



## Videoconferencing Insight Newsletter, March 14, 2006

### Interview with Janet L. Zanetis, Global Marketing Manager for Education at TANDBERG: she tells us we need to emphasise the preparation of content - video programmes designed for schools - Part 1



Janet L. Zanetis joined TANDBERG in October 2005 in the position of Global Marketing Manager for Education where she is responsible for expanding the company's leadership position in education and distance learning through partnerships, new solutions and innovative programs. Prior to joining TANDBERG she was director of the Virtual School of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She had 20 years experience in the classroom in primary and secondary education. Her last post was teaching science in a Middle School.

Jan is the co-author of the book "Videoconferencing for K-12 Classrooms: A Program Development Guide" by Camille Cole Kecia Ray & Janet Zanetis published by ISTE in 2004. She is a prominent distance educator, speaker and trainer. We talked to her about content creation in schools the subject of much of her book.

**Editor:** Why are you passionate about extending the use of videoconferencing in schools?

**Jan:** The short answer is because the children love it. It takes them out of their limited local environment and brings them into contact with the outside world, all without leaving the classroom. This is exciting for them, something new; they sit up and take notice and they become engaged in the learning process. We can use video to maximise the impact of teaching and events on children.

I will give you one example. When we prepared a programme for high schools on The Holocaust at Vanderbilt University, we interviewed survivors from camps and people who rescued the survivors. One of the survivors was an old lady living in Nashville. She had survived three camps and she spoke about her experiences and answered children's' questions for 60 minutes. There were six schools taking part. At each one, the children were glued to every word she said. The impact on the children was tremendous, even for some additional schools who received only the video stream and did not ask questions.

These kind of experiences take the children outside into the world in a manner which was not possible before modern technology came along. As a result they mature as a person and they learn interpersonal skills. As a result, they are better prepared for and much more interested in the outside world when they leave school.

Videoconferencing technology is now so good and easy to use that it has become a significant tool in teaching at all levels in primary and secondary schools. The potential is unlimited. We have barely scratched the surface. Much more is possible and I aim to be part of making that happen.

**Editor:** When did you first come across videoconferencing in education?

**Jan:** When I was appointed Director of the Virtual School of Vanderbilt University. When I arrived we were doing one or two videoconference a month and reaching perhaps 400-600 students each Semester. Four years later in 2006, the Virtual School will be reaching 5,000 to 6,000 students per Semester.

The Virtual School's programme was Grant funded by NIH. Schools were given videoconferencing systems and the science teachers were taught how to use them. But the content of the programmes offered by Professors at Vanderbilt University was very limited. I found that we needed to build a curriculum.

One of the most successful new programmes was called Career Conversations for grades 7-12. Every Tuesday we focused on a different career examining what skills were needed, what responsibilities the job carries and what persons in that career loved about their job. The time was split between 20 minutes presentation and a 20 minute live Question and Answer session. These sessions have a wide following in high schools across Tennessee and outside the State.

African American History is recommended for students in grades 5 - 12. Vanderbilt University Virtual School offers four innovative and thought-provoking videoconferences to start your school's celebration of African American History Month and to help it incorporate the African American experience into the curriculum all year long.

Let the Music Move You is recommended for students in grades 5 - 12. This series is directed to middle and high school students and explores various music genres. In this videoconference series, students listen to each presenter's historical discussions of that specific genre of music, and they listen to a variety of music. It runs each Thursday in February and March.

Other courses cover: outer space with video links to scientists at observatories; medical subjects like genetics and DNA with video links to medical centres, etc.; and a series of virtual visits to Museums, and Historical sites in the United States and abroad.

All schools are charged the \$50 fee per videoconference. Tennessee schools must also pay the \$50 fee for each videoconference

(More information is available at: [www.vanderbilt.edu/virtualschool/catalog.htm#AAH](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/virtualschool/catalog.htm#AAH). Editor)

**Editor:** When a school first acquires a videoconferencing system, how do they start to use it?

**Jan:** Start with a very simple videoconference. Let two classes meet in a videoconference in a structured discussion of a topical theme. It could be another class in the same school, in another American school. Then kick it up a notch and conference with two other schools including perhaps one in another country.

