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# **APPLICATIONS OF THE INTERNET FOR PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION**

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## Purpose and scope of the paper

Electronic telecommunications technology is transforming the nature of public legal education (PLE)<sup>1</sup> in Canada. It is expanding the reach of resources and services, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of agencies, and offering new possibilities for engaging the public in the process of achieving justice in Canada.

This paper sketches some of the current and potential applications of the Internet for PLE. It is not a futuristic fantasy of what might be, but rather a description of applications that are already available for advancing the various goals of public legal education.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, PLE is defined broadly to include the activities of organizations that have explicit, and sometimes exclusive, public legal education mandates, as well as organizations that carry out forms of public legal education without necessarily adopting the terminology. Since there is no official or authoritative definition or mandate of PLE, this paper takes as its reference point the discussions about vision that took place at a meeting of PLE providers convened by the Department of Justice Canada in Ottawa in February 2001. At that meeting, there was a general consensus among participants that the purpose of PLE is two-fold:

- to enhance the capacity of individuals and groups to participate in justice systems in a variety of ways, and
- to increase the receptivity of those systems to citizen participation.

The Internet makes an expanding range of tools available to achieve these ends. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss those tools specifically. Rather its focus will be the applications that can be made of the tools that are generally available today.

Real examples of applications are provided to demonstrate how organizations are actually using the Internet. Wherever possible, these examples are drawn from the PLE community. Where that is not possible, they are drawn from the broader legal world and beyond. These examples have not been selected on the basis of any particular criteria nor have they been otherwise evaluated. They are provided simply to help give concrete meaning to an otherwise abstract discussion.

While web sites often provide visible evidence of an organization's use of the Internet, not all web services are public and URLs may be confidential. Similarly, some Internet applications, like electronic mailing lists and forums, may be private and known only to

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<sup>1</sup> The term "public legal education" and its acronym "PLE" will be used in this paper rather than "public legal education and information" and its acronym "PLEI". The two terms tend to be used interchangeably in Canada.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of some of these goals see L. Gander, *The Radical Promise of Public Legal Education in Canada* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1999).

those who are permitted to access them. For further information on these kinds of applications, it is necessary to contact organizations directly.

This paper also sounds a cautionary note for PLE providers. The Internet does more than offer new methods for carrying out public legal education. It demands a re-conceptualization of the PLE enterprise itself. Unless this is done, current PLE providers risk being marginalized as new players create new ways of defining and administering justice in Canada.

This paper is available on the web site of the Legal Studies Program. It is a living document that will be updated from time to time. Suggestions for revisions to the text or useful examples or links to websites should be submitted to [lois.gander@ualberta.ca](mailto:lois.gander@ualberta.ca).

## Introduction

### USING THE INTERNET

The Internet had its beginnings in a computer network established in 1969 to provide the defence industry in the United State with a reliable means of maintaining communications between the military, universities, and defence contractors. Over the next several years, various other networks were set up in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere linking other academics and researchers. As these networks began to be linked to each other, a super network - the Internet - took shape. Initially access to the Internet was limited by "Acceptable Use Agreements" that, among other things, prohibited commercial activities from taking place on research networks. But by the 1990s, separate commercial networks had been created, Internet regulations relaxed, and all networks linked, making it possible for anyone with a computer and modem to access the Internet and participate in this new virtual reality. In Canada, freenets and community access points were established to extend access to the Internet to individuals and organizations that could not afford to acquire the equipment or pay on-line charges themselves.

Using the Internet in its early form was tedious, requiring users to have command of several hard-to-understand computer programs, including remote login, file transfer programs, and e-mail. "Archie," (a database containing directory listings of what was available through anonymous FTP at several hundred Internet sites), "gopher" (a distributed document delivery system for accessing material on gopher servers), and "Veronica," (an Archie-type service for searching gopher sites) helped provide access to the growing mass of material available on Internet-connected computers.<sup>3</sup>

Access to the Internet was transformed in 1991 with the launching of the World Wide Web (Web or WWW), a menu-based, graphical, hypertext catalogue of Internet resources accessed through a "browser." The rapid development of user-friendly software to

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<sup>3</sup> Internet manuals also proliferated. See J. Carroll & R. Broadhead, *Canadian Internet Handbook*, 1995 ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1994); B. Falk, *The Internet Roadmap* (Alameda, CA: SYBEX Inc, 1994)

support the Web has made accessing the Internet as easy as clicking a mouse. Applications of the new technology have gone hand in hand with its development. Initially the Internet was used to extend conventional methods of working – mimicking on-line what could be done through other means. E-mail replaced voice-mail. E-mail attachments replaced faxes. These more traditional, asynchronous, “one-to-one” ways of communicating have been complemented by “one-to-many” and “many-to-many” forms of communication like electronic mailing lists, discussion groups, virtual conferences, and real-time (synchronous) chat groups that replicate mass mailings and face-to-face gatherings.

The WWW has also made it easy for people to carry out traditional information-gathering activities on-line. Instead of browsing brochures or library shelves, individuals can browse web sites as they “click” from one “hot link” to the next – “surfing” from site to site, discovering the mass of often excellent material being made available by governments, corporations, not-for-profit agencies, and individuals. Portals, search engines, and both print and on-line tools have been developed to help people carry out more deliberate and structured searches. In some cases, on-line experts are available to help with queries.

Having discovered the Internet, many users claim a piece of this new virtual space for themselves, establishing a “presence” on the Internet. On-line and off-the-shelf products make it easy for individuals, organizations, and businesses to set up simple web sites. These first “home pages” are often promotional in nature – replicating the basic resume of individuals or the brochure of organizations. Organizations that have traditionally produced free materials soon see the value in publishing those resources on-line — extending their reach while at the same time reducing their printing and distribution costs. Sites also sport real services for visitors, clients, or consumers.

As the tools for working with the Web have become both more sophisticated and more user-friendly, web sites have become more complex. Increasingly they more uniquely reflect the personality of the organization, its mandate, and its needs. But web sites do not just focus on organizational needs, they may be content-driven, function-specific, or audience-related<sup>4</sup>. Governments, businesses, educators, communities of interest, and individuals have also embraced the new technology as the backbone of global commerce.<sup>5</sup>

So diverse are the applications of the WWW, that the term “web site” itself is becoming obsolete because it cannot do justice to the diversity in the kinds of resources that the Web can be used to create. Terms such as “portals” and “learning objects” have emerged to help distinguish between the wide variety of sites that are being created.

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<sup>4</sup> See Jacob Nielsen’s website ([www.useit.com](http://www.useit.com)) and the Web Developer’s Library at <http://wdvl.internet.com> for valuable information on designing websites.

<sup>5</sup> J. Carroll & R. Broadhead, *Canadian Internet Handbook*, 1995 ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1994)265.

Although still in its infancy, the Internet has already provoked

*...a global revolution no less profound than the invention of the printing press, and perhaps even more far-reaching than the invention of the telephone. The Internet binds the citizens of planet Earth together into a globally wired network in which knowledge and information spans the globe, and in which national politics become world politics.*<sup>6</sup>

While the revolutionary impact of the Internet may be related to its global reach, the same technology can be harnessed to provide more restricted access to information. Intranets (web sites accessible only to those within an organization) and Extranets (web sites that are restricted to a particular category of people external to the organization) enable organizations to manage knowledge and provide access to information, resources and services that support the internal work of staff or volunteers or that provide subscribers, consumers, or clientele with specialized or “value-added” benefits.<sup>7</sup>

#### **THE ADOPTION OF THE INTERNET FOR PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION**

Electronic telecommunications technology has been used to support public legal education activities in Canada since PLEINet (the Public Legal Education and Information Network) was initiated in 1992. Since this was prior to the launch of the World Wide Web and since PLEINet’s purpose did not fall within the Acceptable Use Policies of the Internet at the time, it operated on a subscription basis using a proprietary, text-based system and was carried on a commercial network.

