

www.CILC.org

A Website That Helps Educators Move From Novice to 'Nowledgeable

Kimberly Tyson

Novice: a person new to a field or activity; a beginner

Knowledgeable: someone with specialized information and experience relating to a particular area

INTRODUCTION

When training teachers, media specialists, technology coordinators, and others new to videoconferencing, we desire to move them quickly and efficiently from being *novices* to *knowledgeable* professionals who are informed about the wealth of possibilities and educational opportunities available



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through videoconferencing. It can often seem overwhelming and time consuming for novice users to find and explore the many avenues of opportunities available. Many new users, excited about videoconferencing possibilities, initially desire to put the technology to work by connecting students to content providers, connecting teachers to professional development opportunities, and exploring collaborative projects across the nation and the globe. When training those new to videoconferencing, I quickly point them to www.CILC.org, a powerful Website and asset for videoconferencing users. Discovering the many and varied opportunities found on the Website helps novices make the transition to knowledgeable users occur much more quickly.

The Website—which enables schools and other groups to employ videoconferencing as a powerful instructional tool—is an online resource hosted by the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration (CILC), a not-for-profit organization that provides videoconferencing services and programs. This article highlights membership features, content, tools and resources, and services found at the www.CILC.org Website (see Figure 1) and available to those whose skills range from novice to knowledgeable.



Figure 1. Screen shot of the www.CILC.org home page.

FREE MEMBERSHIP

Membership is not required to explore the CILC Website, but it helps users take full advantage of the resources available. There are three levels of free membership: individual, site, and content provider.

Customization is a key element for the individual member. For example, a middle school teacher in California may submit preferences to receive weekly notification of new programs or special events specifically suited to enhance course content or a specific age level—all automatically converted to Pacific Time Zone. Members can also post to the Collaboration Center—a virtual clearinghouse of sorts—where students and teachers desiring to collaborate with others post descriptions of their classroom or content projects in hopes of find-

ing connections to others of similar interest.

Value-added benefits are available to those who sign up for a site membership. Videoconferencing site coordinators or managers enjoy time-saving additional benefits, such as the ability to request content and professional development programs through the Website. Additional, job-embedded features include site management tools and program confirmations. Gloria LeMaster, the media director at Alexandria-Monroe High School in Indiana, uses these features frequently. She recently shared that she “sends out a monthly listing of the upcoming events and [finds it] easy to search for programs using the calendar feature, copies and pastes the ones she feels are appropriate

into a word document and e-mails it to faculty."

Content provider membership is available to organizations offering programs through videoconferencing. These members have all the benefits of the previously mentioned user categories, as well as the ability to post programs free, thus gaining national and international visibility. Administrative tools, time zone converters, evaluation feedback, and more are available to this member group. Kara Centofante, responsible for Artistic Outreach at the Indiana Repertory Theatre, notes the value of the content provider membership as "an irreplaceable marketing tool. Teachers and coordinators from all over the United States have come to us for programming via the website!"

Other content providers appreciate benefits for their clients. Nora McGrath, the education director for Aquatic Research Interactive, notes that the Website "has made scheduling easier for us and our clients; especially since we can now have our out-of-network sites use it as well." In regard to management features, McGrath adds that "being able to view the status of all program requests directly on the Website and cancel them if we need to is an added bonus."

Clearly, free membership provides benefits for *all* users—individuals, sites, and content providers.

CONTENT PROVIDERS

Content providers offer a wide range of educational programs and often provide the hook to initially interest teachers and students alike. The CILC Website serves as a content destination well known among educators for its comprehensive program listings. Content providers include hospitals, libraries, universities, museums, businesses, and more.

Programs are offered through partnerships with over 100 content providers who have a reputation for delivering meaning-

ful, educational, standards-based content. Educators have access to hundreds of content offerings that range from the arts to science to healthcare. Each program is accompanied by additional instructional resource materials that include student learning objectives, related vocabulary words and definitions, national and state standards addressed by the program, pre- and postprogram activities, and supplemental resources such as related Websites or reference books.

