter and its content has since been integrated with a new website launched by the company serving the same audience.

Issue 1

Learn What's Out There and Where to Find Them

We all know the Net's rich with absolutely free information technology resources that can assist, supplement, or even be fully integrated educationally. There is a slight problem, though: If you don't know it exists, or you don't know where to find it, it's useless to you.

Well, let's try to fix that, shall we?

In each weekly issue, the SimpleTechIntegration newsletter will feature and share at least two of these "resources" with you — from downloads (software, templates, ebooks, etc.) to online services and websites. They'll all have at least one very important thing in common: They'll be free for you to use and/or access and will cost you absolutely nothing out-of-pocket!

And just as important: We'll give you the links to go get (or access) them!

Simple enough, right? Then let's get going...

Bibomatic

<http://www.bibomatic.com>

Who the heck really remembers all those little rules and nuances for properly formatting a bibliography entry? Well, OK, even if you do know all the specifics, let's face it, doing them right can be quite a hassle. Now, thanks to Bibomatic, this is one less chore to worry about!

An "online bibliography generator," Bibomatic lets you enter 10-digit ISBNs, which it then uses to automatically gather data about the book and then pump out a properly formatted bibliography entry (MLA, APA or Chicago format... your choice!).

Here, quick examples. After entering the ISBN 0395906253, this is what it quickly produced (in MLA, APA and Chicago styles respectively):

- Levinson, Jay Conrad. *Guerrilla Marketing: Secrets For Making Big Profits From Your Small Business* (Guerrilla Marketing). City: Houghton Mifflin, 1997
- Levinson, Jay Conrad. (1997). *Guerrilla Marketing: Secrets For Making Big Profits From Your Small Business* (Guerrilla Marketing). City: Houghton Mifflin.
- Levinson, Jay Conrad. 1997. *Guerrilla Marketing: Secrets For Making Big Profits From Your Small Business* (Guerrilla Marketing). City: Houghton Mifflin.

Cool, huh? A must-bookmark resource!

EconEdLink

<http://www.econedlink.org>

An online “database” of hundreds of free Internet-based lesson plans and materials on Economics for K-12 teachers, and classroom-tested to boot, EconEdLink isn't just a wonderful no-brainer resource for Economics teachers — with the amount of information and links to additional resources usually provided with each “lesson” (such as current events news items), just a dab of imagination and creativity can tailor many of its lessons to fit a wide range of educational purposes, even seemingly unrelated ones.

And there’s no shortage of additional resources on the site to make your job easier. Like a regularly updated page of U.S. economic “data” — facts, figures, rates, jargon, etc. — and a large number of links to other related external Web resources. It’ll even help you create your own lesson plans with its CyberTeach “comprehensive guide to teaching economics using the Internet, including model lessons and templates...”

And it’s totally free. A very impressive resource.

Issue 2

They're Not All Limited Trials!

A friend told me the other day that she never bothers with “free” software or sites since they’re “[n]othing more than limited trials.” She’s referring to the practice of offering a time- and/or feature-limited version for free to hook and sell you on the “full” paid version of the product or service.

In many cases, she’s right. But not always. Some freebie “bait” products and online services really do offer something incredibly good for absolutely nothing, no strings attached.

This issue gives you two examples...

MediaFire

<http://www.mediafire.com>

No doubt you already know that the Internet is an incredible way to share files with your students. Just send the file to them by email attachment (if you have their email addresses) or give them a download link. All well and good with simple text and normal document/data files, but with multimedia files (video, audio, PowerPoint presentations, etc.), it gets a bit trickier.

Thing is, media files tend to be obscenely huge. Many email services set limits on file attachment sizes... both on the sending and receiving ends (which means that even if your email account can send huge files, that doesn't necessarily mean your students can receive them).

Media file sizes can also present a problem even if you plan to distribute through website downloads. For example, I recently had to distribute a 9MB (even after compression) vidclip to the members of an online community. The online service we were using had a file sharing area, but it limited files to a max of 5MB.

Thankfully, I knew of MediaFire.

The MediaFire service lets you store and share files for free, up to 100MB in size (it has a pay-to-play "Pro" service if you need more than that, up to 10GB). Just upload the file then give out the link. Really, a hundred megs is probably more than enough for most if not all of the educational media files you'll be handling.

There are many other similar file storage and sharing services out there, but there are at least two reasons why MediaFire is worth seriously checking out:

- You don't need to sign up and set up an account before being able to use it.
- The banner ads it runs (it has to make money somehow!) are clean and appropriate for general audiences, unlike many of the other services I've seen.