Initially PLEINet linked a dozen or so individuals involved in public legal education but grew to include several hundred people, mainly staff of various federal government departments. The purpose of these first on-line communities was to improve information sharing and decision making, facilitate research and database development, promote the image of public legal education and information, and attain self sufficiency.<sup>8</sup> PLEINet functioned through e-mail and a series of thematic forums on such topics as crime prevention, plain language, victims of crime as well as various public legal education issues. Press releases and other full text documents could be posted, a simple calendar of events was maintained, and a catalogue of holdings of the National Public Legal Education and Information Resource Centre was accessible. These services enabled organizations like the Public Legal Education Association of Canada (PLEAC) to carry out virtual meetings. In today’s vocabulary, PLEINet created and supported virtual communities of people interested in sharing resources and in working cooperatively on particular issues.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. at 267.

<sup>7</sup> There is a growing body of literature on Intranets and Extranets, including S. Guengerich et al., *Building the Corporate Intranet* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1997); P. Lloyd & P. Boyle, *Web-weaving: intranets, extranets and strategic alliances* (Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998)

<sup>8</sup> M. Vale, *Public Legal Education and Information Computer Network (PLEINet): A Policy Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada, 1992) at p.3.

PLEINet was also an experiment in using the new electronic telecommunications technology to improve communication between PLE providers, among PLE providers and the Department of Justice Canada, and among the PLE community and social services organizations in both the public and the non-governmental sectors. Initial experience suggested that there was tremendous potential for an electronic network for all those involved in law and justice issues — linking the entire justice community and the general public to create a community of people working toward a more participatory legal system.<sup>9</sup> All Canadians could share their ideas, information, resources, and experiences about the justice system, and debate issues of concern. And so PLEINet began its transformation into ACJNet, Canada's national access to justice network.

Launched in late 1993 as an expansion of the text-based system that had been PLEINet, almost immediately ACJNet took advantage of the launching of the new World Wide Web (WWW) technology to become a national, bilingual web service hosting or linking to on-line law and justice-related resources and services developed across the country.<sup>10</sup> The components of ACJNet included

- a library without walls, where a myriad of justice-related organizations, services, and resources could be brought together to create a super “knowledge centre;”
- a virtual community, where those who are responsible for justice-related services, those who use those services, and the many government departments, non-governmental agencies, and members of the private sector who support those services could meet electronically to foster collaboration, and share their experiences, knowledge, expertise, resources, concerns, and opinions;
- an electronic publishing service which encouraged and supported public legal education providers and the broader justice community in converting their print materials into electronic form or generating new electronic documents; and
- on-line educational opportunities which linked students and teachers across the country reducing or eliminating conventional barriers posed by time and distance.

With the launching of ACJNet in 1993, the PLE community in Canada led the world in using the World Wide Web to develop the legal system and deliver legal services. Over the next few years, judicial associations, senior government officials, law deans, national crime prevention, family violence, and law reform bodies began to use the service to conduct their business or make their resources available on-line. A Law Room was created on SchoolNet (a federal government initiative to support the adoption of Internet technology in schools), catalogues of various libraries were mounted, interactive

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<sup>9</sup> S.S. Sy, *PLEINet: The Next Three Years* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1993) at p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> For a more complete history of PLEINet see M. Vale, *Public Legal Education and Information Computer Network (PLEINet): A Policy Discussion Paper* (Ottawa: Department of Justice Canada, 1992); S.S. Sy, *PLEINet: The Next Three Years* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1993); and L. Gander & S.S. Sy, *ACJNet: Catalyst and Crucible for Transforming Justice* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, University of Alberta, 1998).

reference services were provided, and arrangements were made with several provincial and territorial governments to make their statutes available on-line.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequent iterations of *ACJNet* have responded to changes in the opportunities for providing online services and have capitalized on advances in the functionality of the WWW. The functions of *ACJNet* continue to expand to include current awareness services, public consultations, and cross-marketing of products, programs, and services. A portal to the wealth of on-line Canadian legal resources, it is beginning to develop sub-portals to streamline access for particular categories of users. Today, the service no longer relies on “flat” HTML-coded “pages” of information up-dated bi-weekly but is a database-driven, automated, “dynamic” complex of resources and services which changes daily.

With these and other developments, the PLE community has embraced the WWW as a means of communicating with the entire world – marketing globally; publishing electronically; creating electronic bookshelves and virtual libraries; networking with each other and various communities of interest; providing interactive services and learning resources; and engaging in collaborative learning, social development, and policy development activities.

#### **THE CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION**

During the 1990s, public legal education itself experienced a period of turbulence as funding for programs and services changed, new PLE players emerged, and new issues had to be tackled. Law foundations and the Department of Justice Canada had been the traditional funders of PLE but plunging interest rates severely limited the financial resources of foundations and deficit reduction policies limited government spending. In many instances, core-funding of PLE programming was reduced or eliminated entirely and many organizations had to develop new funding strategies to survive at all. Funds that were available often took the form of special project funding, leading to the perception, if not the reality, of *ad hoc*, “flavour of the month,” PLE. The very scope and definition of PLE was threatened as funders limited and focused their support leaving PLE organizations to make the best of the opportunities that were available.

PLE providers are currently going through a process of reflection - recommitting themselves to their goals and reformulating their objectives. In February 2001, the Department of Justice Canada convened a meeting of public legal education organizations to discuss issues related to the renewal of public legal education. At that meeting, it was recognized that justice is experienced at several levels – in individual

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<sup>11</sup> For more complete discussions of *ACJNet* and its various components see V. Footz & M. Dubois, *ACJNet Library without Walls* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1997); S.S. Sy, *ACJNet: Electronic Publishing* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1998); S.S. Sy, *ACJNet: Electronic Publishing* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1998); S.S. Sy & M. Sadler, *ACJNet Main Website Policy* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, 1998); and L. Gander & S.S. Sy, *ACJNet: Catalyst and Crucible for Transforming Justice* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, University of Alberta, 1998).



interactions, through experiences in communities, as well as through the formal justice system — and that justice renewal must attend to all these levels. A citizen-centred approach to justice needs to facilitate meaningful, informed citizen participation in shaping that justice. It must be accessible and equitable —respecting diversity and embracing justice from a holistic perspective that values prevention and that provides a variety of responsive and effective methods of preventing and resolving disputes at the individual, community, and societal levels.

In these discussions, public legal education providers generally supported the proposition that the role of PLE is two-fold:

1. Public legal education helps give members of the public the capacity to participate effectively in the systems for creating and administering justice in society by
  - helping them to understand and assert their rights and to understand and fulfill their responsibilities;
  - fostering opportunities for Canadians to play a meaningful role in creating justice; and
  - facilitating communication, coordination, and collaboration among partners and key stakeholders in the systems for providing justice.
  
2. Public legal education helps to ensure that the systems for creating and administering justice are, and continue to be, capable of doing so and that they recognize the necessity of and facilitate the effective involvement of citizens in achieving justice.

