Creating a Web Presence with Blogs, Wikis and Wix

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Why do teachers need a Web Presence?

A great deal has been written about ‘21st century learners’, and the changes that technology has brought to the ways students learn and communicate. However less is available for teachers dealing with these learners – how to engage them, meet the range of needs that they present and maintain organisation and clarity of the wealth of information that is available at our fingertips, thanks to the World Wide Web.

In times gone by, creating a website was time consuming and required specialised programming and coding skills. However thanks to Web2.0, there are hundreds of applications now available that make establishing a web presence a fairly simple process, requiring a few hours, some creativity and basic computer knowledge. If you can use Microsoft Word, or attach a document to an email, then you have the skills to build a basic online web presence.

The key reasons teachers should establish a web presence are:

- Access
- Communication
- Sharing
- Modelling and Scaffolding
- Engagement

Let’s look at these in more detail to identify what they mean for busy teachers.

1. Access:

Having a website offers students greater access to classroom materials, resources, information and instructions. Not only can students find the materials that they need 24/7, online delivery allows material to be shared in a variety of formats, to meet a variety of needs. If you have students with a vision impairment, they may access podcast recordings of your verbal instructions. Students who need extra time to process information can spend as long as they need reading and comprehending. Images and multimedia will enable students with a variety of learning styles to gain the most benefit from a class website.

In addition, students who are absent can easily check in on what is happening in the classroom, and there is no need for those who are away for extended periods to have specially prepared homework packages – they can access it all online just as easily as anyone else.
2. Communication:

A class website allows you to communicate clearly with your students and their parents – and it is a two way street. Depending on how you create your web presence, you can allow students to make comments, collaborate on tasks or even publish their own content.

It will also save you valuable administration time, as notes and messages for parents are always available, so when a child forgets to bring home a permission slip, or a parent loses the important camp information booklet, it can easily be reprinted without you needing to search through your archives.

In addition, having information for parents accessible online means records of everything are always available for the following year. Of course some communication will need to continue face-to-face and via traditional methods, but the vast majority of day-to-day information can easily be posted online.

3. Sharing

An online presence promotes sharing and collaboration. Not only will your students benefit from this new medium, but parents will appreciate being able to easily see exactly what is being taught, what the expectations are for the students and the schedule of the school term, should you choose to include this. Depending upon how widely you share your website, other teachers may also benefit from viewing the content and materials you share online. Even if your website is private and viewable only by those you choose, it is easier to share with colleagues curriculum information that is already in electronic format – a few clicks and an email with a useful attachment can be sent to anyone, anywhere.

4. Modelling and Scaffolding

What better way to model positive digital citizenship than through active use of online tools. Introducing an online aspect to your teaching will provide teachable moments and the opportunity to directly address many aspects of online safety, such as appropriate online conduct, being aware of the information you reveal about yourself online and issues of copyright and intellectual property. Rather than just telling students about cyber safety, an online presence allows students to practise it every day.
5. Engagement

Students on the whole enjoy working with technology and multimedia materials. Having an online presence truly flattens the classroom’s walls, and brings a world of resources and possibilities into your students’ learning. As you become increasingly confident with your online presence, you will begin to expand your repertoire of skills, and the students will benefit through increased use of technology that is relevant and stimulating. Having an online presence opens up opportunities for students to publish content also, which in turn may increase a sense of ownership of their learning. Students will also be more able to share their work with their family and friends - making their learning rich, real and relevant.


Image used with permission thanks to Langwitches via Flickr; http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/

based on Alec Couros's "The Networked Teacher" http://educationaltechnology.ca/couros/799
So now you know why you need a web presence, how do you make one?

With the advent of Web2.0, it has never been easier for teachers to establish a presence online.

This booklet features three of the many ways teachers and others may create a website – using Blogs, Wikis and a flash webpage designer called ‘Wix’.

All three allow you to create a website easily and quickly, and with a minimum of computer skill. However, each of them are best used for different purposes, so it is important to be clear as to what your online presence’ aim is. Below you will find a brief rundown of these three tools, and a guide to assist you in making a decision about which one best meets your current needs.

1. Blogs - A blog (a blend of the term web log) is a type of website or part of a website. Blogs are usually maintained by an individual with regular entries, which are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. Blog can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. Others may view the blog and post comments, which are moderated by the blog owner.

2. Wikis - A wiki is a website that allows the easy creation and editing of any number of interlinked web pages via a web browser using simple text editing. Wikis are often used to create collaborative wiki websites, and can be locked, where only the creator can make changes, open only by invitation (where specific individuals have been given permission to make changes) or open to the entire internet (anyone can make changes). In most cases, a history allows the owner to see the changes that have occurred, and who has made them.