Besides, it works. That 9MB vidclip I mentioned got distributed to over 200 people without a hitch (and not a single one of them asked for help downloading!). Now that I think about it, that last "minimal support required" bit is actually worth a heck of a whole lot...

Stock.XCHNG

<http://www.sxc.hu>

Stock photography sites are a great source of images (vidclips and clipart too!) for all sorts of educational uses. Thing is, they cost. There are a few excellent low-cost stock photography sites (maybe we'll mention them to you someday), but it's hard to beat free, right?

Especially when it's *pro-caliber* free.

Stock.XCHNG, as you'll see, is definitely pro caliber. By Jupiter Media, it is, after all, supposed to help lead you to Jupiter's Stockxpert site, which is so very not free. Although I'm sure Stockxpert's got the better images between the two of them, when you see what's at Stock.XCHNG, there's a good chance you'll be, like, "So what?"

The site is packed. With over 350,000 images (slick ones!), this freebie's got more content than many pay sites! And they didn't scrimp on the intelligent features either, like keyword searching and — this one you'll really like — a "lightbox" feature, sort of like a temporary holding place for images that have caught your eye while browsing so you can easily return to them later.

Very, very impressive and useful freebie, this one.

Issue 3

Teaching With Web Content

There's no need to sell you on the benefits of using the Web and its rich seemingly endless content as teaching material. But it's also common knowledge that the open Web isn't the safest place to be sending the younger kids to.

Because of that, many teachers have taken to merely printing out the material. That works. But it takes something away from the experience, particularly with interactive content.

So, what to do? This issue provides two possibilities. The first gives you a way to guide and control students through "live" sessions, and the second lets you present the Web in action. Print is good obviously, but for some material, students will likely get more from either of these free solutions.

Daft Doggy

<http://www.daftdoggy.com>

Daft Doggy is a free online service whose whole reason for being is to let you record Web browsing sessions, play it back at will, and share recorded sessions with others... with very little effort!

You don't even have to give it any URLs (save for the first one, your starting point) — DD automatically records every URL you progressively visit during the session.

Calling it a “session” record could be a bit misleading. It doesn’t really record everything you do; what it does do is remember each separate URL you visit in sequence (internally within the site or externally, it doesn’t matter).

Viewers of your recorded session will see a blue bar across the top of the page that shows the URL of the page displayed; on the right of the bar are Reverse and Next buttons that will let the viewer follow you along through your session, visiting every URL you visited, in sequence going forward or backwards. The blue bar shows and stays in place throughout the whole session playback.

Here, take a look at this example I put together in less than 5 minutes:

<http://www.daftdoggy.com/play.php?r=288>

Note that for each session recording, you’ll be given a unique link like the above... very easy to distribute!

You can edit your session recordings to a limited degree. You can’t add or delete URLs, but you can edit existing ones. You can also give any URL entry a description, comment and/or — nice touch! — record a voice comment.

I’d say that at this point the service has minimal frills, but it sure can come in handy for quick and dirty guides, tutorials, presentations. And, of course, student projects!

CamStudio

<http://camstudio.org>

Although not designed specifically for capturing and recording a Web session, a lot of folks use CamStudio to do just that!

CamStudio can record everything you see (and hear) on your screen while performing a task (such as working with software or — ta da! — Web browsing) and save it to an AVI video file. It also has a built-in feature that can convert your captured AVIs to Adobe Flash SWF format, often preferred for vidclips that need to be accessed online because of its much smaller file sizes.

(AVIs can get pretty huge, even the brief ones. Not a problem for offline use, but online that’s a killer. To illustrate this, I created a short CamStudio-generated vidclip that shows nothing but a single Google Toolbar search sequence. Total AVI filesize? Almost 16MB! Here it is. That’s just the nature of the video beast.)

This is a very powerful tool, quite frankly, and there is a very slight learning curve. But it sure is worth it! A lot of software publishers use it to create tutorials, which is how I got wind of it in the first place. Imagine my amazement at finding out that it costs us absolutely nothing to get and use!

Issue 4

Great Tools for Teachers and Students

Besides using free resources to help develop learning material and other related educational content, you may also want to share information and details with your students on the actual tools you're using. In many cases, the tools you use to help you teach, they can use to help them learn.

Here are two in that category.

Muchobeets

<http://www.muchobeets.com>

Excellent study tools that they are, it's a shame teachers aren't able to give every single one of their students a set of flashcards whenever they need to memorize or even just learn a whole bunch of information. There's the cost thing, of course. And production time. Relying on the students themselves to build their own flashcards using material you provide? Yeah, right.

It isn't perfect, but Muchobeets goes a long way towards helping reach this "flashcards for every student" utopia. It very easily lets you create virtual flashcard sets (both "definition" and "regular info" types) that will then be hosted and accessed by students through the Muchobeets site.