Later in 2001, the Department conducted consultations across Canada to involve a broader range of interests in addressing the new vision and direction of PLE and its role in the justice system. The meetings had two stated formal objectives:

- to provide a forum for a range of constituents to offer input and exchange ideas about the need for and delivery of information and education about the law and justice system in Canada; and
- to provide an opportunity for various organizations, constituents and the Department to exchange ideas and develop a better understanding of each other's roles with respect to the provision to the public of information and education about the law and the justice system in Canada.

The substance of those consultations is currently being synthesized and a report on the discussions is expected shortly. This data will form the basis for further discussion on the roles played by this extended family of PLE providers and how they are best supported in those roles.

Explicit in these discussions and processes is recognition that the mandate of PLE is shared by a host of government and non-governmental organizations. New providers and services continue to emerge. Interest in PLE is broadening, with the judiciary,<sup>12</sup> the

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<sup>12</sup> For example, in 2001, the Courts and the Classroom project was established in Ontario as a result of a Public Legal Education Task Force spear-headed by the Ontario judiciary.

courts,<sup>13</sup> and commercial operations<sup>14</sup> playing increasingly significant roles. Not only the Department of Justice, but other funders are looking at ways to harness the PLE interests of the not-for-profit sector particularly.<sup>15</sup>

This renewal of the PLE vision makes it particularly timely to pause and consider the enormous potential of the Internet for achieving PLE goals.

## **Applications of the Internet for Public Legal Education**

The rate and nature of the adoption of Internet technology by any organization or sector of society is a reflection of that organization's or sector's values and resources. Adoption is related to the group's mandate, networks, clientele, and attitudes toward communicating, sharing, and collaborating, as well as to its financial resources and its priorities in allocating those resources. Through its early adoption of the Internet, the public legal education community signalled its recognition of the importance of electronic telecommunications in advancing its mission and significant resources continue to be dedicated to exploring the practical value of various applications.

To help improve the rate and effectiveness with which the Internet is embraced by PLE, this paper outlines the kinds of activities that have already being undertaken both in operating public legal education organizations and in providing programs and services. The paper also considers applications that have or could be developed to advance the development of the profession of public legal education itself.

### **OPERATIONAL APPLICATIONS**

The Internet is first and foremost about connectivity. It offers PLE organizations a host of ways of improving communication between people and enhancing access to information, resources, and services that are essential to carrying out the internal, day-to-day activities associated with running an organization.

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<sup>13</sup> The Canadian Forum on Civil Justice is currently coordinating a major national research project on the state of communication between the courts and the public. For a discussion of this project, see L. Gander et al., "The Canadian Civil Justice System and the Public" in *8th International Consumer Law Conference*, (Auckland: The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand and The Research Centre for Business Law, The University of Auckland, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> A Toronto-based company, MyLegalAnswers, recently receive a \$1.25 million from CANARIE Inc Industry Canada to provide on-line access to basic Canadian legal information on a commercial basis.

<sup>15</sup> For example, in 2001 the Alberta Law Foundation conducted a survey to explore the interest of selected community organizations in carrying out PLE activities.

In connecting staff and volunteers with each other and with the information they need in their work, the Internet can be harnessed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of a diverse range of organizational and administrative operations including

- recruitment, orientation, and training of staff and volunteers;
- communication amongst boards, committees, staff and volunteers;
- strategic planning;
- fund-development; and
- marketing.

E-mail, electronic mailing lists, and forums can enable efficient asynchronous (any time any place) and synchronous (same time, any place) communication between the organization's personnel and with constituents. Interactive learning objects, tutorials, and virtual mentors can be used to help train staff, board members, and volunteers in carrying out their functions. Intranets can be used to provide restricted access to internal communications or documents such as directories, organizational charts, policies and procedures, mailing lists, list serves, annual reports, marketing materials, inventory management systems, statistics, or any other information that assists staff in developing loyalty to the organization or carrying out their work effectively. Well used, Intranets can improve communication and decision-making, improve productivity, and reduce costs.

Activities related to the internal operation of an organization are usually carried out in private and are known only to those who are permitted to access them. As a result, the organization's web site may provide no indication of these sorts of activity. For further information on possible applications it is necessary to contact specific organizations directly.

### **Staff and Volunteer Recruitment and Development**

Web sites are increasingly being used by not-for-profit agencies to recruit staff, board members, and volunteers. Web sites can provide newcomers with basic information about the organization; web resources can provide more specific orientation; and on-line training can help prepare new recruits for their participation

#### **❖ Examples**

- Most PLE organizations use their web sites to provide a general orientation to their activities that has multiple applications including attracting and orienting prospective volunteers. (See <http://www.acjnet.org/services/education.cfm>)
- The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia web site includes a specific section on volunteering (<http://www.legalinfo.org/volunteer.html>) which lists volunteer opportunities as well as recognizes the contributions its volunteers make.
- The Legal Services Society of British Columbia web site includes a section on job opportunities (<http://www.vcn.bc.ca/lssbc/lss-employment/lss-employmentInfo.html>) that lists current vacancies. Listings are supported with job descriptions.

## **Board, Committee, Staff, Member Communication**

Board, committee, staff and volunteers can be located at distant offices and have access to each other and to information and data bases as readily as those at the home office. They can also work together on project management and development, draft documents on-line and meet asynchronously or synchronously.

### *❖ Examples*

- Many organizations, like the Public Legal Education Association of Canada, use mailing lists or forums to carry on their work or communicate with members.
- The Public Legal Education Network of Alberta publishes an electronic newsletter, keeping members informed of each others work and of new or emerging PLE opportunities. The site has also been designed to provide restricted access to certain resources for members only (<http://www.plena.org>).
- PovNet maintains restricted-access forums for members, providing them with a vehicle for discussing advocacy and strategic issues.
- The Legal Studies Program (<http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lsp/>) makes use of a web-based Extranet to make emergency contact numbers, organizational charts, strategic plans, funding applications, reports, important documents, and other management information available to staff located at three sites and in two provinces.

## **Strategic Planning**

The Internet offers PLE organizations a wealth of information about how to carry out strategic planning as well as specific information relevant to such plans.

### *❖ Examples*

- Under the “Steps to Competitiveness” segment of its Strategis web site ([http://www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc\\_indps/service/engdoc/steps.html](http://www.strategis.ic.gc.ca/sc_indps/service/engdoc/steps.html))
- Industry Canada (<http://www.ic.gc.ca/>) includes material on how to undertake strategic planning.
- The Government of Canada ([http://www.gc.ca/main\\_e.html](http://www.gc.ca/main_e.html)) maintains a section of its web site that includes critical information about various sectors of the economy.
- The Statistics Canada site (<http://www.statcan.ca/start.html>) provides access to data and publications about Canadians, their communities, and current issues of concern, including justice matters.
- The web sites of the Department of Justice Canada (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/index.html>) and the Solicitor General of Canada ([http://www.sgc.gc.ca/index\\_e.asp](http://www.sgc.gc.ca/index_e.asp)) provide useful information on the important trends and factors affecting the justice sector as well as departmental priorities and initiatives.

## Marketing

One of the first responses of non-commercial agencies to the World Wide Web has been to create organizational web sites establishing their “presence” on the Internet. These web sites serve as on-line brochures and, not surprisingly, are sometimes referred to as “brochure-ware.” Their chief purpose is promotion.