To find another school to conference with, some teachers advertise their request on the Knowledge network of PacBell. I see such requests there at [www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/vidconf/vidconf.html](http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/vidconf/vidconf.html). One example I recall is a teacher looking for another school's Grade 2 class to discuss earth worms.

The next stage is to make the students not only participants but content providers. When they meet with another class they must become presenters of a special subject, their school and their town and county.

All these ways are free except for the telecom costs. You will also add virtual visits to museums, zoos, historic sites, etc. But these cost between \$50 and \$200 a time.

**Editor:** Do you think it is reasonable to expect content to be provided free of charge?

**Jan:** For an exchange between schools, there is no need to charge, but for everything else there is a need to charge unless the entire costs of programme development are borne by a Government grant.

Virtual field trips, visits to a Museum, visits to a zoo, visits to the Great Barrier Reef in Australia are awesome for the children and easier to absorb than reading a book. So like a book, they should be considered as a teaching resource. The head of a school should have a budget for financing approved virtual visits.

As regards programme content creation, there is as much a need for this as for grants to supply the equipment itself. At the moment we do not have enough content and we desperately need more. In my view the only way to get it is to provide grants to create it as the Government of the Province of Alberta does in Canada.

In the United States, the Federal Government is pulling back on funding of new technology for schools in 2006-2007 and ISTE is objecting. Until that improved funding is available, the development of video programmes for schools is not going to take off.

We at TANDBERG have long recognised the importance of programmes. Through the TANDBERG Connections Program, we help educators and schools get the most out of their investment in visual communication technology. Our education customers can access quality content at no cost. (We described part of this programme - The TANDBERG Content Portal last week. Editor.)

**Editor:** Where do champions of videoconferencing in American schools meet up with like-minded champions in other schools?

**Jan:** I would have to say the ISTE. ISTE is a non-profit membership organization that provides leadership and service to improve teaching and learning by advancing the effective use of technology in K-12 schools and teacher education. ISTE represents more than 85,000 worldwide leaders and potential leaders in educational technology. It supports its members with information, networking opportunities, and guidance as they face the challenge of integrating technology into schools.

One of the best ways to keep in touch is to become a member of the ISTE ([www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)). I am Chairman of the Special Interest Group for Interactive Videoconferencing (SIG-IVC) and any member of ISTE can join that group.

ISTE runs the National Educational Computing Conference, the largest Ed Tech conference in the world with 18,000 attendees. Any of your readers that are interested can join us at the National Educational Computing Conference - NECC 2006 - in the Convention Centre, San Diego, CA from 5 to 7 July 2006.

Another place you can meet champions of videoconferencing is at The Keystone Conference (a K-12 Videoconference Best Practices Conference). Last year it was held in Indianapolis, IN, from 3 to 5 October 2005 and virtually by videoconference. (More at [www.keystoneconference.org](http://www.keystoneconference.org))

The TANDBERG Teachers Training Teachers Program (T4) goes beyond traditional training in videoconferencing equipment by providing both initial and follow-up training, which is crucial to spur teacher adoption of the technology. The program is hands-on and empowers teachers to develop distance-learning programs and classroom applications.

There are two resources I would also recommend to educators. First, you can download the K-12 Video Guide found on the TANDBERG Education website. [http://tandberg.net/ind\\_focus/education/index.jsp](http://tandberg.net/ind_focus/education/index.jsp) Secondly, you can purchase

"Videoconferencing for K-12 Classrooms: A Program Development Guide," written by myself, Dr. Kecia Ray and Camille Cole. This textbook is available from the ISTE website. [http://www.iste.org/eseries/source/Orders/isteProductDetail.cfm?product\\_code=VIDCON](http://www.iste.org/eseries/source/Orders/isteProductDetail.cfm?product_code=VIDCON).

So, even if your school is trying out videoconferencing for the first time, there are plenty of resources and people to support you. Start networking and you will be amazed how willing other educators are to help you. There is a great future ahead for our children in extending distance learning. Be a part of it!

**Editor:** Jan, thank you very much for those inspiring insights.

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