

Top 2012 web resources for

Learn more about the websites your education colleagues are finding indispensable.

Lisa: *Hey Devin, it's a new year. Time to come up with a new set of top websites for ACSA. You game?*

Devin: *Absolutely. The landscape has changed a lot since our "Top 10" in 2010.*

Lisa: *Agreed. There are some cool new sites that are making my life much easier, but maybe we should start with one of our staples – Facebook.*

■ **Facebook (facebook.com).** Facebook continues to dominate the web and all educators, particularly those of us in leadership roles, should be aware of just how influential this social network site is in our modern world. According to today's data, Facebook has grown to more than 800 million users, with half of those logging in on a daily basis. Of those users, more than 300 million use mobile devices for Facebook access.

So what are all of these people doing? Certainly a lot of the activity is sharing of personal information such as family photos and status updates about daily activities. However, Facebook also provides for an increasing amount of professional use,

with great potential for schools to increase connectedness and to build community. Inspired by the U.S. Department of Education and schools around the country, our district launched a Facebook page last spring with great success (facebook.com/CarlsbadUnifiedSchoolDistrict). We are now in the process of adopting the CSBA board policy and administrative regulations for district-sponsored social media and working on expanding our presence to school sites to complement our district page. For tips, tutorials, and more recommendations for educational use of Facebook, one can always go to the TICAL website and find excellent resources (www.portical.org).

Lisa: *Glad to see my old friend Facebook is still on our list. What is your take on Twitter?*

Devin: *Still one of my favorites and a regularly used site in our district.*

■ **Twitter (twitter.com).** Frankly, Twitter has lost a bit of steam since we initially promoted it in 2010. However, Twitter is still an amazing way to connect and share.

And while it may not be growing as fast as it once was, when you look at the numbers, the volume and rate of data that is exchanged is staggering. For example, it took more than three years to reach the first million tweets, and now we see that number of posts in a given week.

Our take on Twitter is that it still has a valuable role in the educational ecosystem, and the microblogging platform can be an incredibly useful tool. John Roach, superintendent in Carlsbad Unified, has been tweeting for almost two years now, and we have particularly noticed the benefits during crises where we needed immediate, short bursts of information to go out to the community. We also find that Twitter can be a great way to highlight success and to recognize achievements. Check www.twitter.com/suptrouch for some examples of how it works for us.

Lisa: *All of this twittering and facebooking sounds like it could be time-intensive for some*

By Lisa Gonzales and Devin Vodicka

people, especially during the learning phase. Maybe we should offer something that will save leaders some time?

Devin: Great idea. One site that will definitely save some time is Tungle.

Lisa: Tungle?

Devin: You have to wonder where they get these names.

■ **Tungle (tungle.me).** Tungle is a very simple way to schedule meetings. You simply “paint over” available time slots on a web-based calendar to indicate availability and share with others. You can synch existing calendars such as Outlook, Mobile Me or Gmail to simplify the process. They even have mobile apps so that you can work through the process on your smartphone. In the current economic climate, we need to find smarter ways of approaching our work so that we can focus our efforts on high-leverage activities. This tool can save you (or support staff) hours of time.

Lisa: Love it! That would give me some time to peruse one of my all-time favorite websites – FCMAT’s Education Highlights. I have it bookmarked and check it daily to see what is hot statewide.

Devin: It sounds a little voyeuristic.

Lisa: Where else can you go to get a snapshot of education-related articles statewide? It’s very insightful.

■ **FCMAT (fcmat.org)** was established in the 1990s to provide business services to educators, from audits to professional development and software development to chief business officer training programs. What is most impressive on their website for the non-business person is their daily “Education Headlines.” The headlines are a compilation of news articles that have run statewide on a wide variety of topics.

The average day has about a dozen links to articles, which provide a flavor of what the issues are around California. This is a great site for leaders who want to get a global view of issues, or perhaps just validate that the “grass isn’t always greener” somewhere else. And it’s free!

Devin: Got any suggestions for how to send large files?

Lisa: As a matter of fact, yes! The easiest, simplest website I use is YouSendIt. I find that large files, especially PowerPoints embedded with videos, won’t make it out of my email system unless I use a site like YouSendIt.