In addition to promoting the organization itself, web sites are useful in promoting the organization’s specific services and resources. Program descriptions, calendars of events, and catalogues of publications are examples of ways this is currently being achieved.

Simply being on the Internet is not enough, however. Web sites must be promoted both on-line and through conventional means if they are to attract a significant amount of traffic. To achieve maximum effectiveness, web sites must be designed with the practices of on-line users and the particular strengths and weaknesses of on-line promotional devices, like browsers and search engines, in mind. Attention must be paid to metadata conventions; sites must be promoted to major search engines; and specific marketing strategies must be designed to promote services and products. Cross-marketing allows organizations to go beyond reciprocal linking and provide more substantial recognition of each others sites and resources. Co-branding can allow visitors to use the services on another site without leaving the host site. These opportunities need to be explored and exploited.

The Internet also contains useful resources on how to develop marketing plans as well as essential information about prospective markets. PLE web sites themselves can be mined for data about current needs, resources available to meet those needs, and emerging trends.

### ❖ *Examples*

#### **On-line web marketing resources**

- The Canadian Business Services Centre’s web site provides a range of resources on how to carry out market research, including links to important sources of data.
- The Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency web site (<http://www.acoa.ca/e/index.shtml>) includes a section on Business Tools that contains a guide to developing a marketing plan.
- Like many webs ties, the ACJNet web site (<http://www.acinet.org>) has been equipped with a program that gathers statistics respecting the usage of specific sections of the site as well as topics being searched.

#### **On-line web promotion services and tools**

Sites such as WebPromote, Website Promotion Central, Website Design and Promotion, and Zen and the Art of Website Promotion provide advice on to increase your link popularity.

Services such as Submit It!, SubmitaWebsite, and Submit Express offer services to assist web site owners get listed on the major search engines and directories, like Yahoo, AOL, HotBot, and MSN.

### **Portals and resource listings**

- ACJNetAlberta (<http://www.acjnet.org/alberta/index.cfm>) provides access to resources of particular interest to Albertans.
- ACJNet (<http://www.acjnet.org>) provides a portal to law and justice resources in Canada.
- CanLii (<http://www.canlii.org/>) provides a portal to primary materials in Canada.
- The Electronic Law Library (<http://www.bcpl.gov.bc.ca/ell/>) provides a portal to selected legal resources of interest to residents of British Columbia.

### **Cross-marketing and Co-branding**

- Particular elements on ACJNet, such as “Featured Site,” “Calendar of Events,” and banner ad space allow the service to cross-market its own resources and those of other providers.
- ACJNet is currently developing a co-branding policy by which affiliates will be able to use both their own and the ACJNet images on their web sites and vice versa.
- The Librarians Index to the Internet (<http://lii.org/>) provides both a description of their co-branding process and examples of how they have employed this concept.
- The concept of co-branding is also discussed in the Library Journal section on Digital Libraries and on MarketingProfs.com (<http://www.MarketingProfs.com>).

### **Promotion of services**

- Most PLE web sites provide descriptions of their programs and services. (For a listing of PLE web sites see ACJNet - <http://www.acjnet.org/services/EducationLists.cfm>)
- The Ontario Justice Education Network goes further and enables visitors to begin the process of booking services.

### **Calendar of events**

- The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia web site (<http://www.legalinfo.org/>) and the Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan (<http://www.plea.org/>) include calendar of events sections.
- The Legal Education Society of Alberta (<http://www.lesa.org>) web site contains a section on courses that includes descriptions of each event, the course outline, presenters, date, location, and cost.

### **On-line catalogues**

- The web site of the Community Legal Education Association of Ontario (<http://www.cleo.on.ca/english/pub/pub.htm>) contains a catalogue of its publications

(also available on-line) and a listing of other publishers that produce resources that may be of interest to visitors to the site.

- The catalogue on the website of the Canadian Forum on Civil Justice (<http://www.cfcj-fcjc.org>) includes 16,000 bibliographic records of books, conference proceedings, reports, government publications and journal articles from Canada and other common law jurisdictions as well as some full-text documents (<http://www.cfcj-fcjc.org>).
- The catalogue on the web site for the Community Legal Information Association of Prince Edward Island covers publications (<http://www.isn.net/~cliapei/pub/publications.htm>) that are not available on-line as well as those that are. The catalogue also serves as an order form.

### **Fund Development**

The Internet can be used to carry out on-line campaigns or to support or supplement more conventional fund development approaches. Web sites can post development case statements, manage prospects, cultivate donors, solicit donations, facilitate bank-to-bank transactions, report on campaign progress, recognize donors, and carry out stewardship activities.

Commercial enterprises are supporting on-line fund development through a variety of innovative ways including on-line sponsorships and revenue-sharing arrangements. Using these sorts of methods in 1999, Toys for Tots raised over \$300,000 in partnership with Amazon.com; Webvan, an on-line grocery service, helped several food banks raise over \$700,000; and the American Red Cross raised \$2.5 million on line.<sup>16</sup>

The Internet can also be used by PLE organizations to plan development campaigns, research opportunities, and identify potential prospects. Government web sites contain information about their various funding initiatives; the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy (and other organizations) offer on-line searching of its data base of funders, and, increasingly, foundations maintain web sites describing their mandates and application processes.

#### **❖ Examples:**

### **Development Research and Planning**

- The Canadian Centre for Philanthropy web site (<http://www.ccp.ca/>) provides extensive resources of interest to the not-for-profit sector, especially charities. It includes articles on key issues in fund development and the Ethical Fundraising & Financial Accountability Code, which some funders require organizations to subscribe to before they will consider their grant applications.

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<sup>16</sup> T.K. Reis & S.J. Clohesy, *e-Philanthropy, Volunteerism, and Social Changemaking: A New Landscape of Resources, Issues, and Opportunities* (Battle Creek: W. K. Kellogg Foundation, 1999).

- The Law for Not-for-Profits web site maintains a list of foundations (<http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lawnow/nfp/link-fou.htm>), including law foundations, and other links of interest to the not-for-profit sector.
- Law Foundations across the country are mounting websites. See Alberta Law Foundation at <http://www.albertalawfoundation.org>, Law Foundation of British Columbia at <http://www.lawfoundationbc.org>.

### **Solicitations**

- The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre web site (<http://www.aclrc.com/>) includes a donation form that can be submitted on-line.
- The LawNow (<http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lawnow/>) web site contains a section on its development campaign.

### **Donor Relations and Recognition**

- The page design of the ACJNet web site provides for banner advertising space at two locations. These locations are also used to acknowledge funders of certain portions of the site.
- Educaloi acknowledges its funders at the bottom of its home page ([http://www.educaloi.qc.ca/EDU\\_Portail/00\\_Accueil/](http://www.educaloi.qc.ca/EDU_Portail/00_Accueil/)) through customized links to their web sites and internally on a section of their site devoted to acknowledging their partners.
- The Canadian Forum on Civil Justice also indicates the amounts it has received from each funder ([http://www.cfcj-fcjc.org/eng\\_3.htm](http://www.cfcj-fcjc.org/eng_3.htm)).
- The Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia web site contains a section on Donations and Fund Development that reports on its various campaigns and ways of making donations (<http://www.legalinfo.org/donations.html>).

### **Contracts**

Some web sites post requests for proposals or other contract opportunities. By surfing these sites regularly, PLE organizations may obtain new projects.

