Revolutionizing Collaboration and Learning for Teachers and Students

With the widespread adoption of e-mail, the Internet, and hosted applications for creating and sharing documents, the way in which students learn and educators teach is undergoing a dramatic shift. In most educational environments today, students complete projects using desktop software and submit them to instructors as e-mail attachments or hard-copy documents. But with new technologies for creating documents and collaborating online, educators are transforming how they work with students, and students are finding new ways to work with peers. The result: an approach to collaboration and learning that redefines possibilities for teacher-student interactions and gets students more engaged in learning.

Helping drive improved collaboration among students and between students and teachers is increased reliance on Software as a Service (SaaS), also known as “cloud” computing or hosted services. SaaS takes full advantage of connective technologies like e-mail and the Internet and is part of an array of emerging Web 2.0 technologies that are transforming teaching and learning.

Instead of relying only on expensive desktop-based software and in-person classroom meetings, SaaS enables students and educators to work together online using hosted productivity software solutions and the web for real-time collaboration. With Web 2.0 technology, students and instructors can collaborate in small or large groups to comment on research papers and other documents at their convenience.

Bringing Web 2.0 functionality to education

Adobe is offering a set of online services, Adobe Acrobat.com, that revolutionizes communication, productivity, and collaboration among teachers and students—all by using tools available from within popular Internet browsers. From web conferencing and online word processing to file sharing, these new solutions let users create and share documents, communicate in real-time, and simplify working with others from anywhere to facilitate teaching and learning. These new tools are available for free and effectively dissolve technical barriers such as the need to ensure that students and educators have the proper desktop software installed to reliably collaborate with each other.

With Acrobat.com, Adobe offers a set of free, powerful, hosted communication, collaboration, and productivity services that are constantly evolving and being enhanced. Two of these services, Adobe Buzzword™ and Adobe ConnectNow are particularly compelling for teachers and students.
Adobe Buzzword fundamentally changes how educators can teach and how students can complete assignments and work with their peers. Buzzword’s highly intuitive, visual interface enables students to work quickly and enthusiastically on a range of assignments. Not only can students easily create and edit their own documents, but they can also have multiple peers view or edit their documents anywhere, anytime.

It’s perfect for writing reports, term papers, and other materials. Its revolutionary design is built on three key principles. Buzzword provides an intuitive, attractive user interface that outpaces the user experience of other word processors—both desktop and online solutions—and makes it easy to incorporate graphics, tables, and other visually compelling elements into documents. At the same time, it helps students and educators work together more easily, because everyone works on the same document, instead of having to manage different copies and versions. Also, Buzzword allows users to store documents in the cloud for anytime, anywhere access from any computer.

Buzzword looks and behaves like a full-featured word processor, but it operates inside a web browser, so there’s no software installation required. With Buzzword, what students and educators see on screen is what they get in print, with fonts, letter spacing, colors, and graphics all reproduced exactly. Documents are all online in the cloud, so there is no need to e-mail attachments back and forth and students and teachers no longer worry about whether or not they are looking at the current version.

Students can use Buzzword to collaborate with any number of peers, writing, editing, and commenting on documents while controlling access and tracking the edits of each contributor. Because collaboration on presentations and papers is a common activity for students today, Buzzword offers a valuable tool for bringing students together in a virtual environment.

Although there are other online word processing products available, educators are discovering that Buzzword makes it easier to create, edit, and correspond with students online. Buzzword also offers many common features seen in costly word processing applications—and then some.

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Dr. Phil Ice,
Director of Course Design, Research and Development,
American Public University System
Students prefer Buzzword

Dr. Phil Ice, Director of Course Design, Research and Development at the American Public University System (APUS), has great insight into the challenges and trends in education today. Because APUS predominately educates active military personnel, it has long been at the forefront of online learning—an area of expertise for Dr. Ice.

Over the past few years, Dr. Ice has conducted several research studies to look more closely at how students and faculty work best in online environments. For Dr. Ice, Adobe Buzzword offers the ideal combination of widespread accessibility, ease of use, and powerful features to support online learning. “My user research findings clearly show that Adobe Buzzword is the tool of choice for students,” Dr. Ice explains. “They found the Buzzword interface and experience much richer compared to other online authoring tools. Equally important, the overall quality of their work and level of cognitive engagement have improved. Using Buzzword, students were more likely to include graphics, charts, and active links in papers because the authoring process was more fluid and reliable. Students viewed Buzzword more as an intuitive multimedia creation tool, not simply a word processor.”

