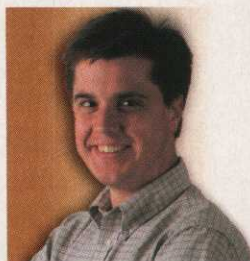


Solve Problems the Web Way

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR.



JUST-IN-TIME
LEARNING ON THE
WEB WILL
REVOLUTIONIZE
THE WAY
SUPERINTENDENTS
SOLVE THEIR TURF
PROBLEMS

“**W**hat the heck are you going to do with a history degree?” I heard that question often as I studied at the College of

Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. The best thing about earning that history degree (and a master’s degree in post-war modern German history — go figure) wasn’t the facts I learned, as my eventual shift to journalism proved. I may have escaped Indiana University with my advanced degree just before they kicked me out, but I took away learning skills that still serve me well today.

The best classes, of course, consisted of a free exchange of ideas. The discussions challenged us to solve problems creatively through spirited debate. That’s why the potential of the Web as an educational tool excites me.

The estimated population of online users in the United States is between 65 million and 101 million people, depending on who’s counting. International Data Corp. has predicted that number may grow to as high as 180 million by 2003. The Web is growing at a startlingly fast pace, and those who harness its educational potential will be the people who move ahead the fastest.

Al Turgeon, professor of turfgrass management at Penn State University, shares my excitement. As one of the founding members of Penn State’s Web-based World Campus, a distance learning program that includes turfgrass management (www.worldcampus.psu.edu/publications/turfgrass/), Turgeon is in awe at the potential of the Web to reach turfgrass students around the globe.

“To bring people from different cultures together and enrich the knowledge base of the turfgrass industry feels great,” Turgeon says. “It will enable me — and others like me — to extend our reach.”

Let’s not limit ourselves to the idea that the Web is just for distance learners, though. Its graphic and immediate feedback capabilities also serve to supplement classroom learning. Turgeon and his fellow professors often send students to Web sites to do research and communicate with other students in the class.

That, of course, is the key to using the

Web as an effective learning tool: It allows the instantaneous, free exchange of ideas so critical to learning.

Imagine a university chat room devoted strictly to turfgrass managers. The Web can give you access to the best turfgrass experts across the country and innovative students who may have a new perspective on your problems.

In Turgeon’s classes, Web-based bulletin boards allow students collaborating on projects to exchange ideas more easily. For example, Turgeon will give one student in a group of five a problem to solve. When the student has a solution to the problem, he or she posts it on the Web for constructive criticism from his team members. Then the group works out a solution as a result of the exchange.

With the Web, you can access that information today, when it will help you. In the past, information might not reach you until it was too late. The instantaneous exchange of ideas propels innovation, and that’s why the Web is so important.

The next step will be just-in-time learning, when superintendents will access a database of case studies with both solutions — and failures — built in from a Web site set up for that purpose. In fact, Turgeon is working on compiling such a database now.

Then a superintendent will have the capability to hyperlink to educational sites, which will explain the scientific basis behind the solutions.

Penn State’s World Campus currently hosts students from North America, but Turgeon foresees a time when students from around the world take his Introduction to Turfgrass class online. He can’t wait for the day.

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