■ **YouSendIt (yousendit.com)** is a secure site that allows users to send large attachments efficiently. Rather than putting documents on flashdrives and sharing them with colleagues, YouSendIt allows you to identify a file, upload it in a matter of seconds to a couple of minutes, email it to one or multiple recipients, and receive an email confirmation that the attachment was sent. The



recipient of the email receives a URL that sends them to the location of the file where they can download it within a week.

The YouSendIt business model, like many, is to offer the site at a “freemium,” so basic services are free but others are at cost. For example, email notification that the file was opened, files in excess of 50MB or extended recipient access to the email are available at a nominal cost. YouSendIt currently transfers about 20 million files a month.

Devin: Sounds like a great site. What sites do you use that allow you to go green?

Lisa: When you and I present at conferences, I’ve given up printing PowerPoint presentations. Killing trees doesn’t make me feel very good. I really recommend Slideshare.

■ **Slideshare (slideshare.net)** is an online hosting site for presentations, especially presentations like PowerPoints, keynotes, PDFs and anything in the OpenOffice suite. With Slideshare, you can upload your presentation and then receive a URL link that can be sent to others, including via email. Anyone using the link can download the presentation in PDF format. You can also embed the documents in Slideshare into

websites. Think about it as the YouTube for documents instead of videos. One great use would be to post presentations for PTA, School Site Council or even board meetings on Slideshare by embedding the presentation on websites. Of course, Slideshare also operates with the freemium strategy.

Lisa: Hmm... Have you ever paid to use it?

Devin: No way, and I use it regularly. Stick with the free version! Just remember that what you put up is public.

Lisa: Isn’t everything these days?

Devin: As a matter of fact, yes. How about we add QR Readers to our list?

Lisa: Q who?

■ **QR Readers.** QR is an acronym for “quick response” and QR codes are simple, two-dimensional matrix barcodes that look like a bunch of black squares arranged into a bigger square. These were initially designed for manufacturing, but they now have pervasive use in a multitude of areas, largely fueled by easy access from QR Readers on smartphones that have cameras.

You can use a free service like kayawa (qrcode.kaywa.com) to generate a QR image that links to a website, phone number or SMS (text) number. In terms of saving paper, if you have packets of information that come from online sources and you are planning to share, simply generate some QR codes and print those on a single sheet on paper. Better yet, use the LCD projector to show the image and have participants use their phones to “scan” the code. Think also about placing QR codes around campus to enhance Back To School Night or Open House.

There are a number of excellent lists with recommended uses for QR codes. I like this one as a starter: <http://itcboisestate.wordpress.com/2011/02/18/10-ways-to-use-qr-codes-in-your-classroom>.

Devin: Any new sites for focused searches on specific topics?

Lisa: With our rollout in Santa Clara County of Common Core State Standards and the support we are providing for districts, I was doing a little research and stumbled upon a site called LiveBinders.

Devin: Wait. That rings a bell...

■ **LiveBinders (livebinders.com)** is a virtual online binder. If you have documents from trainings or board manuals you want to store, LiveBinders can be used to create an online storage location with tabs for different topics. You can access the site without logging in and can search any topic of interest. We recommend the “Education/More Education” section, which will take you to a listing of many broad subjects. Teachers nationwide have created “grade level” binders and filled them with standards-aligned assignments, projects, discussions and links.

What was most impressive is that some of the binders, especially for hot topics like the Common Core State Standards, have more than 10,000 hits. Another popular theme features close to 100 “project based learning” binders. With the new focus on the 21st century skills of integrating subjects, students working in teams, communication, and problem-based activities, it’s a great starting place to see what others have already done. Our tip? Check out the number of views, as those with more views seem to

have more substance to them. The subject-specific binders, such as math, STEM, arts and web2.0 tools have a great variety of very popular binders.

