

# A Whitelist plus Oliver: Ensuring better learning and teaching outcomes

*By Sarah Taylor*

**S**t Patrick's College in Ballarat has recently taken Googlemania head on and restricted student access to websites through a **Whitelist** of approved sites managed by Oliver (Softlink Australia) or the *Learning Areas* on the College Intranet. Students can currently access over 13,500 sites via Oliver and within the College Learning Areas. These are supplemented by many hundreds of additional external sites to the base domain name links included in the **Whitelist**.

## Rationale

The decision to make this radical step came about after the Kelty Resource Centre staff, the Curriculum Committee and teachers expressed concern about student reliance on search engines such as Google, the possibility of on-task time being affected by casual surfing of the net, and the ability of students, despite firewalls, to access inappropriate sites.

The College's information management system Oliver is also able to provide access to websites managed by the KRC staff, and the KRC homepage currently supplements these Internet resources with access to databases such as Australia/New Zealand Reference Centre (Ebsco), Echo (Echo Education Services) and Electric Library Australasia (ProQuest), as well as online encyclopaedias, so open access to Google or

other search engines was not seen as necessary or appropriate. It was felt that pedagogical considerations about information literacy skill development, censorship, controversial information and adequate access could still be addressed using this system.

## Implementation

- After consultation with the groups referred to above and with the support of the ICT staff a **Whitelist** system was installed at the beginning of term 4, 2006.
- The KRC staff ensured that Linkplus and SCIS sites were uploaded in addition to the College catalogued sites totalling initially about 10000 sites.
- Instruction booklets on how to use the KRC homepage and Oliver for students and how to assist students to use them for teachers were written and distributed.
- Teachers were provided with professional development sessions.
- All Year 7 students had orientation sessions on the system at the beginning of the New Year.
- We established a list of sites that must not be added or part of an address and a list of sites, which have had external links added to the **Whitelist** to avoid duplication.

## Selection of Websites

1. We import **LinksPlus MARC K-12 (Secondary)** into Oliver on a monthly basis. Pledger Consulting provides an updated list of new websites specifically for secondary schools. Teacher librarians and educators choose these websites for their educational content and curriculum usefulness. Each site is given only one subject heading by Pledger but the substantial notes provided are keyword-searchable in Oliver.
2. We import **SCIS** websites appropriate to the teaching and learning outcomes of the College on a monthly basis.
3. We also add sites on the basis of teachers' and students' recommendations as appropriate to a subject area or College-based curriculum focus. Both these groups email sites to the Director of the KRC who oversees and manages the overall selection process. This is a vital component for success as the main stakeholders must be able to influence the selection process. Students are competent internet surfers at home and may come across excellent sites suitable for inclusion. If appropriate, external links connected to a domain name will be added to the **Whitelist**.
4. All **.edu** and **.gov** sites are automatically accessible as wildcards in the **Whitelist**.

## Process of Cataloguing

1. **Bulk Import:** After importing websites, a URL list is generated using a customised report in Oliver. → The list is transferred to a Notepad file. → All URLs are reduced to the domain using the delimiter function in Excel. → Finally the URLs are transferred into the **Whitelist**.
2. **Individual Additions:** Each site is catalogued in Oliver, added to the **Whitelist** and checked for external links that take the user outside the base domain site. The best way to find the external links is to go to the page with links View → **Source** → Find

http://www → Delete everything except the URLs. → Copy and paste the URLs to a Notepad file and proceed as above.

3. We allocate a GMD and Classification of Website, and a Location of Online.
2. Selected domains need to be added to the **Whitelist** once only. External links do not need to be catalogued in Oliver as long as the base domain is listed.

## Selection criteria

- Our selection policy for websites is the same as that which applies to all resources accessible by students and staff at St Patrick's College. These criteria cover: authorship; year level suitability; capacity to enhance the teaching and learning programs; quality of information; aesthetic, literary, academic and social value; awareness of our pluralist and multicultural society, and the provision of a broad range of viewpoints including issues of a controversial nature.

## Technical details

- We use our firewall server (**Microsoft Internet Security & Acceleration Server 2004**) to manage both our website and the **Whitelist**. The firewall allows us to nominate approved sites and to which computers and/or computer laboratories we wish to apply the firewall.
- The firewall console is not necessarily user-friendly, nor did it provide some of the necessary functionality such as the ability to bulk import multiple website addresses in one go. Therefore, a developer built a small web application that interacts with our firewall to make overall management and administration of our Internet access management easier.

## Advantages

1. The College has a degree of control over the websites students can access as it does over all other resources.
2. Students are working more directly on the

task in hand as they are not distracted by 'surfing' and the advertisements inherent within any search engine results.

