Edited by Tom Robb

Free Web-based E-mail Providers

Whether it is for you or for your students, a free e-mail account can come in handy. Even if you have an account with a local provider or through your school, there are times when it might be impossible to access it. At times like this, a free web-based e-mail account can be a blessing. A free account allows you to send mail from any Internet cafe you might find, using familiar browser programs like MS Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. It will also allow you to receive a copy of the mail waiting on your regular provider's account, as well as to send mail that will appear to have originated from that account.

Free e-mail providers were not all born equal, however. Be sure to get one that has the features you or your students need. Here are some of the major features to look for:

Filtering — If you receive mail from a number of distinct sources, such as work-related e-mail, mail from family and friends, and mailing list postings, filters allow you to direct incoming mail from work into one folder and those from a mailing list into another, leaving your general inbox less cluttered. This allows you to read just the type of mail you want to read when you want to read it.

Reading other mail with "Post Office Protocal" (POP) — The POP feature allows you to specify one or more other providers to receive from (so long as your home e-mail server is not behind a security firewall that restricts this type of access). You will need to input the internet address of the server as well as your account name and password (this is the information you use to log in to your regular server to receive and send e-mail). Clicking on "Read POP mail" from your web-based e-mail service then connects you in turn to each of your accounts and loads copies of the mail into your free account. (Be sure to stipulate "leave mail on server" if you want also to read your mail on your home computer later.)

Saving sent messages — This allows you to refer back to them later. If your students are corresponding with "keypals" (internet penpals), their outgoing mail will be archived for them to later show you as proof of their work.

Using your regular return address on mail sent from the web e-mail server — Specifying a different "reply-to" address means that when people answer you, the mail will go to your regular account rather than your free account. This way everyone stays in the habit of sending to your regular address. When you are not out on the road, your web e-mail does not fill up with a lot of mail. Even when you are out on the road, this does not lessen the convenience, since you can always use the POP feature (explained above) to download anything that has been sent to your regular address.

Below is a comparison of a few e-mail providers. The last one, MauiMail, is hardly a commercial giant like the others, but I have listed it just to show that the provider does not necessarily have to be a major one to offer a wide range of features.

For further information on the ins and outs of free e-mail, check out the Free Email Providers Guide at <http://www.fepg.net/>.

	Hotmail	Yahoo	Excite	Netscape	MauiMail
Amount of Free space	2mb	6mb	3mb	5mb	
Additional space	N	25mb/$20	N	N	Y
Additional folders	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Filtering	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Bulk mail spam filter	Y	Y	Y	N	N
Reading other POP mail	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Forward to other account	N	Y	Y	N	$
Saving sent messages	Each time	E/A	E/A	A	E/A
	(E=tick box each time; A=Automatic)				
Different "Reply-To"	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Vacation autoresponder	N	Y	N	N	Y
Signature	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Attachments	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Address book	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Search messages	Y	Y	N	N	N
Inactive acct deletion	2 mos	4 mos	?	?	?
Japanese	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
Japanese interface	Y	Y*	Y*	N	N
Spelling	Y	Y	N	N	N
Dictionary	Y	N	N	N	N
Thesaurus	Y	N	N	N	N

* Japanese interface has a different e-mail address

Ask the Techie

This column is for you to ask your own questions about using computers and the Internet with your students. Send your questions to the editor, Tom Robb at tom@robb.net

Q - In my junior high school in Niigata we ran a project last year to create an English language web site for the school. It turned out pretty well and we won two web awards for educational excellence, the first school in Japan to win such awards. If you're interested feel free to take a look:

http://www.bigfoot.com/~tochu

Our main problem was that the roman alphabet is so strange and foreign to students, and because they prefer pictures to words, they couldn't really relate to what they had achieved. They worked really hard to write the text for the pages but after it was all put together, they didn't really feel such a sense of accomplishment. So in my case the question would be how to make students feel more involved in the process of creating text for web pages or e-mail.

