

Lambeth Education's One Stop SWOP

By Phil Redman

Eight year old Christopher looked up from the cereal box that he was using to make his puppet theatre and pointed out to his teacher that the manufacturer had a website. 'Look Miss, here's their website, www dot kelloggs dot com', he read. 'Miss, can **we** have a website?'

That's a good question, and one that many teachers and children are asking. Everybody seems to be talking about the Internet nowadays with website addresses appearing everywhere. Now, with all the fantastic new ICT equipment going into schools connecting them to the Internet and the National Grid for Learning (NGfL), schools are naturally keen to get themselves on the web.

As Andrew Wesby, Head of Telferscot Primary School in Balham South London says, 'Schools want websites to promote their school, like a virtual visit. It helps to create pride in the school when children see theirs and others work on "Our School's Site".'

Many teachers **and** ICT co-ordinators are capable of producing and publishing a small website, but keeping it fresh, alive and interesting is a challenge to an already stretched and busy teacher. There is also the question of what should go on the site. Should schools decide this for themselves, or should they follow their local authority guidelines?

In Lambeth, we have tried to meet these challenges. In 1995, Lambeth Education began an ambitious, innovative project, Brixton Connections, connecting fifteen primary schools to the Internet with a single computer each and a dial-up account. Each school was given some space on the web and free courses were run to train the teachers in the intricacies of web publishing. With this support, about fifty percent of the participating schools developed their own website.

When the project was extended in 1997, a one hundred percent target was set. More training courses and expert support was provided and each school given a copy of Front Page (web publishing software) by Microsoft UK. Further, a web design consultancy, at the time called EdWeb - now called NetSetGo, was employed to spend a day in each school to help with design, development and training.

The lesson learnt from this project, was that schools need help, advice and support if they are to produce an interesting, worthwhile and vibrant website. **As Andrew Wesby says, 'Having professionals available helps with putting our ideas into a practical form that is technologically feasible.'**

Now, with each school getting Internet access, a domain name, **e-mail** and web space through the NGfL, Lambeth is looking to move forward from Brixton Connections to Lambeth Connections **to** take the lead once again. Our aim is for **all** of our schools to have an up-to-date, well designed and well maintained website.

Enter the Schools Web Online Project - SWOP, a partnership with local and national business, professional web designers and the local education authority.

Each school website will be developed through sponsorship which will provide the school with several days of support from the professionals. This will include training in the use of web publishing software

and the principles of web design. They will get invaluable assistance in keeping their site relevant and up-to-date, and receive on-going support. We want SWOP to help schools make a significant contribution to the National Grid. Telferscot School is keen to play their part in this. Wesby says, 'We are looking forward to playing our small part on the National Grid. This will give our small school in Balham a global perspective. We can reach the world and the world can reach us.'

The children are perhaps the keenest to take part, and have their own views on the technology. On seeing Telferscot's burgeoning site, five-year-old Nancy exclaimed, 'Look! There's our school in the computer.' Nine-year-old Lowell said, 'It's nice to see what the school looks like. To show how good the school is.' While his classmate Micah agreed, 'It shows what good work we do at the school. Yeah, it's good to say how the school works and to see the school working.' The children want to see more pictures of the school on the site, more display work and naturally, more pictures of themselves.

Sponsoring a school website will give the sponsor a good opportunity to participate in the NGfL project and to foster links with the local community. (Lambeth Connections is an NGfL Community Grid.) Sponsors will also get to advertise themselves on the Internet and to gain from publicity from the interest generated by this innovative project. Each sponsored website will contain an appropriate advertising banner along with details about the sponsor's business. Sponsors will also be listed on the SWOP homepage. The cost of sponsorship will start at just £1350 for a calendar year. We consider this a small price to pay when all the benefits are considered.

The schools will also make a small financial contribution to the project and make a commitment to maintain their site.

Bearing in mind that the key objective is for each school to produce a website that makes a real contribution to the National Grid, the schools and designers will work together to design the right website for the school. To answer our earlier question, there will be no dictates on what should go on the site. However, a small working group of teachers, LEA staff and web designers, have put together a suggested structure in a guideline document.

Already, some school websites are under construction through a small SWOP pilot. Andrew Wesby's school in Balham is one of them. Potential sponsors too are showing an interest. RM and Microsoft have already agreed in principle to sponsor some schools. The main SWOP website is being developed and can be visited at www.lambeth-connections.org.uk/swop.html. Early in the new millennium, more potential sponsors will be contacted and schools signed up as Lambeth once again leads the way with an innovative Internet project. So finally, to answer Christopher's question - 'Yes, you **can** have a website!'

Phil Redman - Advisory Teacher ICT - Lambeth LEA - February 2000

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Interested in becoming a sponsor? Contact Phil Redman -Phone: 020 7926 9855, e-mail: phil@rmpc.co.uk