At the CILC.org Website, members can search the database for over 600 unique offerings available through videoconferencing. Novices quickly become adept at searching for content programs by key words. Knowledgeable users understand that narrowing the search by grade level, dates, or content providers yields more specific results. Members may also request weekly e-mail updates that feature all new programs *or* only those programs that match their specific preferences. Linda McDonald, an instructional technology facilitator in the Katy Independent School District in Texas, regularly uses this feature. She recently called "finding CILC's Website a blessing!" McDonald adds that the Website has "provided a great way to look for programming that matches our curriculum objectives, very specific to Katy, Texas." She also enjoys the "update that keeps [her] up to date on new programs that suit [her] campus needs."

In addition to regularly scheduled programs, many providers customize their content programs as well as deliver them on a date and time that works for educators. Christian Monroe, the Oakcrest (New Jersey) High School Distance Learning Coordinator, has scheduled numerous customized programs with the help of CILC staff. Christian recently remarked that "CILC [staff] were wonderful people to work with, and made it their responsibility to try to accommodate every request I made. If they didn't have a certain program, they didn't just say, 'Sorry.' They

looked into the topic carefully and asked their providers if they could create something for us." So, not only is the Website helpful for educators but, in addition, the face behind the Website—CILC staff—is helpful as well.

Finally, the *content rating system* (see Figure 2) is a valuable feature that appears on content search pages. The rating system is easy to use and simple to interpret—a plus when rating systems can sometimes be more confusing than enlightening! A program that appears with a star next to the title indicates that it has been rated exceptional by educators while a "thumbs up" sign indicates that at least 75% or more of educators who viewed the program would recommend it to others (see Figure 3). Educators appreciate having the ability to provide program feedback through the rating system. Content providers, on the other

hand, enjoy the feedback loop it provides them. Millicent Wright, manager of Artistic Outreach at the Indiana Repertory Theatre, put it this way. "Online evaluations have allowed us to keep track of much needed data, to make improvements to our programs and render better customer service." In a time of budget constraints, this simple rating system helps content providers improve programs while educators can stretch their content dollars and make wise decisions based on others' valuable feedback.

TOOLS AND RESOURCES

Novices to videoconferencing easily get hooked on the numerous educational opportunities for students through access to varied content offerings. Upon becoming more skilled and knowledgeable, they soon begin to realize that videoconferencing

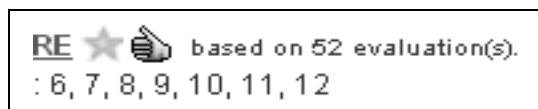


Figure 2. The star and "thumbs up" rating system.

Provider: COSI Toledo

Title: Simple Machines ★ based on 1 evaluation(s).

Audience: *Education:* Grade(s): 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, Curriculum Director, Gifted and Talented Coordinator, Title One Coordinator, Teacher, Paraprofessional, Parent, *Public Library:* Library Patrons, Adult, Business

Description: **Simple Machines** make-work easier by using Mechanical Advantage. This session uses levers, pulleys, and inclined planes to show how.

Program Availability: By Request/On Demand ONLY

Provider: Discovery Center of Springfield

Title: SIMPLY MARVELOUS MACHINES ★ based on 10 evaluation(s).

Audience: *Education:* Grade(s): 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, Curriculum Director, Gifted and Talented Coordinator, Title One Coordinator, Teacher, Paraprofessional, Parent, *Public Library:* Library Patrons

Description: Take your students on an interactive **electronic field trip** into the world of **Simply Marvelous Machines**. This hands-on program contains student activities working with the 6 major types of simple machines: levers, pulleys, wheels & axles and gears, wedges, screws and inclined planes. It is taught by an aerospace engineer and certified science educator. The course is aligned with the National Science Standards. A supply kit of manipulatives will be shipped to your classroom 2 weeks prior to the videoconferencing adventure. Included in the kit are the videoconferencing curriculum, pre-lab and post-lab activities, supplies necessary to perform the interactives, and links to websites.

Program Availability: By Request/On Demand ONLY

Figure 3. Screen shot of several Content Programs and their ratings.

ing provides a nearly perfect vehicle for making meaningful, educational collaborations possible, whether working with another group of students across the state, nation, or around the world. Finding collaborative partners can prove to be the more difficult piece of the equation.

The online Collaboration Center, found under “Tools and Resources” on the home page, is one of the key enhancements to the retooled CILC.org. A powerful, free tool available to members, the Collaboration Center creates a unique opportunity for educators and other videoconferencing users to create innovative partnerships to enhance learning. Teachers, site coordinators, or administrators can log on to the Collaboration Center to search postings or to post a request. Knowledgeable users will likely choose to limit their search by using a variety of delimiters, which may include: target audience such as education, library, business/community, or healthcare partners; time frame of collaboration; and key content words.

