

### CASE STUDY > TAFE > QLD > 2004

#### 'Have you got my number?' – using communication technology in VET

##### Organisation Profile and Objective: Tropical North Institute of TAFE (Queensland)

Mobile communication has become a standard form of communication in Australia with 82% of Australians expected to own a mobile phone by the end of 2004, and 89% by 2008\*.

It's perhaps not surprising then to find vocational education and training (VET) professionals like TAFE Queensland's Jacqui Conway using mobile phones and other forms of communication technology to deliver flexible training to students.

Jacqui teaches the Certificate III in Hospitality (Operations) at Queensland's Tropical North Institute of TAFE (TNQT) to students located in nine remote high schools.

TNQT has more than 13,000 clients annually from eight campuses located at Cairns, Innisfail, Tully, Atherton, Mareeba, Mossman and Thursday Island. The service area covers 15.5% of Queensland, comprising a 268,000 square kilometre area of north-eastern Australia from the Papua New Guinea border in the north to Cardwell in the south and the Gulf of Carpentaria in the west.

TNQT delivers more than 400 courses in 30 vocational training areas and provides qualifications ranging from Certificate I to Advanced Diploma level. The Institute offers a range of programs and courses online and has established a Flexible Learning Network to support students from all campuses who are studying flexibly.

This Network comprises a series of Flexible Learning Centres located in Cairns, Innisfail, Atherton, Tully and Thursday Island. Each Centre houses an Electronic Learning Centre with computer facilities and Internet and email access.

Jacqui delivers the Certificate III in Hospitality (Operations) course material directly to Year 11 and 12 high school students using a 'blended learning' approach.

She said this method uses a mix of more traditional learning tools such as hard copy reference materials and face-to-face workshops where the students learn



Jacqui Conway picks up the phone to chat to her students

interpersonal, communication and other relevant skills, combined with online and mobile technology tools.

These blended learning tools include:

- videos of local hotel industry managers being interviewed on a range of relevant topics
- visual material accessible 24 hours via the Internet
- online quizzes and crosswords
- Microsoft Network Messenger (MSN Messenger) online chat tool
- mobile phone short messaging service (SMS)

## **Getting there – the Framework connection**

Since 2000, Jacqui has participated in a number of LearnScope projects that have helped her explore the potential for communication technology to be used to deliver more flexible training.

LearnScope is a national professional development project focusing on the application of new learning technologies to achieve more flexible learning in VET which is funded and supported by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework (Framework).

The Framework was established in 2000 to support the VET system to meet the rapidly increasing demand for flexible learning, including e-learning, from industry, enterprise and clients.

Jacqui said students are enthusiastic about using today's communication technology tools for training purposes because they are already part of their everyday lives. She said students frequently rely on mobile phones and the Internet to maintain their social contacts. As a result, she believes these communication tools can also be used by trainers to enrich student-teacher relationships and engage them in training, particularly those in remote locations.

"The 15-19 year olds I work with are eager to use mobile phones to SMS text, email, and use online instant messenger and chat services such as MSN Messenger, to communicate with me and their peers for formal training and assessment purposes," she said.

MSN Messenger provides a real-time online chat service. Users can talk together on the Internet and they can also send electronic messages to other users who are offline, which can be read and responded to later.

Jacqui said that her interest in flexible learning was sparked in 1999 when she attended a Learning Technologies Conference. "The Conference was an incredible eye opener. At the time I felt the areas of hospitality and tourism were too practical to be delivered flexibly but at the conference we heard about video streaming over the Internet, online delivery and how CD-roms were being used to deliver training – I was spellbound.

"After that I began a quest for more knowledge. I undertook training in video streaming, began teaching myself web design and started developing flexible paper-based workbooks, which students can read and use to participate in learning activities independently at home without a teacher. We also started engaging

students in telephone role-playing and discussions to support them to complete some workbook activities.