#### *❖ Examples*

- The Government of Canada provides a site (<http://contractscanada.gc.ca/en/index.html>) that explains how to go about obtaining Government contracts, that lists contracts currently being tendered, and links to relevant departmental information.
- The Law Commission of Canada (<http://www.lcc.gc.ca/en/index.asp>) lists its current and previous requests for proposals.



## Advertising and corporate sponsorships

Obtaining advertising revenue from commercial sources is largely uncharted territory. However, there are businesses that will assess the revenue potential of a site and recommend appropriate advertising rates.

### ❖ *Examples*

- The Chatelaine Magazine web site contains a section on advertising and sponsorship (<http://www.chatelaine.com/faq/advertising/>) including information about readers, sponsorship and advertising rates, information on why to advertise on-line, and a checklist to help advertisers use this new medium for promoting their businesses.
- DoubleClick (<http://www.doubleclick.com/us/>) provides various marketing services to assist in obtaining effective banner ads for web sites.
- As noted above (Fund Development) ACJNet has been designed to handle banner advertising.

## E-commerce applications

E-commerce represents a combination of many of the above applications but is particularly identified with on-line financial transactions. The shopping cart metaphor and bank to bank transfers of funds are the hallmarks of these applications.

### ❖ *Examples:*

- Metro Community College (<http://www.metrocommunitycollege.ca/>) enables prospective students to download registration forms for courses (including its Law for the Layperson courses) which can then be faxed or mailed in.
- The Legal Education Society of Alberta web site permits a visitor to register and pay for a course on-line (<http://216.18.93.114/index.html?target=Courses.html>).

## PROGRAM AND SERVICE DELIVERY APPLICATIONS

The Internet enhances the ability of PLE providers to develop and deliver programs and services in a variety of ways, including

- identifying and tracking needs
- carrying out the research that is necessary in developing new programs, services, and resources
- mounting substantive information, links, and research aids
- enabling entirely new forms of educational services and resources to be developed.

As a new communication medium, the Internet is changing the paradigm through which PLE programs and services are shaped. But along with its new features and functions, it brings new contradictions that influence the ways in which its potential can be harnessed. On the one hand, it permits global broadcasting while on the other hand, it enables individual customization. It can both bring us closer together and isolate us from each

other. It makes collaboration much more possible at the same time that it supports competition. It gives voice to those who otherwise have previously been cut off from debate while amplifying the voices that dominate conventional communications. It offers new formats – like multi-sensory interactive text or 3D animation integrated with audio and visual streaming and real time interpersonal interactions - that can enrich educational experiences in ways not possible through traditional methods yet those learning resources may be beyond the financial reach of those who might need the help the most. What remains constant between the old and the new environment is the need for human interaction and intervention in giving meaning to information and in creating knowledge.

The challenge for designers and developers of PLE applications of the Internet is to make the best use of the capabilities of the new electronic telecommunications technology without falling prey to its limitations. Initial applications of the technology in PLE have proceeded cautiously along this route, representing incremental steps in exploring the Internet terrain.

### **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

Mailing lists and forums can be used by PLE organizations to communicate directly with the communities or individuals they wish to serve. The number of visitors to particular parts of a web site - sections, topics, publications, etc. can be useful in determining needs and changing interests. User surveys can also be incorporated into web sites to help gather information about visitors and their needs.

As it continues to develop, the Internet will supply increasingly important information about the make up of client groups of importance to PLE providers, the needs and interests of those constituencies, and the raw material for meeting those needs.

#### *❖ Examples*

- LawNow (<http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lawnow/>) uses its electronic mailing list to solicit topics readers would like to see covered in future issues of the magazine.
- As noted above, useage of various sections and topics included in the ACJNet web site is tracked, providing critical data on current and changing needs of visitors.
- ACJNet has developed a “pop-up” survey to obtain more information on users.

### **EVALUATION**

The flip side of needs assessment is evaluating whether those needs were in fact met by the program, resource, or service offered. A variety of formal and anecdotal, formative and summative, quantitative and qualitative approaches may be adopted to carry out this function but the Internet can be used to assist with many of them. Statistics can be maintained with respect to the preferences of users for certain portions of a web resource, time spent on the site, feedback forms can be offered, responses can be polled, to name but a few methods currently being employed.

### ❖ *Examples*

- The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat maintains a useful sub-site on evaluation ([http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/eval/home\\_accueil\\_e.asp](http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/eval/home_accueil_e.asp)) .
- ACJNet provides visitors with a feedback form (<http://www.acjnet.org/interact/feedback.cfm>) they can use to provide comments on the site.

## INFORMATION SERVICES

The Internet is an information provider's dream-come-true. The possibilities for disseminating information through this new medium seem endless. Information can be packaged as anything from tiny bits of data to fully integrated, interactive multimedia, organized in an infinite number of categories, and used and reused as the need or interest dictates. Information services can include building the capacity of a sector, training in carrying out research, and providing interactive on-line guided tours. Databases can store and cross-tabulate statistical data with fact situations, making it possible to standardize practices previously requiring subjective judgement.

## Portals and Links

The value of portals from a marketing perspective has been discussed above. The corollary is that these portals perform a valuable service to people looking for information. The larger of these services are discussed under Library Services since they tend to include a variety of library-like features. However, more limited lists of sites are also useful to Internet users and most PLE agencies find it feasible to maintain these sorts of lists.

### ❖ *Examples*

- Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre maintains links (<http://www.aclrc.com/links.html>) to other civil liberties sites.
- Public Legal Education and Information Society of New Brunswick (<http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/>) maintains a list of links to sites of particular importance to some of their areas of work.

## News and Views

One of the ways to keep visitors returning to a web site is to maintain a section that highlights new developments in the law or up-coming activities of the organization.

### ❖ *Examples*

- ACJNet News and Views (<http://www.acjnet.org/News/news.cfm>) segment
- Department of Justice Canada News and Events section (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/index.html>)
- Law Courts Education Society of British Columbia What's New section (<http://www.lawcourtsed.ca>)

- LawNow Update (<http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lawnow-online>) provides bi-weekly summaries of changes to the law delivered via e-mail messages
- Public Legal Information Society of New Brunswick What's New section ([http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/mainframe\\_en.html](http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/mainframe_en.html))

### Frequently Asked Questions

One of the earliest conventions of the World Wide Web was the introduction of articles that answered questions that came up frequently in newsgroups. The purpose was to help newcomers to the newsgroup and to avoid having newcomers repeatedly posting the same questions and interrupting the flow of the discussion. The concept has been extended and refined to include bite-sized answers to specific questions on any topic. These questions can be deposited in searchable archives and can form the data for more sophisticated information services.

#### ❖ *Examples*

The following all offer FAQs on the law:

- Canadian Legal FAQs (<http://www.law-faqs.org>)
- Community Legal Education Association of Manitoba (<http://www.acjnet.org/white/clea/faq.html>)
- Educaloi ([http://www.educaloi.qc.ca/EDU\\_Portail/00\\_Accueil/](http://www.educaloi.qc.ca/EDU_Portail/00_Accueil/))
- Société québécoise d'information juridique (<http://www.soquij.qc.ca/>)

The Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland ([http://www.publiclegalinfo.com/law\\_online/index.html](http://www.publiclegalinfo.com/law_online/index.html)) also offers short items about the law through its "Law-On-Line" section but they are not set up in FAQ format (<http://www.publiclegalinfo.com>). The Public Legal Education Association of Saskatchewan site offers FAQs on their services to teachers (<http://www.plea.org>).

