



# Beyond Summer: Conducting Internet Activities at Camp

A promising practice  
by Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.

Some things never seem to change. There's something timeless about kids and summer camp. There's the hot sun and cool water, the green trees and blue skies, the outdoor games and public showers, and the rustic cabins and raucous dining halls. But most of all there are the grinning faces of friends gathered around the table, the pool, and the campfire.

However, summer camps these days *are* changing. Added to the chirps of crickets, splashes of water, clangs of dinner bells, and songs, shouts, and peals of laughter are the clicks of computer keys and the hum of hard drives. Summer camps are going electronic to give kids experience with new tools for learning and fun, including challenging campers to learn to use the Internet.

## Why add Internet activities to your program?

Computers and network technologies are indispensable tools in virtually all aspects of contemporary life. The Internet provides a rich environment for electronic communication and information access. People can communicate with others worldwide without the constraints of time or distance. Networking services create new options for convenient access to a wide range of entertainment and educational resources. Although everyone recognizes the widespread interest in the Internet, some might still wonder why a typical camp for children and youth would want to add Internet activities to its program offerings?

1. Learning to use the Internet is fun and fits in with the exploratory nature of camps.
2. Internet work can support interaction for socializing, support, and program participation year-round for those campers who gain Internet access in their homes or schools.

3. Internet activities can support academic growth as campers use technology, practice reading and writing, and access information.

In short, with growing concern over the low academic achievements of American youth, summer camping programs can be part of the solution while providing new, exciting experiences for their campers.



## What can DO-IT do for your summer camp?

For more than fifteen years, DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) coordinated Internet activities at selected summer camps run by different organizations. They included camps operated by the Easter Seal Society, the Pierce County Department of Parks and Recreation, the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation, the Northwest Burn Foundation, and Camp Courage. DO-IT staff and program participants sent messages to their friends and family with email, blogs, and social networking tools, used the Internet for fun and education, programmed robots, and created web pages and movies.



Internet activities at the camps varied depending on the campers served and the program needs of the sponsoring organizations. Some were day camps where local children and youth dropped by for basic Internet training each day. Some were residential camps where campers stay for a week or more. In other settings, campers were scheduled into the computer lab for short sessions to learn to use the Internet, just as they choose to swim, hike, boat, and do crafts; others offered an intense camp session for those who wished to develop in-depth Internet skills. Some were for young learners, some for teens, some for a mix of ages.

DO-IT created materials to assist camping programs that want to add a technology component to their offerings. This brochure and web resources are available from DO-IT without charge at [www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology/beyond-sum.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Brochures/Technology/beyond-sum.html). A video entitled *Camp: Beyond Summer* can be viewed freely online at [www.uw.edu/doit/Video/camp.html](http://www.uw.edu/doit/Video/camp.html) and comprehensive preparation materials entitled *Internet at Camp: How to DO-IT* can also be viewed freely at [www.uw.edu/doit/CampN/](http://www.uw.edu/doit/CampN/). In addition, the DVD and comprehensive preparation materials can be purchased from DO-IT. NEC Foundation of America provided major funding for the development and distribution of these materials. Camp activities have also been supported by Children's Hospital and Medical Center, Compaq Computer Corporation, Digital Vision, Inc., the National Science Foundation, the Western division of Kraus-Anderson, and PTI Communications.

## How can you DO-IT?

Although putting together any activity at a summer camp can be daunting, following the six steps described in this publication can guide you through the process of successfully including Internet activities as part of your camp program.

### **1. Put together an instructional and technical team.**

Building a team with both technical and instructional expertise is an important first step. Planning and implementing Internet activities work best when people with a variety of knowledge and skills work together, including an activity coordinator, one or more instructors, and a computer support person. These roles may be filled by members of the camp sponsor organization, paid contractors, or volunteers, either as primary responsibilities or as additions to other duties.

The exact division of tasks will vary from camp-to-camp. In general, however, the activity coordinator oversees program development, resource acquisition, and staff supervision. The instructor develops the curriculum and delivers instruction. The computer support person handles hardware, software, telecommunications, selection, acquisition, setup, troubleshooting, and development of electronic program materials.