For a more detailed look at Dr. Ice’s research, please visit www.sloanconsortium.org/node/1243.

For more on his experience with Acrobat.com, including Adobe Buzzword, go to www.adobe.com/go/philice.

A sleek, elegant interface

Like Dr. Ice, many educators are finding that Acrobat.com can facilitate teaching, learning, and completing assignments. As a professor at universities and colleges in Las Vegas and manager and editor of the popular blog lifehack.org, Dustin Wax is always looking for ways to increase efficiency and productivity so he can accomplish more during his busy days.

Wax initially came across Buzzword when he was doing a review of online word processing solutions for lifehack.org and quickly determined that Buzzword was by far the most powerful, easy-to-use tool available. Shortly after evaluating the online tools, Wax adopted Buzzword for his own projects and currently uses the solution for approximately 75% of the writing that he does, including blog posts, academic papers, and interview questions.

“Other online word processors are really just overly simplified versions of desktop publishing software,” says Wax. “Buzzword has an elegant and clean interface. It’s the only solution that took a creative, new approach—and it works so much better. It looks like actual printed pages, which is not only great from a design standpoint but also helps non-tech-savvy users get started faster and create better quality work. Buzzword is both pleasing to use and pleasing to look at.”

For more information about how Wax is using Adobe Buzzword and the benefits he is seeing go to www.adobe.com/go/dustinwax.

Improved teaching and learning

Increasingly, educators are praising Adobe Buzzword for revolutionizing writing instruction for students. With Buzzword, student writing assignments are being returned in record time. Collecting homework happens automatically, and educators can provide in-depth comments and revisions that they never had time for in the past. As a result, the use of Buzzword to enhance teacher and student collaboration is expanding at K-12 schools and colleges and universities.
At West Springfield High School (WSHS) in Massachusetts, Adobe Buzzword is becoming a standard for completing and submitting assignments. After evaluating an early release of Adobe Buzzword, the school’s teachers quickly recognized its benefits. “Buzzword is a revolutionary technology for educators,” says Bob Ballentine, English department chair at WSHS. “There was an ease and accessibility to it—plus, it was just fun to use. I knew it could transform how students and teachers work.”

By next year, all 1,400 students at WSHS will be trained on using Buzzword to complete and submit assignments. Already, the dynamic online authoring tool is used regularly by the school’s English teachers, as well as teachers in several other subjects. Overall, the quality of student writing has improved, largely because students tend to write more and can more easily add accurate endnotes and incorporate graphics into their work. In addition, WSHS students have enthusiastically embraced peer review.

“Peer commenting was usually done half-heartedly,” says Ballentine. “Students typically provided little or no useful feedback to other students—so it felt like a wasted exercise. Using Buzzword for peer-review processes has made the dream of peer editing a reality.”

This is an important achievement because over the years, the merits of peer editing and review have been hotly debated among English teachers. Indeed, the difficulty with it has been its inefficiency. Even in the most ideal classroom setting, it is difficult to monitor and direct quality peer response among groups of students. But with Buzzword, the peer-editing process is part of the document’s history. The peer—or group—editing process is captured in a permanent record, and it makes writing a review a true process-based activity. Plus, it is done outside of class, leaving more time for in-class activities.

For a closer look at the use of Adobe Buzzword at WSHS go to www.adobe.com/go/ballentine.

**Getting everyone on the same page**

In addition to Adobe Buzzword, educators regularly use Adobe ConnectNow to initiate real-time discussions with students, whether it is working with students in traditional school settings or in distance-learning environments. ConnectNow is designed for ad hoc collaborative meetings. It lets students and educators meet live over the web in an instant.
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“Adobe ConnectNow brings an immediacy and clarity to faculty and student interactions,” says Dr. Ice. “Rather than sending questions back and forth through e-mail or trying to talk through complicated questions by phone, we can view information onscreen and interact immediately. With Adobe ConnectNow, I have a hands-on, online tool for reaching students and helping them learn. Using the dynamic web conferencing solution, I can instantly share lessons, see what students are working on, and address student challenges and problems in an easy-to-use, collaborative environment.”

As educators look to transform student learning and reach students with online tools that inspire creativity, collaboration, and higher standards, Acrobat.com, including Adobe Buzzword and Adobe ConnectNow, is becoming a tool of choice. By harnessing innovative SaaS solutions from Adobe, educators and students are discovering more effective, efficient ways to teach and to learn.

The other free services available on Acrobat.com are CreatePDF, Share, and My Files. Go to www.acrobat.com to learn more.