Using Technology to Develop a High School Career Awareness Workshop: The REACH Program

By Kathleen Friery and J. Gordon Nelson

“...The strength [of the program] lies in the fact that we were conveying to students what was happening in their own community instead of simply providing general information about various careers and job opportunities.”

This article describes a collaborative project between business and industry, local school systems and Jacksonville State University. This project resulted in a new education and business/industry partnership called Readiness Education for Achieving Career Heights (REACH). The Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce saw a need for local high school students, especially graduating seniors, to be informed of career opportunities in the county. They approached the department head of educational resources at Jacksonville State University in an effort to develop a strategy to meet this need. Under the co-directorship of Drs. Kathleen Friery and Marvin Jenkins, professors in the counselor education program, a team was assembled to develop workshop materials and procedures to be presented to local high school students. A grant was received by the local County Chamber of Commerce to support the REACH program. We share the development of this project with the perspective that it will be helpful to those who would engage in similar planning.

Participants in the REACH project made numerous visits to local businesses and industries to gather career information, make videos and take pictures to get an overall impression of every facet of the industry. This information was used to create multimedia PowerPoint presentations, a website with an online newsletter and a career informational CD using Macromedia Director.

REACH participants presented to all seniors in ten area high schools. Another presentation was prepared for all eighth grade students. Technology was used in these presentations to provide a workshop with interactive activities and a variety of class activities and formats. The result was a workshop that was informative, exciting and well received. Evaluations of the presentations were excellent.

The Project

Participants

The REACH staff consisted of two co-directors, a technology coordinator and six graduate assistants. Over 6,000 students participated in the workshops over a period of three years. Seniors from ten area schools were involved in the workshops every year. These presentations were made to small classes to allow for interaction with the students. Presentations were also made to eighth and tenth grade students on special career days.

Materials

A logo was created to serve as a focal point for the project. It consisted of the acronym: REACH (Readiness Education for Achieving Career Heights). This further led into metaphors of mountains (goals) and mountain climbing (the
effort and planning to achieve goals), which was useful in PowerPoint presentations and graphics in the brochure.

Information was gathered by site visits to the various companies by the co-directors and graduate assistants. During these visits, digital pictures were taken and activities were recorded with a video camera. The graduate assistant accompanied the team to help with the photography. Pictures taken with the digital and video cameras were later entered into PowerPoint and CD presentations. These pictures were also used on a website that was developed with links to all businesses featured.

Brochures were developed with Microsoft Word and sent to a local printer for professional printing. The information in the brochures consisted of general information and how to access the website for more up-to-date information.

**Group activities**

Group activities were developed using age appropriate and motivational activities for a one-hour presentation. These activities were placed between the multimedia presentations to provide variety.

The first group activity was “Glasses: We all see things differently.” The students were given extra high-powered glasses purchased at a local dollar store and asked to read from a brochure. Students had difficulty reading, but the presenter (“eye doctor”) insisted that the glasses were good because “she wore them and that they had always worked for her.” The objective was to caution the student not to “take someone else’s glasses” to make a career choice since they each already have their own glasses (perspective).

The second group activity was “Counting the Fs: Looking for the details.” Students were given the following sentence and asked to count quickly the number of “Fs” in it within five seconds. “Finished files are the result of years of scientific study combined with the experience of many years.” They were then asked, “How many “Fs” are there?” Although there are six “Fs,” most people miss the “Fs” in the “of” words. The objective of this activity was to be aware of the small details when considering your career choice.

The third group activity was “The Juggling Activity: Life can become complex.” A student volunteer was asked to keep bouncing a foam ball representing a job in the air. Then the presenter added additional foam balls representing spouse, children, hobbies and so on, one at a time to provide a challenging juggling act. The objective was to become more aware of how complex life becomes in addition to your career. “Balancing” life can become extremely difficult.

**Multimedia PowerPoint presentations**

Multimedia PowerPoint presentations were developed using sounds and pictures taken from the web or CDs. Sounds taken from the web were collected in “wav” format by right clicking over the sound, using “save target as” to save to the desktop, and embedding the sound in “slide transition” by skipping the canned sounds, going to “other sound.” Embedding the sound saved the trouble of placing the sound on the desktop when using the “inserting” command. On one occasion, however, using of the “Play CD audio track” in the “Insert > Movies and Sounds” was used. Music was extracted from CDs using Sound Forge from Sonic Foundry. This eliminated the 60 second restrictions using the standard Microsoft Sound Recorder in “Accessories.” During the PowerPoint presentations, the sound was transmitted through a Bose Wave Machine.

Pictures were taken from Corel’s One Million Clipart & Pictures disk or from the web. Pictures taken from the web were mostly from “Google > Images” tab. Thumbnails were clicked until the real picture emerged, which was then copied and pasted onto the PowerPoint slide.

The first PowerPoint presentation was “The REACH Program.” The theme of the presentation focused on mountain climbers, with the analogy that different mountains were like different careers; therefore, choosing a career was like choosing a mountain to conquer. Examples of different careers were shown ending with different mountains and the encouragement to choose a mountain (career) and then “reach” for the goal (the REACH program would help). The music came from the movie soundtrack Rudy, and was timed with the slides by embedding it in the “transitions” command. Many viewers thought it was an emotionally moving experience.

The second PowerPoint presentation was “Calhoun County.” The theme of the presentation focused on the various business opportunities and the benefits of living in Calhoun County. Examples of historic sites, businesses, activities and the various high schools were shown. The music came from the movie soundtrack of First Knight. A slow section was cut from the middle of the soundtrack using Sound Forge. This was timed to the slide presentation by embedding it in the “transitions” command.

The third PowerPoint presentation focused on a local division of the Parker-Hannifin (PH) Company. The theme of the presentation focused on history and values of the PH Company with old historical pictures of the founder, the company, the troubled years, the growth years and current projects (e.g., making dinosaurs for movies). A sub-theme of the presentation was celebrating the persistence of the founder, Arthur L. Parker, “who never gave up,” a valuable lesson for the students ready to start a career. The music came from the movie soundtrack of Gladiator was timed to the slide presentation by embedding it in the “transitions” command.

**CD-ROM and Website**

The CD-ROM and Website presentation were developed using Macromedia Director. The CD consisted of a tab (columns) by button (rows) design for easy access to all parts of the program. The contents include pictures and videos of businesses and schools, and a video introductory statement about the REACH program by the co-directors, Drs. Friery and Jenkins. Pictures and videos were obtained through on-