

## Making your website more interactive

The best websites are the ones with the most interactive features. The use of blogs, polls, forums, ratings and feedback on a website can help the site become more of a reflection of the people who use it, which, in turn, gives the users a reason to come back again and again to help shape the website.

Interactive sites encourage visitors to communicate through comments or opinion polls. It's one way to give patrons a greater voice in the direction of your school district.

And, even more important, it's a way for community members to feel invested in their schools. Patrons who leave comments and then see responses to those comments can't help but feel more connected to their schools.

But how can you encourage interactivity? How can you build the district's online community?

Internet experts say it takes time to transform a static website to one that encourages two-way communication. But as communities slowly build, momentum eventually takes over.

It's getting those first few comments or first responses to an online opinion poll that's tough.

- ➔ The first step is to make it clear just how visitors can communicate with the district. This could mean incorporating a message board for patron questions or comments or adding a blog that has clearly-marked spaces for reader comments. Online polls are also popular, and easy, requiring little effort from site visitors. The district needs to actively seek comments. This means asking readers a simple "what do you think?" at the end of a blog post.
- ➔ Opinion Polls: Polls can help create user interest and add a medium level of interactivity to your website. Opinion polls are good to use as a survey tool and help gauge the mood of your users. The key factor in making opinion polls a success is that they should be updated regularly and the results of previous opinion polls should be published for the readers to see.
- ➔ Another great device for creating an interactive website is linking to educational games for students. There are numerous sites that provide great opportunities for students to continue learning outside the classroom.
- ➔ And don't forget the interactive use teacher web pages can give their students. From providing homework assignments to podcasts of classroom projects, teacher-generated web pages can be a great learning tool and interactive web experience for students and parents. An extra added benefit of such pages can come from encouraging community visitors to visit teacher web pages to see how and what students are doing in the classroom.
- ➔ The U.S. Department of Education provides an amazing assortment of interactive learning and teaching tools on its website.

For students and teachers link to: <http://www.free.ed.gov/>

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- ➔ The Jefferson County (TN) Schools Interactive Website for Grades Pre-K through 12 is a great example of what can be done with interactivity: <http://je-schools.net/tutorials/interactive.htm>.
- ➔ Here are some good interactive sites for teachers:
  - The Teachers' Guide:  
<http://www.theteachersguide.com/interactivesites.html>
  - Education World:  
<http://www.education-world.com/awards/past/topics/internet.shtml>
  - Mike Mountain Horse Elementary School (Lethbridge, AB) website:  
<http://mmh.lethsd.ab.ca/games/top100.htm>

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