### LIBRARY SERVICES

With the World Wide Web came the concepts "library without walls" (electronically linked catalogues, collections, and services of independent libraries) and the "electronic bookshelf" (an array of electronically accessible full-text documents) as libraries sought to capitalize on the possibilities of improving and coordinating access to their holdings. However, the cost of fully implementing those concepts has proven to be high. The technology required to make them work is expensive. Digitizing print and media resources raises copyright as well as technical issues. As a result, many sites on the Internet exhibit library-like features but stop short of being fully-functional e-libraries.

The sorts of library-like services common on the Internet include catalogues of holdings, listings of new acquisitions, indexed abstracts, recommending reading, book reviews, related resources, current awareness services, various kinds of guides and pathways, reading rooms, and reference or "ask an expert" services, and book clubs. Just as conventional libraries have done, some electronic libraries also provide referral services

to agencies that might provide additional useful information or assistance. Where the electronic library can differ from its conventional counterpart is in the degree to which it can be customized for or by the patron.

One of the difficulties for users of these libraries is the lack of standardization between them. There is no consistency in index terms, meta tagging, features of search engines, or other classification and cataloguing practices. Under the auspices of its law foundation, the State of New South Wales in Australia has begun to tackle some of these issues for that jurisdiction.

❖ *Examples:*

- Like several other PLE groups, *ACJNet* includes a Resource Centre of indexed links and full-text documents accessible through several mechanisms.
- CanLii contains indexed full-text primary materials. ([www.canlii.org/index\\_en.html](http://www.canlii.org/index_en.html))
- The Community Legal Information Association of PEI provides access to a library of materials available at the CLIA office.
- The Land Centre contains indexed abstracts and lists new acquisitions. It also enables members to generate their own customized library
- The Legal Services Society Electronic Law Library in concert with the Vancouver Public Library, the LSS provides access to its own holdings.
- The Weir Memorial Law Library provides on-line access to a range of its services, including its catalogue, indexes to periodicals, full-text electronic services, and reference services.
- The Law Foundation of New South Wales is involved in a number of research and policy initiatives designed to improve the accessibility and quality of on-line legal information.

## **PUBLISHING**

One of the first ways that PLE organizations have used the Internet to extend their reach is by putting their publications on-line. They may do this on their own sites or on the sites of another service, such as *ACJNet*. Doing so increases the accessibility resources while reducing the organization's costs in providing them. Printing and distribution costs are transferred directly to the user and storage costs can be reduced or eliminated. Some organizations increase the usefulness of this section of their sites by listing publications of other agencies that might be of interested or by providing annotated bibliographies of other resources.

The Internet, however, takes publishing beyond simply making available on-line what is available in print. Electronic versions of documents can have features their print versions cannot. Embedded links can facilitate movement within and beyond the electronic document, full-text searching and rich indexing, and indexed, searchable archives can enhance access to a body of work. Functionality can be enhanced with interactivity, simulations, visualization, video and sound. Documents can evolve into multimedia, three-dimensional learning objects, supported by moderated forums.

Not all organizations make the full text of their documents available on-line. The Internet is not a particularly good way to publish large documents and organizations cannot always afford to make their resources available for free. Instead, some promote their publications and may conduct sales in whole or in part on-line. The Internet also lends itself to value-added, subscription-based services.

❖ *Examples*

- The Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre ([www.aclrc.com](http://www.aclrc.com)) and the Public Legal Information Society of Newfoundland ([www.publiclegalinfo.com](http://www.publiclegalinfo.com)) publish their newsletters on-line.
- The Community Legal Education Ontario web site provides access to its publications on-line (<http://www.cleo.on.ca/english/pub/pub.htm>)
- The Community Legal Information Association of PEI makes its publications available on-line (<http://www.isn.net/~cliapei/pub/publications.htm>).
- Council of Elizabeth Fry Societies of Ontario
- The John Howard Society of Edmonton (<http://edm.johnhoward.org/education/graphics.html>) makes its lesson plans available on-line
- LawNow provides subscription-based access to its articles archive and updating service at <http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lawnow-online/>
- The Ontario Justice Education Network publishes a number of resources aimed specially at teachers ([www.ontariocourts.on.ca/ojen/](http://www.ontariocourts.on.ca/ojen/)).
- The People's Law School publishes many of its materials online but also provides a list of publications available by mail ([www.publiclegaled.bc.ca/home/index.htm](http://www.publiclegaled.bc.ca/home/index.htm)).
- The electronic version of the Reference Guide to Landlord and Tenant Law in Alberta includes internal hyperlinks.
- Public Legal Education and Information Society of New Brunswick

## EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Internet has revolutionized the provision of education. Everything from administration and promotion to design, delivery, management, and evaluation has been transformed by the technology of the World Wide Web. While many of these changes have resulted in increased efficiency in administration and extended reach in programming, several are making fundamental changes to the educational enterprise itself.

One of the most critical impacts of the Web has been on the way in which new knowledge is generated. Increasingly, knowledge is coming to be understood as shared interpretations of fundamental truth rather than universally-held understandings. Knowledge depends on one's perspective, values, experience and context and takes both

explicit and tacit forms. If so, knowledge is socially constructed – the product of social processes.<sup>17</sup>

The Web is ideally suited to promoting this notion of knowledge creation. Interest rather than status rules on the Web, making it easier for people regardless of their particular training to share data, experiences, insights, intuition, and knowledge with each other to generate new understandings. The Web's capacity for spanning boundaries means that who you are matters less than what you know. Discipline-specific solutions to problems are subjected to multi-disciplinary scrutiny. Academic inquiry is subjected to reality testing. Knowledge that was once suppressed is more openly shared. The social nature of knowledge is much more obvious and the process of ascribing meaning is much more open. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is that the supremacy of institutions of formal learning as sources of new knowledge is increasingly being challenged by government departments, corporations, and not-for-profit agencies.

The Internet also makes it easier for groups of people with similar expertise and a "passion for a joint enterprise" to share their knowledge and experience, foster new approaches to problem-solving, identify good practices, and further develop their skills. These informal, self-selected, self-organizing, "communities of practice" may be found within or across organizations. Individuals may even feel a stronger affiliation to their community of practice than to the organization in which they practice.<sup>18</sup>

A second major change in the educational enterprise that has been facilitated, if not entirely provoked, by the Internet is the shift toward learner-control over knowledge acquisition. Although still in its infancy, the Web already provides more people with greater access to more information than any education system could hope to facilitate. Learners have much greater ability to decide what they want to learn, when and how they want to learn it, who they want to learn it from, and with whom they want to share their learning experience. This is occurring at a time when understandings about learning are being redefine. Learning is no longer being seen as simply the transfer of knowledge from an expert to a learner as in a banking transaction. Rather learning is coming to be regarded as "a dynamic process driven by each human being in a unique way."<sup>19</sup> E-learning advances this approach by making it more feasible for learners to assume more responsibility for their own learning. Everything from the learning objectives, to the content, means, processes, duration, evaluation and application can be determined by the individual or group that engages in the learning. While this learning can take place within

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on the nature of knowledge, see for example, T.H. Davenport & L. Prusak, *Working Knowledge: How Organizations Manage What They Know* Harvard Business School Press, 1998) and A. Lam, "Tacit knowledge, organizational learning, and societal institutions: An integrated framework" (2000) 21:3 *Org. Stud.* 487.