A - Yes, your site is very attractive. Both you and your students have spent quite a bit of time on the site, but my guess is that the students provided the content, while the site design and implementation was basically Lars Nielsen's, right?

One key to instilling them with a greater sense of pride and accomplishment would have been to have had them involved more deeply in the implementation. Students can scan photos or take pix with a digital camera. Some students might even be able to create graphics for the page, or create html pages themselves from templates that you provide for them.

One major problem is simply the fact that most material on your site is English-only. Even if the students were proud of their contributions, they can't show them to their parents or friends since they don't read English!

One method to overcome this is to make all pages bilingual. This does not mean placing Japanese on the page since this would appear as gibberish to anyone using an English-only system, but rather to have a complete set of parallel pages in Japanese. Most of the projects that I have done with my students at Kyoto Sangyo have been implemented in this fashion.

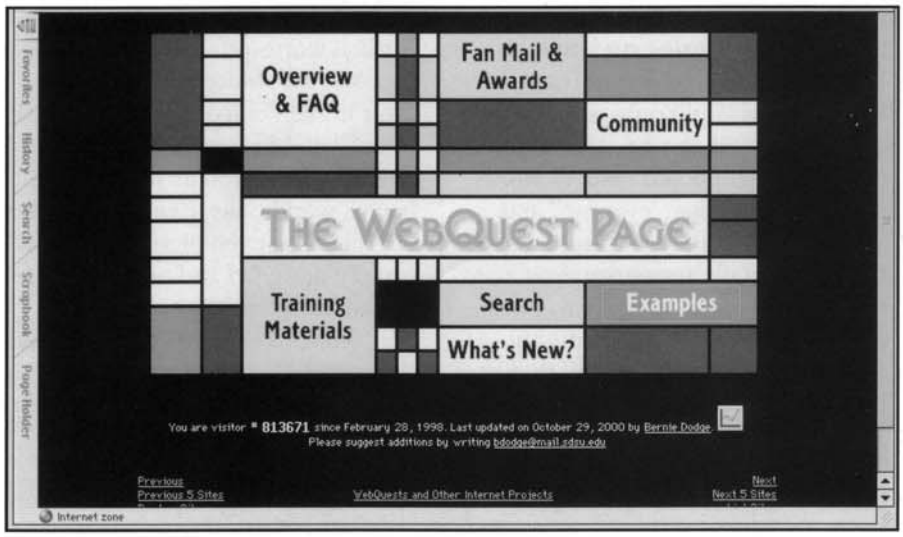
Mini-review

Webquests - Classroom Fun on the Web

Wondering what to do now that your students have web access? Perhaps a "Webquest" or two would provide them with a stimulating experience and the language practice that you are looking for.

A Webquest is more than a web-based scavenger hunt, but rather a means to engage students in a topic by having them first find information and then react to it. Webquest activities typically include these stages: introduction, task setting, a set of information sources, a description of the task, guidance on organizing the information and a conclusion.

An excellent example of a Webquest is "Mexico City Earthquake" <http://students.itec.sfsu.edu/edt628/mexquake/earthquakers.html> presented on the Webquest homepage. Students are assigned roles, such as a photo journalist, a student trapped in a collapsed dormitory, a city planner and a newspaper reporter, and must approach their fact-finding a make



their reports from those vantage points. Once the students have found the required information, teams are formed and the newspaper reporter on each time interviews each role-player on their simulated experiences in the earthquake.

The Webquest site <http://edweb.sdsu.edu/webquest/webquest.html> provides a through introduction to the topic, with a full range of training materials and hundreds of teacher-developed Webquests from which you can select an appropriate one for your class. The example sites are graded by school level, academic area and general type (compilation, creative project, mystery, persuasion, self-knowledge, etc.) but none are designated specifically as "ESL". Your challenge will be to adapt these to the special requirements of the Japanese EFL classroom, or perhaps develop new ones to complement your existing curriculum.