New collaborative opportunities appear often. In a recent week, collaboration postings were made from educators in Indiana, Texas, New York, and China. Really interested in collaborating but don’t have the time to keep abreast of new postings? CILC thought of that, too. Registered users may create a MyCILC.org Member Profile and request a weekly e-mail that highlights all new collaboration requests or just those requests that match your specific preferences.

Other beneficial resources are also found at the CILC.org Website. An online Resource Directory, tips for users, and an E-newsletter provide valuable tools for becoming more knowledgeable about videoconferencing. The Resource Directory of experts allows users to search online for expert resources on myriad topics, and then contact them via the Website. In addition, novices can take the fast track to look like a “pro” by downloading free tips for everything from room set-up to tips for

maximizing interactivity during a videoconference.

Finally, CILC publishes a quarterly E-newsletter delivered to your Inbox—another option in a member’s profile. The newsletters provide timely information of interest to educators. Recent CILC newsletters have included spotlights featuring several content providers, ideas on how to achieve a school improvement makeover, information about the upcoming Keystone Conference in Indianapolis, and school and community collaborative Vista projects.

SERVICES

Many novice users and organizations need guidance in order to maximize the value of videoconferencing. Knowledgeable individuals have learned that successful videoconferencing equals more than technology and equipment. For example, when used to its full potential, videoconferencing content serves as an effective educational tool that supports classroom curriculum and state standards. Through training, workshops, and consulting, CILC staff works with those in leadership positions and school teams to help them envision the possibilities and align videoconferencing applications with their organization’s mission, goals, and beliefs. Whether your staff is made up of novices, knowledgeable users, or anywhere in between, CILC workshops are designed to help educators implement and integrate videoconferencing.

Knowledgeable videoconferencing educators, particularly those in leadership positions, often serve as a resource and facilitator for teachers, curriculum directors, and professional development directors. Being aware of the variety of professional development opportunities available through videoconferencing is one way to become a valuable resource.

Professional development opportunities, listed under *Services* on the CILC.org

home page, round out the diverse content that is available through CILC. They seek to provide experts in all content areas whose workshops focus on instructional best practices. A recently featured national expert, Ruby Payne—author of *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*—reached over 400 educators from across the United States through a CILC-sponsored workshop series.

To keep current on new professional development offerings, members may access and download a current calendar of professional development opportunities and register for workshops and credit courses offered through CILC. These opportunities provide teachers with ongoing professional development and access to experts in various content areas fields with much less expense and hassle! They also offer leadership and lifelong learning venues for administrators, parents, and the community.

Another educational focus that has moved to the forefront is that of students exploring authentic community issues. Known as the CILC Vistas program, Vistas focus on creating vital community partnerships and collaboration between students, schools, public and government entities, and community organizations to focus on creating solutions to a community issue. Knowledgeable users involve the various participants by enabling them to communicate through videoconferencing and the Internet to conduct research, design solutions, critique recommendations, and

present reports. Each Vista involves training and consulting services in problem-based learning instructional strategies, authentic learning, service learning initiatives, and technology applications. A teacher involved in a Vista project remarked that “the most significant aspect [of the project] is that students were involved in the community and engaged with a variety of people and experts.” From a student perspective, learning through the Vista program is a “more hands-on approach.”

Whether your school or organization needs assistance in integrating videoconferencing to maximize its’ many possibilities, desires to take advantage of professional development opportunities, or chooses to have a hands-on student and community-based Vistas program, CILC staff competently provides it all.

SUMMARY

Videoconferencing is moving toward becoming universally accepted as a worthy instructional investment to advance standards-based learning and educational opportunities. Educators who have embraced videoconferencing are actively moving novices to become knowledgeable individuals and advocates for the many and diverse learning opportunities available for children and teachers. The www.CILC.org Website appears to be one simple and straightforward step to help achieve that goal.

“VISTAS FOCUS ON CREATING VITAL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, PUBLIC AND GOVERNMENTAL ENTITIES, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TO FOCUS ON CREATING SOLUTIONS TO A COMMUNITY ISSUE.”