

Computing in the cotswolds

Business



Gloscat delivers IT on wheels.

.. Like the wandering troubadours of old, Gloscat is touring our green and pleasant land, across the verdant pastures and soft rolling hills of the Cotswolds. Things are different now though. The college has swapped lyre and lyricism for cutting-edge computing facilities and high-speed broadband Internet access in a bid to bridge the digital divide and provide ICT training to disadvantaged and rural areas of Gloucestershire.

The challenge: Bridging the Digital Divide in Gloucestershire

Back in 2002, Gloucester College of Art and Technology (GLOSCAT) faced the challenge of improving ICT and Internet skills across the county, as part of the Government's drive to bridge the digital divide. Operating in a very rural part of the UK, the college looked at how to deliver computing facilities and Internet access to its outlying communities. The college considered a number of options, such as installing ISDN lines into village halls, connectivity through mobile phones and the option of an e-bus, but the upfront investment and costs associated with purchasing the hardware and setting up the IT infrastructure proved prohibitive, mobile phone connectivity proved unreliable and the e-bus option was too expensive.

Eureka! IT on Wheels

With the help of technology specialists ABK, the college developed the Gloscat Commun-IT van, a mobile computing centre taking e-learning and computer access to some of the remotest areas of the county. The Commun-IT van removes the financial implications and the headache of organising and installing costly ICT infrastructure, and also the problem of disposing

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with the IT equipment after the training has taken place. A core feature of the college's van lies in its simplicity – it's a mobile computing centre that can be deployed quickly and easily anywhere.

The van is fully self-sufficient and operates on a wireless local area network, removing the need for a power supply or extra cables. Gloscat's mobile computer centre comes equipped with its own laptops, which can be set up in a local venue and simply by pressing four buttons, the server is initialised, the satellite locked onto a fixed signal and the class can begin. The van is playing a pivotal role in bridging the digital divide and increasing access, as it gives the college the flexibility to offer courses in many locations.

The Benefits – Increased IT Access & Education for All

The college is able to offer a raft of different courses and syllabuses to rival the choice on campus. The van is out on the road most of the year, delivering taster sessions, evening classes and 10-week courses.

The college works in conjunction with local parish councils, social services and primary schools to host tailor-made sessions to meet specific area requirements. City & Guilds and Skills for Life qualifications equip locals with the computing skills necessary for today's e-based business environment. Training courses are also now held at local primary schools, simultaneously providing ICT training to help young mums to get back into the working world as well as invaluable child care and supervision.

From Nippers to Nonagenarians

The van has also benefited many sections of the community, from 16 to 92 year olds. Local interest groups have benefited from the computer resources

available to research and chronicle the history of their area, and sheltered housing residents have used the facilities to produce exhibitions on how life was in their area during the 1930s and 40s.

Head of School, Community and Adult Learning at Gloucester College, Pat Gibbs, said: “ The Commun-IT van has helped us to remove many barriers to learning and take e-learning facilities to where they are most needed. By offering IT and training in a familiar environment, many people who would not want to return to college or had no means of making the journey are able to further their skills and make the most of the resources the Internet has to offer.” We have also noticed that the van has acted as a kind of catalyst for improvement in many local communities. The village halls and community centres where we hold our sessions have once again become hubs of activity – facilities have been improved and there is a greater sense of community spirit.”

About ABK

ABK is a specialist technology provider to the education sector, with over 10 years of experience and an in-depth knowledge of today’s teaching requirements. ABK deliver complete managed services to schools, meeting all curriculum technology requirements, offering finance and maintenance packages to meet specific educational needs. For further information go to <http://www.abkplc.com> ABK Contact Mike Rimmer T: 0161 482 6300 E: Contact Luke Ford T: 01625 511966 E: