

Crossbow Web and Education

Case study: the Rye Presbyterian Nursery School

With Crossbow Web from Crossbow Media the Rye Presbyterian Nursery School has been able to bring the classrooms to the parents. Crossbow's technology makes it easy for teachers to maintain secure class websites that the parents access via the Internet.

29 Websites: no Webmaster required In addition to the twenty-nine class websites that the teachers are able to maintain themselves; the school uses Crossbow to maintain their main site, which can be seen at <http://www.rpnskids.org>. The people who maintain the RPNS site had never put anything up on a website themselves in their lives before September of 2004. Now, the web is becoming more central to the school's communications. For example, RPNS is now maintaining the school's calendar entirely online in Crossbow. Within a few months, and without the help of an outside web design agency to maintain the site, RPNS's website is already admired by many who have seen it for both its professional look and the rich, current content that Crossbow is enabling the staff to maintain. RPNS is now maintaining a living, changing website in a way that was too cumbersome and expensive to consider before. The school is now able to take full advantage of the web for the benefit of students, parents, teachers and prospective new members of the RPNS family. The educational process is about learning, teaching and communicating. Crossbow is helping to make that process better. Cheryl Flood, Director of RPNS, states, "I cannot believe how empowered I feel to be able to design and implement a state of the art website that represents the work we do with young children in the most professional way. The ideas that we began with are constantly generating new possibilities in communication and Crossbow has enabling us to realize our greatest potential."

Tools to empower busy professionals Crossbow is pushing the bounds of what has traditionally been called Web Content Management. Crossbow Web is designed to empower non-technical people to create, post and maintain the information, usually called "content" in web parlance, that they want to share with others via the most widely understood and ubiquitous medium in use today – the web browser. Crossbow makes it easy for the administration and teachers to do things like posting new information online in new web pages, maintain photo galleries and make PowerPoint presentations available online. Teachers can do all these things without ever having to install an application, backup a file or know anything about programming a web page. Crossbow makes it easy to compose newsletters then post them on the website and email them out to a mailing list. Crossbow takes care of all the technical details involved so that busy teachers have only to think about the information they want to convey, while leaving the technical details of managing a website to

the Crossbow system. Mrs. Flood further states, "At a time when communication with parents has become so important, Crossbow has allowed us to be on the cutting edge of informing parents what and how their children are learning in the classroom. With minimal training, my teachers and I are able to present continuous, timely documentation of children's work and relevant up to date information about our program."

Crossbow Web itself is actually accessed entirely through the web browser, over the network. No application is ever installed. Consequently, no application ever needs to be maintained or upgraded and, if you have the proper permissions, you can do your work from any network-attached computer. With Crossbow, it doesn't have to matter where you are or what computer you're on. This can be very helpful for a busy teacher or administrator that fits in work when and where she can, be it in the classroom, in her office or at home. Crossbow automatically keeps backups of everything the teacher ever does to her website – she can't lose anything. When she saves a change to a Crossbow managed page, the previous page is backed up and archived. If she makes a mistake and wants to restore any previous version of a page, she can.

With a few clicks, administrators and teachers can upload their PowerPoint presentations to their web pages. Crossbow uploads the slides and creates a new "Album" for the presentation. No designing or HTML necessary – Crossbow just takes care of it. And the album is quite attractive and usable with a list of thumbnails (small pictures of the slides) down the right and a large version of the current slide on the left. Crossbow handles photos (or any digital image) the same way.

Graphics & the web Crossbow is smart about graphics and the web too. When you upload an image, Crossbow resizes it to a size appropriate for a web page, again, all by itself, automatically. So, all you have to think about is that you want to use a given photo in a webpage and then upload it. If you took the photo with your digital camera, it's probably over a megabyte in size – much too big to be practical on a web page (it would take too long to load when someone viewed the page containing the graphic because of its size). Crossbow uploads the picture, saves it and makes web-sized copies for you to use on your page.

Easy Content Creation – focus on communication not HTML Creating new pages, adding or editing existing pages with Crossbow is roughly the same as using Microsoft Word. You add and format text, add pictures and tables via this intuitive interface then either save your work as "completed and ready to be published" or as a work in progress – that is "save my work, but don't publish this to the live website yet." If you are done with a page, you can tell Crossbow to publish it now, or to publish it at some future time and date.

So, back to the School; at RPNS, in addition to managing the main public website, the teachers and administrators are using Crossbow to maintain websites for every class. Class websites are accessible only to the parents of children in that class via Crossbow's SecureLive secure login. The websites allow teachers to document for parents what is going on in the classroom with their children with photos, text, graphics, and even sounds & video if they like. The teachers also write weekly newsletters with Crossbow's Newsletters tools which the system then both emails out to the parents and posts on their websites in the Newsletters page for their class.

Galleries The teachers use the photo galleries to post albums documenting ongoing work and special events. Crossbow allows the teachers to add both titles and descriptions to each photo in the gallery, allowing them to create visual narratives with the albums.

Calendars Crossbow also makes it easy to maintain class calendars. The calendar function is, again, automatic. The teachers need only to add events (either one-time events or repeating events), Crossbow does the rest. Parents can then consult the calendar to see what's planned for the class or when their conference is scheduled.

Increased efficiency while reducing expenses: Crossbow customers have told us that using Crossbow has reduced the time and expense associated with maintaining their website by as much as 95%. Making a content change can now be done directly by the content owner and takes minutes instead of days.

For those who need it, Crossbow has full editing security, publishing rights and workflow control. Who can edit what and who can publish or who has to give an OK before the system publishes new content can be controlled as finely as required.

For those with more sophisticated needs, Crossbow can accommodate custom scripting, works with databases, movies, sound and Flash animations. Crossbow encourages, and if desired can enforce, good design practices, so users need not worry about maintaining site design consistency – Crossbow takes care of it. By the same token, making a change to the overall look and feel of the site is easy because Crossbow sites naturally have a consistent, professional look and feel even though they can be maintained without professional design help.

Crossbow tools for communication In short, Crossbow is empowering the school to use the web in ways and to an extent that simply wasn't possible before. Crossbow makes the tools that allow the school to do what it does better. If communication is at the heart of what you do, Crossbow will do the same for you too. Why don't you give it a try and see for yourself. We think you'll be thrilled with the results.

“The capabilities that my staff and I have learned through the use of Crossbow Web are beyond our expectations. As educators we are learning to present the information that we know to be vital---what we do in our classrooms and program--- to our parents (and to the public) in a creative, professional manner that we never thought possible. I am indebted to Crossbow and would recommend this tool to any educational setting that would like to enhance their communication systems!” Cheryl Flood