3. Students use the breadth of e-resources available through the KRC homepage.
4. Students have begun to engage in the discussion about access and reliability of information.
5. As we are able to allocate subject headings for individual classes such as VCE Media or year 7 Mathematics, teachers can contain student usage further to selected sites about which they may have also have attached a task document.
6. Teachers are actively accessing the internet to search for sites suitable for their students to be added to Oliver and the **Whitelist**. Some are developing learning tools to assist students with navigation of individual websites. Worksheets which are directly linked to specific sites are being added to Oliver or to *Learning Areas* to complement specific websites.

### Disadvantages

1. It adds processing time to the cataloguing of websites.
2. Domains that have external links require additional processing time.
3. Not all the 14,000 websites currently on Oliver or in the *Learning Areas* have been checked for external links. Students are asked to email the website manager if they are unable to access any links and these are then added to the **Whitelist**.
4. It requires time and commitment to ensure that teachers are given the skills to assist their students use the KRC homepage and the Oliver system appropriately
5. Students are relying heavily on Wikipedia as a one-stop shop to avoid learning how to use Oliver.

### Essential processes

1. It is imperative to have the support of your

Principal, Curriculum Committee, teaching staff and, most crucially, the IT Department.

2. Prior to the implementation of the **Whitelist** system parents, teachers and students should be advised of the decision-making process and the stages of implementation.
3. Teachers and students should be provided with easy-to-understand instructions on how to access sites and how to suggest worthy sites. We have written an in-house brochure called 'How to help your students use the KRC Homepage' for teachers and 'How to use the KRC Homepage' for students, both of which refer to Oliver and explain the website selection process.
4. It is critical to allocate a library staff member to be responsible for the website uploading and cataloguing.
5. You will need to have a subscription to **Linksplus** <<http://www.weblinksresearch.com.au>>, access to **SCISweb** <<http://www.curriculum.edu.au/scis/>>, and/or any other commercial website databases.
6. It is vital that the website manager has open dialogue with the entire teaching staff and students to ensure their online information needs are met.
7. There are occasions when classes such as senior ICT need open access to the Internet. The website manager must be able to override the **Whitelist** for a selected computer lab.
8. All library staff will need to develop very thick hides when the decision is announced that your school is Google-free!
9. The teaching staff will require assistance and support from the library staff as they use the system and work to develop the information literacy skills of their students.

### Evaluation

**Anecdotal and observational evidence suggests that:**

- Students are now able to find relevant, often teacher-selected sites more efficiently.

- Students are less distracted by online advertising and 'surfing'.
- Students are beginning to value other forms of information free from commercial sponsorship and vested interests. The use of the online databases and encyclopaedias mentioned above has increased dramatically.

A recent survey of staff revealed that the majority believes that "the introduction of the Oliver/Whitelist system has improved teaching and learning at St Patrick's College". They found the system user-friendly and were able to have specific sites added quickly. Many noted that some students still have trouble navigating Oliver but felt that would be alleviated with practice and assistance.

Teachers opposed to the system expressed concern that they did not know how to use it and that they were not aware of other resources' availability to teachers and students such as Ebsco, and that images in particular were hard to search for.

Both these issues have been addressed by teacher-information sessions, booklets and the addition of special image sites. Some teachers expressed concern that students were not learning how to search on the web effectively and while this is a valid point it would have been hard to find examples of where rigorous site evaluation took place prior to the installation of the system.

## Conclusion

While the introduction of this system has proved a challenge on a number of levels, it is our belief that the teaching and learning outcomes more than balance the increased workload, the initial antagonism and the ongoing need for adequate support to be given to students and teaching staff as they adapt to it.

*Sara Taylor is Director of the Kelty Resource Centre, St Patrick's College, Ballarat.*

[www.slav.schools.net.au](http://www.slav.schools.net.au)

## Forthcoming professional development opportunities

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secondary students. It is stated clearly in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards that "reading involves active engagement with texts and the development of knowledge about the relationship between them and the contexts in which they are created. It also involves the development of knowledge about a range of strategies for reading."

These workshops will explore the importance and value of pleasure reading. Time will be spent on the role of the adult as an enabler in the process of creating an engaged community of readers, the supportive nature of positive relationships and the essence of a creative reading environment. How we make meaning from text, and the place of this in the classroom, will be a focus of the workshops.

The workshops will feature examples of practice, practical strategies and planning grounded in theory and the VELs, including thematic approaches and interactions with a wide range of text types including visual, information and graphic formats.

These workshops are scheduled for Tuesday 4 and Wednesday 5 December at the Statewide Resources Centre, 150 Palmerston Street, Carlton and a registration form is enclosed.

*Mary Manning is Executive Officer of the School Library Association of Victoria.*

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