“The LearnScope projects I was involved in were also instrumental in developing my skills. In 2002, I worked collaboratively with colleagues from three other TAFE institutes to develop a combination of online and paper-based learning experiences, including video conferencing, video streaming and face-to-face activities, to deliver the Certificate III in Tourism.

“Through the professional development opportunities I was able to access through LearnScope, I learnt how to develop online materials including online crosswords, quizzes, videos and how to use the Institute’s learning management system (LMS), ‘Janison’.

“Increasingly I also began to notice how important mobile phones and the Internet were to my students for staying in touch with their friends. This led me to start investigating ways I could use email, MSN Messenger and SMS texting for training purposes.”

## **The challenges**

Jacqui said she was using technology that enabled ‘real time’ communication through the online MSN Messenger service, email (most of her students have free Hotmail accounts) and SMS texting to deliver the hospitality training.

“When I started using this communication technology, I initially had a hard time convincing the schools to provide student access to MSN Messenger because they thought it would lead to cybersex and other inappropriate behaviour. However, this has not been the case and now most of the schools I work with can see the benefits of the idea,” she said.

“I’ve had to learn the language of today’s youth to engage the students, which has been fun and now I can type almost as quickly as they can and keep up with the conversations. For example, ‘CUL8R O :-)’ is shorthand for ‘See you later angels’.

“Talking with students on MSN Messenger gives me the opportunity to motivate them and build trust. I know the name of their dog, their boyfriend or girlfriend for example. I listen – or actually I read – as they tell me all this on MSN Messenger. The technology means I am as real to them as they are to me. As a result, I think students are more motivated to stay in the course which broadens the range of career paths open to them within the hospitality industry.

“I also use a mobile phone provided by the Institute to send and receive text messages. Students send text messages asking me to come online to discuss an issue. They also text me to check if I’ve received an email, to confirm something I’ve said in an email or to confirm a workshop time. Sometimes students text and thank me when I’ve return a marked assignment to them.

“In the beginning, I was just so excited about developing flexible learning materials that I was mainly doing a lot of work in my own time. The manager of my Faculty at the time could see that I was ‘drowning’ so she negotiated support for me from the Institute’s information technology [IT] department. In the beginning I was on a huge learning curve and it was a very stressful time.

“Now I have a different approach and spend less time trying to master the technical side of online training delivery. I work collaboratively with our IT professionals and rely on their expertise for developing the technical aspects of the course content delivered though the Institute’s LMS. I provide them with the information and explain how I would like online materials to look and be laid out. I don’t spend time physically creating the online materials anymore. It’s a specific skill that the professionals can do ten times faster and better than I can.

## **The end result**

In 2004, Jacqui was awarded the Queensland Department of Employment and Training’s *2004 Staff Recognition Award for Customer Service*. She remains a passionate advocate for flexible learning.

She is leading a research project, *Cum-y-dnt-u? (Come why don’t you?)*, to evaluate the professional development needs of teachers who deliver flexible training to 15-19 year olds. The *Cum-y-dnt-u?* project is funded through the Queensland State Government’s *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* and by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA).

Jacqui said an important strategy to deliver relevant online and face-to-face training was forging strong partnerships with the local hotel industry.

“Local businesses have provided assessable work experience placements for our students and participated in the development of online course materials.

“One of the main benefits for my students has been the opportunity to use technology that is so much a part of their lives to support their learning in a formal training environment. It gives them the ability to be themselves, be creative and feel comfortable communicating with their peers and with me.”

For more information about MSN Messenger or to download it for a free visit: <http://messenger.msn.com>

For further information about flexible learning at TNQT, contact Jacqui Conway, Flexible Learning Manager For Hospitality. Phone: (07) 4042 2669 or email: [Jacqui.Conway@det.qld.gov.au](mailto:Jacqui.Conway@det.qld.gov.au) or [jacquiconway@hotmail.com](mailto:jacquiconway@hotmail.com)

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\*‘*Upwardly Mobile*’ research report released by IDC, a market intelligence and advisory firm in the area of information technology and telecommunications.

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