

DUTCHESS BOCES SCS SPOTLIGHT

February 2015

Technology has dramatically changed how we work, learn, and communicate. Change is rapid. To reap the most benefit, a business must dedicate resources to consistently upgrade its technology. At Dutchess BOCES, the Educational Resources Learning Technology staff is responsible for hardware, software, data, and systems like Moodle, Exchange/Email, and Ensemble Video. In addition, they work to ensure that the technology used in the BOCES offices and classrooms is meeting the needs of the agency in the most efficient and cost effective manner. Recently, they completed the first of two significant technology upgrades and the second will be unveiled this spring.

"We have undertaken two major technology projects in the last year," said Mark Stein, Coordinator of Data Services. "The VoIP implementation and redesign of the Dutchess BOCES website both support the agency's efforts to foster collaboration, innovation, and efficiency."

VOIP



VoIP Implementation

"VoIP" (Voice over Internet Protocol) is telephone service through a digital Internet connection. Over the Veteran's Day holiday in November, more than 220 telephones were changed from a traditional telecommunication service to a VoIP provider. Network improvements were completed before the holiday so all of the connections needed would be in place.

The change will save BOCES thousands of dollars because digital technology is less costly than analog systems. The new system will also improve communications both inside and outside the agency.

Before the switch, about half the agency's telephones operated through a traditional carrier and the remainder through VoIP. The difference prevented transferring calls between some buildings, requiring callers to sometimes hang up and redial to speak to another BOCES employee.

"This creates a unified system of communications," said Stein. "It is now easier to support, and to troubleshoot problems. Perhaps most importantly, there is a better user experience." Other benefits include the ability to offer voice mail for teachers at CTI and SPC, improving communication both internally and with students and their families.

Additionally, "directory by voice" is now possible. When you dial ext. 7555 and say the name of the person you would like to contact, you are automatically transferred

to their extension. There is no longer a need to search for telephone numbers.

"Anytime you change technology, there is a learning curve," said Stein. "We offered in-person training and have posted training videos on our website." He reminds employees that the Help Desk is also always available at ext. 3333 if there are any questions.

"This was a real team effort with Rudy Accardi working as the key technician," said Stein. "However, the entire team was needed to physically deploy the new phones and have everything ready to go when the staff returned from the holiday. Thanks to everyone's support, things went very smoothly and we are pleased with the results."



WEBSITE REDESIGN

In recent years, businesses, students, teachers, and the general public have come to rely upon the Internet to gather information and to make decisions about everything from what to include in a research project to making major purchases.

Having an easy-to-use website is key to success and customer satisfaction. About a year ago, Dutchess BOCES formed a committee to focus upon improving the agency's website.

The website has been a key contact point for students, parents and school districts, but the desire was to take it to the next level.

“We really wanted to modernize our site, to freshen it up and make it more appealing to our users,” said Stein. “In addition to aesthetics, we wanted to improve functionality.”

A committee was formed and began planning a redesign. Employees from throughout BOCES were included to be certain all needs were met. Frequent meetings were held to submit a redesign recommendation to the Deputy Superintendent.

“Our new website will have a dynamic updated look, and be organized differently making things easier to find,” said Stein.

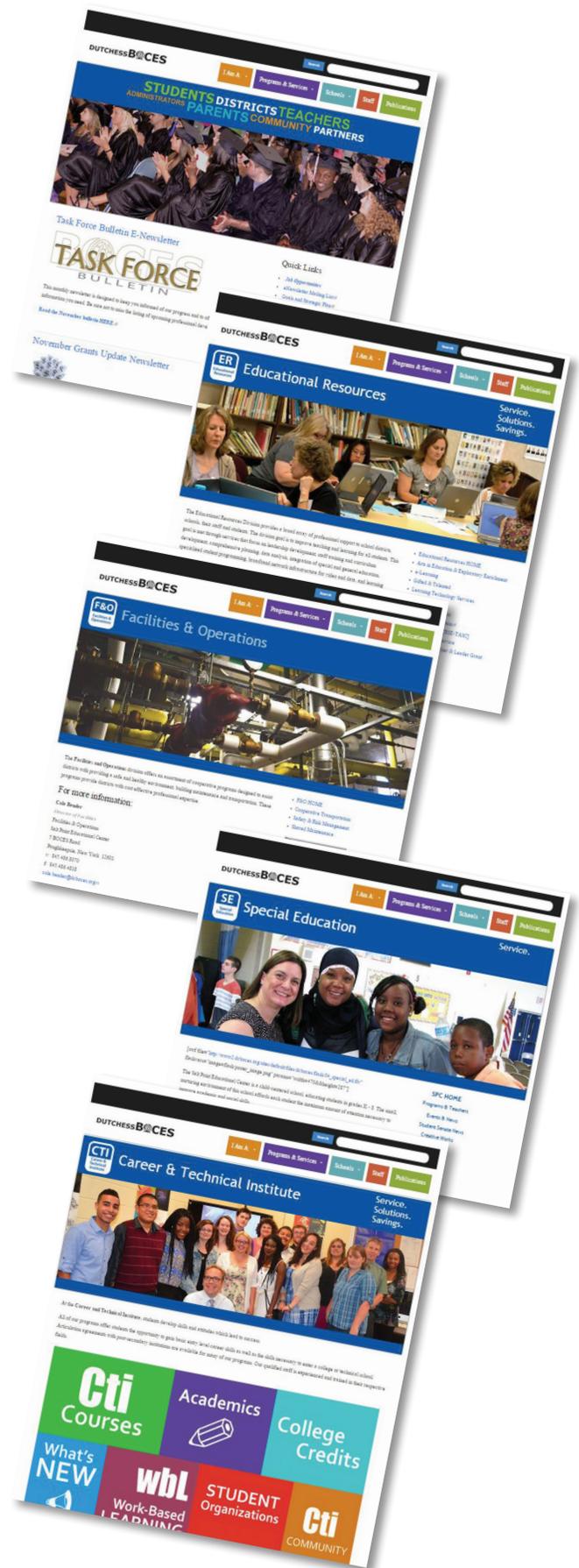
And with a nod toward the old adage a picture is worth a thousand words, the new website will include many more photographs so it can be more appealing to visitors.

“It will be graphic centric,” said Stein. “The Communications and Grants Division has been instrumental in the design process, producing and selecting new photos, to insure that every division and school are represented.”

In addition, each division/area will have authorized, trained designers who will be able to edit their own pages allowing it to stay relevant, changing and up-to-date. “It will be common practice for those closest to the information to be the people who update and manage their information,” said Stein. “We are confident it will be well received visually and operationally.”

Training for those who will be updating their division or school page will be held over the next month so they have time to become comfortable doing so, said Stein.

Keep your eyes out for the official launch of the new website later this spring.



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