You can add to existing card sets, but you can't seem to edit any entries. It also doesn't seem to let you sort your cards, or have the cards presented to you randomly when you're studying or "quizzing" yourself.

Who knows, maybe the developers will add those features in the future. It currently does a good enough job, however. Probably the best part is that students, once exposed to this free tool, will realize how helpful flashcards are and, with Muchobeets, how easy it'll be for them to create them for their own use!

eBookhood

<http://ebookhood.com>

Nowadays, what kid doesn't have an iPod or one of its ilk? I know some schools have banned them from school grounds, which just means the kids at those schools just learn to hide their iPods from view better.

eBookhood is a free online service that lets you convert text, webpages, even RSS feeds to formats that are readable on Apple iPods and other portable "reading" devices.

Now is that cool or what? If I knew every kid in my class had an iPod, I'd seriously consider giving out notes, handouts, info, etc., in that format. When in Rome, blah blah blah...

Besides, showing the kids this neat free resource may actually help them figure out ways to put those iPods to better use!

Issue 5

Let's Get Creative

As an early Gen X-er, my formal education happened before the public Internet. Of course, I missed out on a lot, but no hard feelings... it's not like I didn't have access to a wealth of resources already offered through the school system, public libraries and bookstores, etc. So, I don't feel too bad about hitting the scene just a bit too early...

... except for these absolutely amazing multimedia development tools everybody has access to today, and for free. These would have really blown my mind back then. Heck, these would blow me away now if I were a kid. They're that good, simple and easy.

Spend a bit of time playing around with these. I'd be amazed if you didn't get any ideas on how to use these in your classrooms.

ArtPad

<http://artpad.art.com/gallery>

You've likely already seen and/or played around with this kind of "paint" application before, offline and on. I remember when I first saw this kind of app, way back when the very first Apple Mac hit the market. It was fascinating and engrossing then — and back then, the Macs were black-and-white! — and you betcha they're just as fun today!

Or even more so. ArtPad's interface is quite simple and intuitive, and deceptively so since its creative features are impressively powerful!

But the "feature" that I find will serve very well to help educate budding artists is its "replay painting" command — it replays stroke-by-stroke, layer-by-layer, start-to-finish every little "action" performed to create the finished product. I think you'd be hard-pressed to find something better to vividly illustrate exactly what goes into a finished painting.

GoAnimate

<http://goanimate.com>

My immediate impression upon playing with GoAnimate for only a few minutes: This has got to be the best and easiest animation tool I've ever played with that produces really professional-looking results! How's that for a review?

You'll have at your disposal a whole arsenal of animation components to build with: cartoon characters, scenery, dialogue balloons, soundtracks, props, special effects... just throw in your story and direction, and you've got yourself an animated movie!

Besides being able to use this to help easily create compelling educational material (particularly for the younger kids), I don't see why GoAnimate can't be used for student projects.

TIP: For your first few attempts, start out with their "Thought Starters" templates. They not only make it easy for you to build something quickly, while using them you can't help but learn how their animations get pieced together. Here's one I created in short order with one of their templates.

Issue 6

Raw Unadulterated Content

As an educational resource, if there's anything the Internet is really really tops in, it's its role as a source of archival content. The fact that there is indeed archival content available to us isn't the big deal (we've had that for the longest time... the U.S. is really good at that kind of stuff!) — it's that the Internet has finally given us all *very easy access* to much of it!

Here are two such sources...

Project Gutenberg

<http://www.gutenberg.org>

PG's been around for quite some time (since 1971, according to its site). Although I've known about it for years, it's been a while since I dropped by for a visit. And every time I visit, I wonder why I don't drop by more often!

Project Gutenberg's *raison d'être* is to find books that, through age more often than not, have worked themselves into the public domain. PG then converts them to digital text and makes that available for download, gratis, to any and all comers!

Are there enough books available to download? Well, is a catalog of over 25,000 downloadable titles enough?

I thought so.

NOTE: I just noticed that PG now offers digitized sheet music as well!

National Archives Videos

<http://video.google.com/nara.html>

This riveting collection of over 100 historical “motion pictures” collected at the National Archives is available here for your viewing and use.

The videos on this site fall under these categories:

- NASA History of Space Flight [15 vids]
- United Newsreel (1942-45) [62 vids]
- Department of the Interior [24 vids]

I found the United Newsreel collection particularly mesmerizing (I’ve always liked historic WWII stuff). Make sure not to miss the Department of the Interior vids with early footage of Native American activities!

For more information about Eldon Sarte and his books, clips, publishing projects, services, etc., visit his website at:

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