### **2. Determine instructional goals and activities and create materials.**

Learning something about your campers will help you plan an entertaining and educational curriculum at just the right level for them. A simple survey or a few questions on your camp application form can provide the information you need. Find out about their interests and their previous computer and Internet experiences. You are likely to find that you need to create flexible, alternative activities for a diverse group.

Determine your instructional goals. Think about what knowledge and skills you would like the campers to take with them when they leave. Whatever topics you choose to teach, it is best to limit the amount of time you lecture and develop activities that allow plenty of time for camper practice and exploration. Allowing participants time to explore also promotes self-directed



learning, and people of all ages learn better if they discover the answer rather than just hear it. Provide opportunities for creativity and discovery. You will be pleasantly surprised by the talents of your enterprising campers.

Make Internet activities fun. For example, an Internet scavenger hunt is a great way for participants to practice searching the Internet for specific information, and the hunt can be easily tailored to suit your camp theme. In teams of two, campers begin with a list of objects (e.g., a row boat, a cup of coffee); a team locates an object on the web, and a staff member initials the item on an activity sheet; the team with the most “hits” at the end of the session wins a prize. An important rule to include is that a team can only use a specific website once during the hunt.

Another fun activity that you can adapt to suit your camp is email story-building. The instructor begins the story by writing a paragraph; he or she emails the paragraph to a camper, who adds a paragraph and forwards the whole thing on to another person, and so on. In the end everyone will have contributed to an unpredictable piece of prose. This activity is the Internet version of the story-building we used to do around the campfire.

### **3. Find a facility with computers or make plans to rent or buy them.**

Life will be easier for you if you can use a facility that already has computers set up, for example, a local school or library. However, if that isn't possible, there are other options. Sometimes computer companies will let you borrow computers, free of charge, for the duration of your camp. It will probably take a few phone calls to find a company willing to lend machines, but the effort is worthwhile.

You can also consider renting machines from a local business. The computers can be configured just the way you need them, and the company will usually deliver and pickup at the site. This option can be convenient, but expensive. If you have the funding and plan to incorporate computer activities into future camps, buying the machines may be your best option. If you decide to buy, select computers that can serve your needs for many seasons.

### **4. Arrange for Internet service.**

If the facility you are using does not already have an established Internet connection, you will need to arrange for accounts through a service that provides connections to the Internet. Whoever the service provider, be sure to:

- find out what services are provided with the account.
- discuss connectivity options (e.g., a wireless connection) and software and hardware needed for each.
- determine the total cost of various options.

### **5. Integrate the Internet program into other camp activities.**

Maximize the impact of Internet education to your camp program by integrating Internet activities into other camp activities. Schedule the Internet program to blend well with other offerings. Make sure your Internet explorers have opportunities to participate in a wide variety of camp activities. Here are some samples:

- Let your campers research a camp activity via the Internet. For example, if your participants make beadwork bracelets, they can search the Internet to learn how Native Americans use beadwork to decorate their clothing and artifacts. If you offer horseback riding at your camp, campers could learn more about breeds, training, or the evolution of horses in North America by visiting Internet sites.



- Participants with more advanced skills could create web pages or movies for the camp. Make sure you have camper and parental permission for anyone included in a picture and avoid including last names and other personal identifiers.

## 6. Publicize the program.

It is easy to become so involved in the logistical duties of planning camp activities that you overlook recruiting and public relations. Don't let this happen with your program. There are a number of places you can advertise your camp. Contact local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations.

Consider newsletters from organizations that might be interested in publicizing your camp. You may be able to get a promotional spot free or at a reduced rate. Post messages on electronic discussion lists and on the web. When you contact a potential promotional medium, let them know who comes to your camp and make sure that you show your enthusiasm during the conversation. The people you talk to may want to send their kids, or they may want to volunteer their time.

Find a team member who likes to speak to groups and book him or her to present at school and community events and meetings of the Rotary Club, Jaycees, and other organizations. Talk about your camp and explain how you plan to add computing activities to the curriculum. Speaking engagements can be formal or informal. Who knows, someone in the audience may be impressed enough to donate money to your cause!

Finally, when the program starts, be flexible. Your campers might come up with some creative ideas that are better than yours! Try to find a way to incorporate them.

## About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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