Devin: *Did you see the binder on Fireplace Refinishing?*

Lisa: *Fortunately, no. But it could be an interesting project-based learning teaser.*

Devin: *Or not. Hey, in your new role as ACSA’s vice president for legislative action, are there any sites you’ve run across that are helping you with your travel logistics?*

Lisa: *As a matter of fact, I was presenting at the ACSA North Conference and someone suggested TripIt – and I love it!*

■ **TripIt (tripit.com)** is a site that allows you to save all of your travel arrangements. Booking a flight on Southwest? Reserving a rental car? Email the confirmation to TripIt and your information is saved. Same goes for any other key information you need for a trip, including hotels, rental cars, restaurant recommendations, and more. A week before

you travel, you receive a reminder about the trip logistics. A few days before, another reminder makes its way to your email inbox, but this time, weather forecasts and travel advice for that area are included. Gone are the days of printing out different emails, printouts and receipts. TripIt also has a smartphone application, so all of the information is really at your fingertips.

Lisa: *Devin, I’ll know if this site really works when I can get my husband to stop printing and filing every travel plan we have.*

Devin: *Let me know how that works for you.*

Lisa: *Will do. Let’s move on to file storage. Got any suggestions? I’ve about maxed out my storage on my MacBook again.*

Devin: *Check out Dropbox. Its one of my new favorites.*

■ **Dropbox (dropbox.com)** is a web-based file hosting service in the “clouds” that enables you to share files with one another. Best part of Dropbox is you can log in from any computer. If you have work files you want to take home, drag them securely into Dropbox and you can access them from home, work, smartphones, iPad, mobile, computer lab or wherever else you can access a computer and Internet connection. No longer do you need to rely on remembering where you put your USB drive.

One challenge we have found with Dropbox: If you are working with others on editing a file, the first person who opened it has the file where changes will be saved. When you leave the Dropbox site, the file is protected again, and others can access and edit. There is also a slight delay when you drag files, especially large ones, into your Dropbox folder. Don’t expect them to be there instantaneously, as it may take a few minutes for them to fully load.

Again, Dropbox uses the freemium model, so you have 2MB of free storage. However, invite a few friends to open an account and each friend earns you another .5MB of storage.

Lisa: *Am I the only one who misplaces USB drives?*

Devin: *No. That’s why Dropbox is so valu-*

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able and for now, mostly free. Another good way to keep track of your thoughts is to use a tool like Evernote.

■ **Evernote (evernote.com).** Evernote is something that I didn't really begin to use until I had an iPad. It provides a way to capture "notes" on a mobile device (including smartphones) that synch with an iPad or desktop device. Evernote also uses the free-mium model, and I've found the free version to be just fine for my needs.

With Evernote you can save website links, your own notes, files and photos into virtual notebooks. You can then share those items with others as well. Some of our principals have organized these virtual notebooks for each teacher, and then during classroom visits they will take photos, write notes or even capture videos that they can share with the teacher as part of the ongoing coaching process.

One of the cool features is the ability to annotate a note or a photo with an audio file as well. For busy administrators, this can be an excellent way to quickly capture your thoughts, ideas, interviews with students or other information.

Lisa: *That sounds great! But how can somebody keep track of all of these new developments?*

Devin: *One strategy that I use is to leverage RSS feeds.*

■ **Really Simple Syndication (RSS)** is a way to push (or pull) information from multiple sources – called "feeds" – into one place.

As an example, I made a quick blog site (devinsreader.blogspot.com) that pulls in the RSS feeds from the California Department of Education, TICAL, FCMAT, the K-12 High Speed Network and the "Inside School Research" blog from Education Week. You can see that this scrapes the headlines from these sites and, with a simple click, I can get to the source and get the entire story. Feel free to go to the site at any time to get a quick overview of the latest and greatest developments in the world of California school leadership and technology.

Lisa: *Well, that's it for our Top 12 for 2012.*

A few old friends from our Top 10 of 2010 list, but most are new sites.

Devin: *Just goes to show how quickly things are changing. As a matter of fact, I have an idea for 2013's list.*

Lisa: *Stop the madness. Let's save a little something for our readers to look forward to as we try to embark on 2012.*

Devin: *Sounds like a plan. I'll see you in 2013.* ■

Lisa Gonzales is a coordinator in curriculum & instruction at the Santa Clara County Office of Education. She is the state vice president for legislative action for ACSA. Devin Vodicka is the assistant superintendent of business services in the Carlsbad Unified School District. Both are members of ACSA's Technology Leadership Group and TICAL, the Technology Information Center for Administrative Leadership.

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