

Video Education Australia

www.vea.com.au

September 2001

Video Education Australia makes and distributes educational video multimedia for educational institutions, government bodies, private businesses and home viewers.

The business was founded in 1976 and has a head office in Bendigo with film and video production in Fitzroy, Melbourne. The company employs 36 people.

We talked to Judy Sisson at the head office in Bendigo.

Who are your customers?

They are mainly educational institutions and government bodies, but we sell videos to everybody... individuals and organisations of all sizes in Australia, New Zealand and beyond.

How do they benefit from your service?

We make and distribute our own educational materials as well as distribute on behalf of other producers, so we can offer good teaching tools and educational support tools covering all subject matter.

We have a very comprehensive range and we are more innovative in production and marketing than our competitors.

How have you been successful?

Good customer service, excellence in production, research and the quality of our staff.

How do you use digital technology in your business?

Mobile phones are only for personal use. We have no business need for them.

The office has 56 networked computers and 4 servers running the network here and Fitzroy, Exchange server, Terminal site server and the SQL database.

We use e-mail within the company for information exchange. Also for customer contact.... schools are very aware of e-mail.

We conduct e-mail forums for research... to find out where schools think they are heading.

We are connected to the Internet by an ISDN line to SBSS and then we use their 2 megabit link. Fitzroy is on ADSL.

We have an Intranet that is used for new product information. Our Web site www.vea.com.au is a database driven active on-line brochure and shop for customers. Customers can find products, look at some of our products using video streaming, and buy on-line.

SBSS created the site using Active Server Pages. The site is hosted internally but the video streaming is handled directly from SBSS. We update the site nightly with all the new programs that became available that day.

Do you capture new customer information?

Yes... automatically.

What made you decide to upgrade your connection?

We used to have a dial up modem. Our increased need for capacity drove the upgrade.

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Do you use a regular e-mail newsletter?

We use an occasional e-mail newsletter.

Where did you go for advice?

Ian Gillard at SBSS. I read a lot myself. As a result of what we have done and learned, we subsidise a scholarship in multimedia with SBSS at Latrobe University.

Did you do the work yourself or use outside contractors?

Both.

How much did your site cost?

The original Web site cost \$10,000. Our new interactive site cost \$20,000.

What mistakes did you make that you wish you hadn't?

Using people in Melbourne to set up our first Web site. It was a static site and couldn't be changed easily from Bendigo. At that time we had nobody in charge of the site, checking links etc. The new Web site is much better.

What were the main risks you took?

We were very cautious. We checked things out before we went ahead.

What advice would you give someone else?

Don't jump in. Make sure you can maintain what you put out there... even if you start off simply. Plan your structure.

How do you promote the site?

The address goes on all our brochures and catalogues plus our business stationery.

Do you ask customers how to improve your site?

Yes. We get a varying response back on how to improve presentation of the Web site.

Do you allow transactions on the site?

No. We have different pricing structures based on different market needs.

Do you collect information with forms/surveys?

Yes.

What were the barriers within your business?

The only barrier would be lack of understanding of what we can and can't do.

Did everyone support the enterprise?

Yes. Everyone had a say in it right from day one.

Are the key managers in your business up to speed with digital technology?

To varying degrees.

What are the benefits you are hoping for?

Improved sales... primarily overseas.

Are customers happy with what you have done?

Yes... reasonably happy.

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Given what you know would you do it again?

I'd never go for a static Web site again. Our interactive ASP driven site is the only way to go.

What are you planning to do next?

Expand the Web previewing of our products. Expand the streaming video to all products on the site. Increase the use of e-mail as a marketing tool to direct more people to the Web site.

Possibly introduce teacher notes in the education area for teachers to use in the classroom.

What is the most important thing you learned in the last year?

How complicated it is. How frustrating that you can't always do what you want to do.

For us, It's annoying to have customers so far behind that they're still using Netscape down loaded 4 years ago.

We're constantly doing patches to protect against viruses.

Because our customer base is primarily schools...we did our own survey. From what we got back, the difference between one school and the next is extreme.

Some are on 56K modems and some have MegaLink connections. Most are on 64K ISDN. Obviously that means incredible inequity in the school system. And it slows down our ability to communicate and sell our products to them on-line.