Datacasting pulls content out of the air

Datacasting takes instructional television (ITV) programs, teacher guides, anything that can be made into a data file, and sends it out via the air, just like a TV signal. The Educational Communications Board (ECB) is working to bring this new service to you.

Imagine the possibilities! With an antenna and the right receiver, you could have ITV videos and audio from the ECB, Web pages, text, photos, and other content datacast directly to your school's computer. Planning ahead and requesting resources in advance would ensure that they were ready and waiting when you needed them.

Datacast equipment

Datacasting is one of the "extras" made possible by the national transition from analog to digital television. A digital signal uses only a portion of the broadcast frequency, so there's room left over to deliver additional content.

Equipment items needed to receive datacasts are a UHF antenna and either a receiver card installed in your school's computer or a plug-in receiver "brick" (see photo). You will need special software and a method for distributing datacast content, such as a school network.

In addition, users have to be connected to the ECB's Datacast Catalog Web site in order to request what they need from the list of instructional resources available for datacast. A computer with a 1.4-gigahertz Pentium 3 processor can store datacast resources if it has at least 100 gigabytes of hard drive space available and 512 megabytes or more of RAM. To facilitate teaching and enhance learning, datacast content can be run on an overhead projector, a computer, or a TV set with the required converter.

Pilot tests

Wisconsin was one of the first seven states in the nation to test datacasting in 2002. As a participant in the PBS Digital Classroom Project, the ECB datacast state and national social studies content to specially equipped classrooms at Madison's Cherokee Middle School. Cherokee teachers who used it said the resources added "depth" to lessons and projects, supplied high quality video, and streamed well over school networks with sufficient capacity.

The ECB plans to conduct more pilot tests of datacasting beginning this fall. In conjunction with regional educational telecommunications area (RETA) directors, ECB staff will select Wisconsin schools to try out the equipment, client software, and datacast resources. For more information, contact Linda Hanson at Lhanson@ecb.state.wi.us or 608/264-9688.

Bringing cutting-edge instructional media and technology to Wisconsin classrooms is part of the ECB mission. Watch Interconnect for future reports on datacasting.