Distance Learning and the Daily News

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The Idea

- Email newsletters can be used to enable continuous learning over the internet
- The idea is to present a set of relevant *options* for learning on a daily basis
- Email is used to minimize the effort required on the part of learners

Influences

- WWW-DEV Email List Server

- DEOS-L Email List Server

- HotWired - http://hotwired.lycos.com

- WebReference - http://www.webreference.com

- Slashdot – http://www.slashdot.com

Experience

- NewsTrolls – http://www.newstrolls.com
  - 1998 – present
  - Daily news links on politics, internet
- MuniMall – http://www.munimall.net
  - http://www.munimall.net/newsletter/news.htm
  - 2000 – present
  - Weekly newsletter on Municipal affairs

The Concept

- MuniMall Newsletter Concept Paper
  - http://www.munimall.net/newsletter/concept.htm
- Purpose:
  - Branding – makes people remember
  - Usage – Draws people to the site
  - Information – keeps readers current
  - Interaction – draws people together
  - Demonstration – show what can be done

Current Work: OLDaily

- OLDaily: http://www.downes.ca
  - Read in sidebar or click on 'News'
- Does it work?
  - In a word: yes
  - Launched May, 2001 – 850 readers in 25 countries (zero advertising)
  - Discussions, referrals, email feedback

OLDaily: Design Issues

- Content selection – what to put in, what to leave out?

- Editorial voice – does the newsletter strive toward objective journalism?

- Community – how can the newsletter move beyond mere information presentation?

- Support – how do I produce OLDaily and also have time for other work?

Content Selection

- Define a subject area and stick to it – avoid being caught up in 'background noise'
- Ignore the calendar – what's important today may not have happened today
- News appears everywhere; don't stick to the mainstream
- Events outside the discipline are important

Editorial Voice

- Then difference between teaching and reporting is that teaching includes an expert *voice* over and above mere presentation
- It is important to develop an overall dynamic *model* of the topic and to place items within that context (e.g., categories)
- Report the good and the bad and say which is which – infuse *values* into presentation

Community

- People are trained to passively receive; creating an active community is hardest
- Place opportunities for dialogue right into the newsletter:
  - [Refer] – send items to your colleagues
  - [Research] – follow up news items
  - [Reflect] – post comments to the discussion

Support

- Creating a newsletter can take up all your time; develop a routine

- You absolutely *must* use or develop a content management system

- The idea is to use the newsletter as your own *research* tool