



Cutting-Edge Tools for School Leaders

David Jakes, Instructional Technology Coordinator, Community High School District 99, Downers Grove, IL djakes@csd99.org

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Over the past two years, a new set of software tools have fundamentally changed how people interact, communicate and share information online. Collectively called social software tools, these new tools have tremendous potential for schools as a source of professional learning as well as serving as platforms for dynamic classroom instruction. This presentation explains how blogs, wikis, RSS, along with the hottest tool of all-podcasting- can be leveraged to create 21st Century school information environments.

The Cutting Edge Tools:

Blogs (or Weblogs): Blogs are personal publishing tools. The growth of blogs has been remarkable; it is estimated that a new blog is created every second, with Technorati (a blog search tool) tracking 50,000 blog posts per hour, or 1.2 million per day (Richardson, 2006)

Wikis: Wikis are collaborative publishing tools. Wikis enable the collaborative creation of content, with multiple authors contributing and editing content through a simple Web-editing interface. Wikipedia is an example of a world-wide application of wiki technology.

Podcasting: Podcasts are audio files (and sometimes other file formats) that are distributed through RSS technology and can be played on various types of players and computers.

Flickr: a digital photo sharing site, supported by a host of community tools.

del.icio.us and Furl: These are social bookmarking tools that enable personal and social access to favorite Web sites.

Why are these tools important?

These tools have changed the nature of Web publishing and content-as a result of these tools, everyone can participate, everyone can contribute. In 2006, everyone can be an information provider. These tools also enable content to be distributed or syndicated through RSS technologies, resulting in the active delivery of the information **to** the user.

How do they do it? More tools!

These tools take advantage of RSS (**R**eally **S**imple **S**yndication) technologies. Users subscribe to RSS feeds, which deliver the information to an aggregator, a type of software that is similar to a mailbox. Aggregators collect the feed information and provide an interface for processing the content of multiple feeds from a single location. Aggregators may be online or may be resident on an individual's computer.

- * As professional learning tools
- * As tools that support student learning
- * As communication tools for the school community

How can these tools be used in education?

As professional learning tools:

The potential of these tools as a source of professional learning is dramatic; their ability to connect people, resources and ideas is truly compelling. By using these tools, individuals can construct their own personal learning environments on multiple topics, and subscribe to information that matters to them. As the use of RSS technology continues to grow, more educational institutions that provide useful information online will do so via these technologies.

Read more at www.jakesonline.org/learningtools.htm

As tools to support student learning:

The use of technology is effective when the inclusion of the technology creates a value-added learning experience. Blogs directly support writing, wikis directly support the development of student learning products created through collaborative learning experiences, and both do so through the use of engaging, 21st Century technologies. The use of these tools within instruction provides students with a truly authentic learning experience that teaches them about the tools that they will use through the rest of their lives.

Read more at www.jakesonline.org/students.htm

As communication tools for the school community:

Should school administrators blog or produce their own podcasts for distribution to the school community? Should schools use wikis to support the development of documents important to committee work? Should school events be captured through digital photography and be distributed via Flickr? Should a school calendar, lunch menu, and athletic schedules be published through RSS? Should a school Web site offer multiple opportunities for members of the school community to subscribe to important content which is made available through RSS? **The answer is yes!**

Read more at www.jakesonline.org/schools.htm

For more information on Cutting Edge Tools for Schools, please see:
www.jakesonline.org/cuttingedge.htm

To read my thoughts on educational technology, please see my blog,
The Strength of Weak Ties:
<http://jakespeak.blogspot.com/>