<sup>18</sup> For more information on communities of practice, see for example, E. Wenger & W. Snyder, "Communities of Practice: The organizational frontier" (2000) 78:1 *Harv. Bus. Rev.* 139.

<sup>19</sup> Trindade, A. M, Carmo, H. and Bidarra, B. Current Developments and Best Practice in Open and Distance Learning, (2000) 1 *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning* 1 at 15.

formal programs of study, it need not. In fact, the Internet has facilitated a tremendous surge in informal learning – any activity in the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs outside the curricula of educational institutions. This kind of informal learning never ends.

Informal learning has acquired considerable importance and legitimacy in this new learning environment, requiring a rethinking of the forms that learning opportunities now need to take. Self-directed learners have needs and expectations that differ from those of more traditional learners and learning experiences must be designed to suit these new demands.

In empowering learners to have more control over their learning, the Web has undermined the virtual monopoly that institutions of formal learning have had, not only on knowledge creation, but on instruction in various bodies of knowledge. A new market-place of learning opportunities has been created and governments, corporations, not-for-profit agencies, and communities of practice have boldly entered that market-place, making their knowledge and expertise available at the click of a mouse — often unencumbered by the considerable administrative trappings that constrain formal institutions.

The ready availability of on-line learning is changing the attitudes and expectations of learners, increasing the diversity in learning styles and preferences. On-line learning is also making new demands on instructors as they learn to be guides, facilitators, and managers as well as or instead of experts. They need to learn how to actively foster on-line student interaction, collaborative learning, and knowledge building. Both learners and instructors/facilitators need support in making the transition to the new learning environment.

If knowledge generation and knowledge acquisition have both changed, it should be no surprise that knowledge management has also changed. The Internet provides anyone who is so inclined with the means of organizing and managing knowledge in ways that best suit their understanding of the content and their purposes in using that knowledge. Corporations have recognized the competitive advantage associated with this phenomenon, creating everything from simple Intranets to sophisticated corporate universities. In fact, knowledge management has become so important that it has emerged as a new field of study.<sup>20</sup>

The Internet not only presents these challenges, it supplies the means of meeting them. Educators, whether formal or informal, can draw on both traditional and Internet-specific techniques to construct environments that meet the needs of learners. The fundamental principle of choosing the most appropriate tool for engaging a particular set of learners in

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<sup>20</sup> For more information on knowledge management, see for example, J. Birkenshaw, "Making sense of knowledge management" (2001) 64:4 *Ivey Bus. J.* 32; J.W. Cortada & J.A. Woods, eds., *The Knowledge Management Yearbook 1999-2000* (Woburn: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999), and T.A. Stewart, *Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations* (New York: Doubleday Dell, 1997).



advancing their understanding of a given subject area still holds, but the choices available to both learner and educator have expanded.

On-line learning encompasses a number of components, only some of which need to be present in any given learning activity: interconnectivity of educators and learners; access to full-text electronic resources that can be downloaded and stored for immediate or later use, learning objects, to name a few. E-mail, newsgroups, chats, and computer conferencing enable learning to take place asynchronously or synchronously (just-in-time and on-demand, 24/7; on an individual, self-paced basis or as a cohort). Text-based e-learning can be complemented by interactive communication and multimedia learning objects. Learning objects can also be developed with the unique technical features of the Web in mind, including interactive and multi-media capability. Designers can enable visitors to choose their own learning path through a complex of web-based resources, some of which may be generated “on the fly” for the specific learner.

In addition to enhancing content transmission, on-line learning can be directed toward developing critical thinking skills, collaborative skills, and skills in applying new knowledge. Educators can support the development of learning communities and foster the generation of new knowledge.

The new concepts of education that shift the emphasis from teaching to learning offer PLE exciting opportunities to extend the boundaries of legal knowledge beyond that possessed by lawyers to encompass the knowledge of others who work in the justice system, those who experience that system, and those who have experienced other systems of justice, challenging us to rethink what public legal education is all about. The move away from the “banking” concept of knowledge acquisition to a social “constructivist” concept of knowledge generation will require considerable rethinking of the methods of public legal education. Supporting collaborative learning – that is, using learners to help each other learn rather than relying heavily on instructors — will require us all to rethink our roles in building learning communities.<sup>21</sup>

#### ❖ *Examples*

- ACJNet provides a variety of ways of accessing resources including QuickStart, Jump Menu, and basic and advance search functions (<http://www.acjnet.org/search.cfm>) to enable users to choose the method that best suits their understanding of the law and their immediate needs. Brief explanations of the law are being developed to help those with less familiarity with the structure of law find the resources best-suited to their needs.
- The Belle Project (<http://belle.netera.ca/>) is an example of a project to develop an on-line repository of educational objects.
- The Educaloï web site ([http://www.educaloï.qc.ca/EDU\\_Portail/00\\_Accueil/](http://www.educaloï.qc.ca/EDU_Portail/00_Accueil/)) contains several web-based learning objects .

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the constructivist approach to learning in the context of a public legal education project, see S.S. Sy & K. Anderson, *VIOLET: Learning on the Net* (Edmonton: Legal Studies Program, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta, 1999).

- Justice Institute of British Columbia has developed an On-line Learning Centre (<http://www.jibc.bc.ca/onlineLearning/online/f-onStudCentre.htm>).
- The Legal Services Society has developed a set of resources on family law organized within a distinct website ([www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca](http://www.familylaw.lss.bc.ca)).
- The Legal Studies Program has offered several on-line conference workshops and forums and has produced a guide to convening on-line forums ([www.extension.ualberta.ca/lsp/pubs.htm#online](http://www.extension.ualberta.ca/lsp/pubs.htm#online)).
- Public Legal Education and Information Society of New Brunswick and the Public Legal Information Society of Newfoundland have developed web-based learning objects dealing with youth justice (<http://www.legal-info-legale.nb.ca/yj/splash.htm>).
- The University of Moncton (<http://www.umoncton.ca/>) offers an on-line course on introduction to the law.
- VIOLET (<http://www.violetnet.org/>) is a web-based learning object that provides visitors with three approaches to learning about the law as it relates to spousal abuse.
- VIOLETForum ([www.humanities.ualberta.ca:8080/~violetforum](http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca:8080/~violetforum)) and invitational forums on issues in domestic violence cultivate a community of practice among professionals involved in providing services to victims.

#### COMMUNITY/SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND PUBLIC CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

The line between education and community or social development is sometimes blurred, with education encompassing the development of learning communities and community development promoting the social construction of knowledge. Community development is used here in a broad and inclusive sense to capture everything from helping a small organization get going, to developing an agency's "community", to helping a community organize around a specific issue. These are areas of activities for which the e-mail and the World Wide Web can provide tremendous support. Communication, networking, consultation, collaboration, and resource sharing can increase the capacity of individuals and organizations to participate in civil society and to build the networks and social environments, sometimes called social capital and social ecology, needed to make our democratic processes flourish.<sup>22</sup>

The line between public consultation and engagement is similarly imprecise. Governments are using the Internet to increase efficiency, consult their publics, and enhance citizen engagement in governance activities, ranging from consumer response to government services, priority setting for services, and policy making. Governments are also using the Internet to advance particular policies, such as creating a favourable environment for certain industries or supporting sectors of the economy. Already mentioned e-mail, list services, and forums support consultation activity as do on-line polling systems.