3. Wix.com is a Flash web design creation site. It enables users to create any kind of web content including Flash websites, widgets, presentations or page flip books with a simple drag and drop interface and publish that content anywhere they want. It has a free version and a premium, paid version. Wix websites are useful for publishing content that will not need to be continually updated – ideal for sharing content and information for student research.
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<th>Type</th>
<th>Blogs</th>
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<td><strong>Providers</strong></td>
<td>edublogs, WordPress</td>
<td>wikispaces, pbwiki</td>
<td>Wix.com</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Communicating on a regular basis. Provides a chronological record of communications. Offers a forum for posting student work, photos and multimedia. Two way communication through comment feature – usually content posted only by owner.</td>
<td>Creates a collaborative site where multiple members may contribute. Linked pages allow the site to grow as large as needed. Provides an online forum for posting and sharing work, as well as for working online on collaborative projects.</td>
<td>Allows teachers or students to create an impressive Flash-based website to share content or publish projects. Opportunities to embed multimedia such as sound files and videos provide a rich experience. An excellent way of delivering and sharing content or presenting learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use When</strong></td>
<td>You want to begin having an online presence to communicate to parents and students regularly.</td>
<td>You wish to provide a collaborative space for your students to publish to as well as a communication medium. You would like to have a web presence that allows the inclusion of other tools such as blogs and wix within the one space.</td>
<td>You wish to build a website for students to access content from, as existing websites are unsuitable. You would like your students to present their work online.</td>
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Blogs are a form of website. They are usually maintained by one or several people, with regular entries that are usually displayed in reverse chronological order. They act as a log of posts, and may contain text, images, videos and links to other sites. Individuals can leave comments on individual posts. These are moderated by the owner of the blog, who gives permission for the comment to appear. This minimizes the chances of ‘spam’ or inappropriate comment postings.

"Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (Art blog), photographs (photoblog), videos (video blogging or vlogging), music (MP3 blog), and audio (podcasting). Microblogging is another type of blogging, featuring very short posts – the most well known microblogging site is Twitter. (Information from Wikipedia).

Blogs can be useful for teachers as a means of communicating with students and parents. Access is available 24/7, meaning students can access homework assignments and key information required at any time. They are also useful for providing a space for students to publish and share their work with others online. The opportunities are endless, and providers such as Edublogs ensure student safety and easy management of accounts.

To explore blogs today:

1. Create your own blog! Go to [http://edublogs.org/signup-0be/](http://edublogs.org/signup-0be/) and complete the details.
   
   If you are not ready for your own blog, you can play in the ‘sandpit’ as explained below:

2. Go to [http://edublogs.org/](http://edublogs.org/)

3. Log the following information:
   
   - Username: resourcelink28
   - Password: catholic

4. Click on Your Dashboard at the top of the page (in the blue border, as above).

5. Start making a new post! Fill in the information as indicated on the proforma. Experiment with adding media such as images, video etc.

6. You’ve created a blog post!
An incredibly flexible tool that allows anyone to create a site that can then be edited and contributed to by others.

The strength in wikis lies in the ability for them to be used as powerful collaboration tools, where content can be shared and added to as individuals see fit.

Wikis can be created to be private also, so that they are locked to editing by anyone except those nominated by the creator. This is a perfect way to create student wikis that you have control over. Another terrific aspect is that all changes are logged, so it is possible to see exactly what was changed, when, and by whom.

To explore Wikis today:

1. Create your own wiki! Go to [http://www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers](http://www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers) and complete the details. If you are not ready for your own wiki, you can play in the ‘sandpit’ as explained below:


3. Log in using the following information:
   - Email: resourcelinkone@gmail.com
   - Password: catholic

4. Use the menu down the side to explore the type of content that may be easily embedded into a wiki.

5. Click the ‘New Page’ button at the top left hand corner of the screen.

6. Give the page a name, & write one or two key words that describe the content in the ‘tag’ space, & click create.

7. Begin adding text, images, etc! Try all of the buttons. Explore widgets. Add a YouTube video or other multimedia.

8. You’ve created a wiki page!
Wix allows anyone to create a very modern, interactive website using drag and drop features – you don’t need to know any code or Flash programming – all the hard work has been done for you, behind the scenes!

This allows you or your students to be as creative as you wish, and gives unlimited possibilities for use as a teaching and learning tool. Teachers can create websites featuring content that they have created if existing websites are rare or at a more complex level than students are ready for. Students can create their own websites, or collaboratively work on a shared site featuring their own work.

Wix hosts the websites for you, and you have the option to embed them in other online portals, such as blogs or wikis. This means you can also use Wix to create simple animations, widgets or games that you can then embed onto your current web presence.

The Wix here: http://www.wix.com/resourcelink28/wix-in-ed has been created to explain Wix a little more>
Please note that the hyphens in the web address should be replaced by underscores ( _ ) when entering into the address bar. Take some time to view the video and go to some of the other Wix site examples.

To explore Wix today:

1. Go to http://www.wix.com/ and click on the log in/sign up button and complete the form as required.

2. If you would rather play in the Wix ‘sandpit’, log in using the following information:
   - Email: resourcelinkone@gmail.com
   - Password: catholic

3. Explore the different templates and designs available.

4. Use the menu down the side to explore the type of content you can add into a Wix.

5. Experiment by adding images, videos or music. Be mindful of copyright – unless it is your own content, only use public domain, free for educational use or Creative Commons content and attribute the source!

6. You’ve created a Wix website!