

## No Tech Leader is an Island

Now there are fast answers to support those who support technology abroad

By Doug Prouty

March 2002

Being a Technology Coordinator at an overseas school used to be a very lonely position. There are thousands of American International Schools located in major and minor cities all over the globe. Ranging in size from 40 to 6,000 students in grades K-12, they typically represent 50-60 different nationalities, with none in the majority. Some schools are urban, in the heart of cities like London, Rome, Sao Paulo and Taipei, or they may be located in a Swiss mountain village or on an island in the South Pacific. During the early 90s, I had the opportunity to coordinate technology at the American International School in Vienna, Austria, where my biggest challenge was the purchase and support of hardware. Everything had to come from the United States – and go back, if it didn't work.

Jane Larsson, Director of Educational Staffing for the largest overseas teacher placement agency, International Schools Service <[www.iss.edu](http://www.iss.edu)>, says that besides the usual demand for Math and Science teachers, technology leadership positions are growing exponentially. Schools with over 500 students are beginning to hire a coordinator of instructional technology, while schools with over 1000 students are looking for IT directors. She has observed positions in computer studies and IT doubling over the last five years. And international schools have a huge investment in their technology. For example, the Graded School in Sao Paulo, Brazil has issued a laptop to every teacher and student with a focus on global connectivity. Larsson states that, "Overseas schools place more of a value on technology because it really connects them to colleges and content." The schools make it a priority for faculty and students to be computer and Web literate. "If you are not computer-literate as a teacher it will hurt you as far as placement overseas."

While most International Schools hire someone to lead implementation of technology and professional development, they continue to look for hardware and network support locally. Worldwide, Cisco is the largest seller of routers and Dell leads in the PC market. Many of these popular companies are moving support for their products closer to the overseas school. A few years ago, if you bought a Dell computer and it didn't work, you had to ship it back to the states and hope for the best. Now they have support networks in capital cities all over the world. This has made it a little easier for the support personnel on campus.

Still, the number one issue for a technology leader overseas is access to resources and support. Imagine a high concentration of hardware, heavy use, and pressure to make sure that the network is up and running 24/7 – and you are working in Thailand.

Technology coordinators are breaking down international barriers. Even if you are working in a remote school in the Amazon, help is just a click away as long as you have Internet access.

## Tools of the Trade

Web sites, listservs, online journals, email, and discussion forums are available to help the isolated technology leader keep up to date and in touch

Looking for a recommendation or a “killer app?” Just ask TechCoords (signup at [www.thesnorkel.org/people.htm](http://www.thesnorkel.org/people.htm)) with close to three hundred experts available to you. A recent MS Excel issue brought a flood of support from the community. Someone out there has dealt with the same problem. Why reinvent the wheel?

Web sites are a support person’s best friend. California is fortunate to have a new online help environment for our school technicians at TechSETS <[www.techsets.org](http://www.techsets.org)>, a state funded project that provides a myriad of resources including tips, job skills matrix, training opportunities, live helpdesk, and much more.

Here are other great sites for technical support:

- **Ugeek** – [www.ugeek.com](http://www.ugeek.com) - Offering product reviews, tips and tricks for users, a technical glossary and tons of other tech information.
- **Slashdot** – [www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org) - Serves as a gathering place for power users to share knowledge, answer questions and post comments.
- **Locker Gnome** - [www.lockergnome.com](http://www.lockergnome.com) - The latest Windows news and info and has a section devoted to finding the lowest prices for popular software plus a free email newsletter.
- **Win OS Central** - [www.winoscentral.com](http://www.winoscentral.com) - Addressing all Windows operating systems, with sections devoted to technical issues, tips, How-Tos, etc.
- **Mac Observer** - [www.macobserver.com](http://www.macobserver.com) - Tracks Mac news from many other Macintosh and tech-news sites plus links to articles about forthcoming products and user tips.
- **Macintouch** - [www.macintouch.com](http://www.macintouch.com) - A complete news and information site for the Macintosh also includes hot pricing and new hardware.
- **C|Net** – [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com) - Great place to get reviews on hardware and compare prices.

## Updates Online

There are several online versions of journals to keep you up on the latest technologies and methods. Their online presence often has main articles as well as an ability to subscribe online to their full text. Some of my favorites are:

- *Technology Horizons in Education (T.H.E. Journal)*  
<[www.thejournal.com/magazine/](http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/)>
- *From Now On: The Educational Technology Journal* <[fromnowon.org](http://fromnowon.org)>
- *Journal of Interactive Media in Education* <[www-jime.open.ac.uk](http://www-jime.open.ac.uk)>
- *The International Education Daily* <[www.ibiblio.org/iteachnet/](http://www.ibiblio.org/iteachnet/)>
- *Technology & Learning* <[www.techlearning.com/](http://www.techlearning.com/)>
- *eSchool News* <[www.eschoolnews.com/](http://www.eschoolnews.com/)>.

## Distance Learning

The Internet's ability to deliver distance learning presents important opportunities for International education technology leaders and their teachers and students. As with any small school with a diverse student population, they are unable to offer all of the needed courses and training opportunities. Students can't simply attend the nearby college for advanced classes but distance-learning opportunities for K-12 have really blossomed recently. It has now more realistic for students and teachers to turn to online offerings to extend their education. Here are some good resources they can use:

- **Distance Education Clearinghouse** <[www.uwex.edu/disted](http://www.uwex.edu/disted)> brings together distance education information from Wisconsin, national, and international sources. New information and resources are being added on a continual basis.
- **Distance Learning Resource Network** <[www.dlrn.org](http://www.dlrn.org)> hosted by WestEd, is a dissemination project for the U.S. Dept. of Education's Star Schools Program.
- **Virtual Schools – Trends and Issues** <[www.dlrn.org/virtualstudy.pdf](http://www.dlrn.org/virtualstudy.pdf)> is a study of virtual schools in the United States.
- **TEAMS Distance Learning** <[teams.lacoe.edu](http://teams.lacoe.edu)>, based out of Los Angeles County, is putting it in practice.

If you want to read further about learning online, I recommend the report "The Power of the Internet for Learning: Moving from Promise to Practice" <[interact.hpcnet.org/webcommission/index.htm](http://interact.hpcnet.org/webcommission/index.htm)>. This was produced by the Web-based Education Commission which was established by Congress to develop specific policy recommendations geared toward maximizing the educational promise of the Internet for pre-K, elementary, middle, secondary, and postsecondary education learners.

Networks and the Internet with live synchronous communications such as video conferencing and chat rooms bring us all closer. Web pages become an incredible encyclopedia. Email newsletters and listservs drop valuable information into your inbox. We can access tools and communicate with job-a-likes all over the world. With the recent explosion of text-based and multimedia resources on the Web and the interaction that the Internet can deliver, technology leaders in international schools are no longer so isolated.