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on the concept of civil society, see for example, J. Swift, *Civil Society in Question* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1999). For more information on the concept of social capital, see for example, D. Cohen & L. Prusak, *In good company: How social capital makes organizations work* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2001)

But e-democracy goes further than e-government. It involves engaging citizens directly in creating better communities. These communities of interest constitute the essential social capital required to make democracies work.

Public legal education has long endorsed community/social development and citizen engagement as aspects of its mandate. Activities have included assisting in the formation of organizations to address community issues, assisting organizations in developing their infrastructure or participating in reform initiatives, and convening public forums on issues and proposals for reform.<sup>23</sup> These sorts of activities are now taking on new forms with the aid of Internet technologies.

#### ❖ *Examples*

- The government of the United Kingdom maintains a Citizenspace advising visitors of consultations underway and inviting people to participate in shaping government policy and discussing politics.
- The Treasury Board of Canada has published its document, *Results for Canadians: A Management Framework for the Government of Canada*, outlining how the federal government intends to be more citizen-focused and responsive.
- The Department of Justice Canada web site includes a section on Consultations and Outreach which contains its policy on public consultations and lists current and recent consultations.
- ACJNet maintains polling and forum capabilities to enable public and private dialogues on contemporary issues. It also provides support to agencies wishing to engage in such activities.
- The John Howard Society of Alberta posts its policy documents on-line.
- The Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties also posts some of its policy papers on-line.
- PovNet is actively involved in building an on-line community of anti-poverty activists.
- The Public Legal Education Society supports the development of the League of Peaceful Schools on its site ([www.plea.org](http://www.plea.org)).
- RoseNet was created through a community development process.<sup>24</sup>
- VIOLETFORUM is an online gathering place for abused women and their service providers for community collaboration, information sharing and conferencing ([www.humanities.ualberta.ca/~violetforum](http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/~violetforum)).

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<sup>23</sup> For an early discussion of the community development aspect of public legal education see H. Roberts, "Public Legal Education and Community Development" (1983) 6 Can. Community L.J. 36 and H. Roberts, "Community Development as a Means to Public Legal Education" (1984) 7 Can. Community L.J. 109

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of this process, see S.S. Sy & K. Anderson, "The Community Development Process of RoseNet" in *Learning for Life Conference Proceedings*, (Saskatoon:2000).

### PROFESSIONAL APPLICATIONS

The Internet offers public legal education providers new ways of relating to each other and to their associations. Networking, professional development, research, policy development, and fund development can all be facilitated through appropriate applications of the same tools used to carry out public legal education. National and provincial bodies can use the tools in the same way as public legal education agencies in maintaining contact with their members and doing the work of their boards and committees.

A well-designed Extranet can play a particularly significant role in advancing the theory and practice of public legal education. It can provide PLE providers, policy makers, researchers, and funders with the means of creating, sharing, and managing their knowledge and resources. It can facilitate the work of PLE associations, (such as the Public Legal Education Association of Canada and the Public Legal Education Network of Alberta) and assist in the development of new associations where appropriate. It can support networking, program development, project management, professional development, and research activities among the broader PLE community or within particular segments of it. It can provide access to on-line learning objects, facilitate mentorships, carry on-going and *ad hoc* discussion forums, collect data, stimulate analysis, and share findings. Bibliographies, needs assessment studies, project reports, evaluations, and research studies could be abstracted and indexed to enhance their accessibility. Opportunities for collaboration and resource-sharing could be identified and developed; key issues of importance to the development of the field could be identified and discussed; and strategic planning could be facilitated through a combination of these services.

#### ❖ *Examples:*

- ACJNet currently contains documents and links to resources dealing with the field of public legal education and to public legal education agencies.
- The Legal Studies Program maintains a mailing list for public legal education providers in Canada and elsewhere providing them with a vehicle for sharing information and discussing issues of interest to the sector.
- Many PLE organizations post their annual reports on their web sites.
- The Public Legal Education Association of Canada is currently redeveloping its web site and maintains list serves to support communication among board members and between the board and the association's broader membership. The Association has also struck a sub-committee to look at issues related to using the Internet in public legal education.
- The Public Legal Education Network of Alberta (<http://www.plena.org>) maintains a site to promote its activities.

## Conclusions

The World Wide Web is less than ten years old. Its possibilities have only begun to be explored, yet it is already obvious that it will do more than provide an alternative way of doing what earlier technologies, like the printing press, the telephone and the fax have enabled. It offers entirely new ways of creating, sharing, and managing knowledge. To achieve the full potential of the Internet, PLE providers will need to free their imaginations from the assumptions that have underpinned the field's development to date. The web operates in complete disregard of many of the conventions that have traditionally governed interactions. Many boundaries and barriers that have been taken for granted disappear on-line though new ones take their place. Many kinds of activities that were simply not feasible without the Internet are now not only possible but easily accomplished. Goals that were once remote become immediate. But the web is not just a new way of doing conventional things better; it is a new medium in its own right with its own unique qualities, features, and characteristics. Visionaries and innovators are taking the web on its own terms, creating entirely new genres of applications.

Taking advantage of these new opportunities will require PLE providers to do more than change their methods of operating; they will need to re-define their goals and deepen their understanding of their mission. The meanings of "public", "legal", and "education" are all being challenged as the conversations within and between various existing and emerging communities of interest gain momentum, substance, and direction – aided by the ease of the new electronic telecommunications technology. New players are entering the PLE field, responding to these changing perceptions. Existing PLE agencies may find themselves marginalized, even redundant, if they fail to recognize and respond appropriately to the phenomenon taking place.

As a field of practice, public legal education has constantly been redefined by the challenges and possibilities it has confronted. It comes as no surprise, then, that as PLE providers pursue the possibilities of the Internet, PLE will be redefined, yet again. Three forces influencing this transformation are already at play:

1. Thanks to the ease with which individuals and organizations can communicate with each other on-line, governments, the legal community, the education, library, social services sectors, private enterprise, and other communities of interest are increasingly taking on part of the PLE mandate. As a result, existing PLE agencies will need to integrate their work with these new players while continually assessing the unique contribution they each can make to advancing the cause of justice.
2. In addition to requiring them to accommodate new partners, the Internet will require current PLE providers to re-examine some of their assumptions about the needs and interests of their publics. Distinctions which formerly differentiated publics from each other and from legal professionals are blurred

by the capacity of the Internet to make information available to anyone who wishes to access it. Individuals make their own decisions about whether particular resources are suited to their needs regardless of whether those resources were developed with professional or lay needs in mind.

3. In a knowledge intensive economy in which lifelong learning is the new reality, PLE providers will have both new opportunities and new responsibilities for the educational activities in which they engage. The self-directed, self-paced, and self-help approach to learning that the Internet facilitates has radical implications for the concept of education that PLE providers must accommodate in designing resources and services. It is essential to recognize that it is the individual, not the information provider, who gives meaning to the information provided. PLE providers will have to take this into account as they produce resources.

Public legal education organizations have had over ten years experience in using the Internet for various purposes. However, collectively, they have only begun to scratch the surface of what is possible even with the technology readily available today. Effective use of the Internet requires the development of special skills and knowledge just as any other medium of communication has required in the past. Since the capacity of the PLE sector falls well short of what is needed to make the most of the vast potential of the Internet, PLE providers need to collaborate and cooperate with each other to make the most of their limited resources. The challenge is both awesome and inspiring.

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