

## **Making Google Resources Accessible Within a District**

Clare Timblin  
INTE 6750: Trends  
University of Colorado, Denver  
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## **The Problem**

The Boulder Valley School District began transitioning to using all Google products in the spring of 2012. At this time the district created a subsection of their main website called [Google for Educators](#). In the last four years all employees have been trained through professional development, in-service and workshops about how to use Google applications and instructional tools. The Google for Educators web pages were used as a reference for teachers and administrators that needed additional help and guidance.

BVSD has two groups involved in this process, the EdTech Team, a small group of five tasked with providing professional development to large groups of educators and administrators, who also supply educational technology resources. The second group, the IT team, is a larger group that supports the district in more technological issues. The IT Team works one on one or with small groups of teachers or administrators at the schools to solve hardware and software issues. It came to the attention of all involved that the IT Team was fielding questions about Google apps and tools, in which they were not trained to answer. Therefore, it was decided that they would be trained on all things Google and use the Google For Educators web site as their guide and reference.

The Google for Educators website, not updated since 2012, needed to be revised to be more robust and functional for not only teachers and administrators but the IT team as well. Work on the website included examining content, reviewing formats and testing the functionality of all links. New content also needed to be added where information was out of date or irrelevant. This was my task for the semester. As a former intern with the BVSD EdTech Team I was familiar with the BVSD website and trusted by the team to make informed decisions about changes to the website. After initial direction from an EdTech Specialist I was given access and permission to modify the website at my discretion.

## **Intervention**

The BVSD Google for Educators website consists of eight main tabs, many of which have sub-pages: Home, Professional Development, Instructional Tools, Student Ideas, Our Journey to Google, Global Resources, BVSD Google Knowledge Base, and Important Links.

The Instructional Tools tab and its 20 subpages were the most important part of the website that needed change because these subpages consisted of all the Google products that are encouraged and implemented in the district. They ranged from management tools such as Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Sheets and Google Classroom to creative tools such as Google Sites, Google Drawing, and Google Slides. There were also pages involving hardware such as Chromebooks, iPads and the Nexus

7 Tablets. Many of the pages were text heavy, had too many links, the formatting was inconsistent and resources were out of date. The goal of changing these pages was to make the content easily accessible, interesting and relevant for the users so they could use the information themselves or to instruct others. And in turn, these changes would make the IT department feel comfortable answering any questions they might field about Google products.

## **Evaluation**

The evaluation of this project is ongoing. Experienced teachers and administrators comfortable with the systems wanted new ideas and strategies for their work. Updating the web pages gave these employees knowledge that goes beyond the basics and inspiration for better teaching and managing. Other employees new to Google products needed simplified, explicit instruction. The Google for Educator web pages are especially valuable to these people who are also more apt to request help from the EdTech and IT Teams. Assessing the effects of these changes will be qualitative in nature from the feedback received by the teams from the teachers and administrators. Both teams may see a reduction in requests for help with Google products or increased inquiries about trying new applications. Requests for professional development involving Google tools may also increase or decrease depending on employee's feelings of competency with the updated website. Both EdTech and IT groups have access to data involving website traffic, which has not been used in any meaningful way so far, but may inform decisions in the future.

## **Narrative**

I began by evaluating the Home webpage, which shows a large grid with most popular searched terms and subjects. All of the subjects were also listed under Instructional Tools, except for the Chromebooks and Nexus 7 pages. I helped to design and add content to the Nexus 7 pages during my internship the previous semester and knew I would not need to revise them again. The Chromebook page, however, had a few formatting issues, repetitive and broken links, and needed content updating. The next tab, Professional Development, listed a series of workshops and conferences that had taken place since 2012. Since the links attributed to this tab connected to web pages outside of the BVSD Google for Educator site I was unable to alter them.

The Instructional Tools tab, was where my work truly began. As stated above, there are 20 sub-pages. The first two links, Blogger and Chrome needed many changes. I paired down the information on the pages without losing critical instruction and material. I deleted articles that were more than two or three years old and found current information to replace them from reputable sources. Both pages had too many videos, which was distracting and could be overwhelming. In terms of formatting and

design I referred to three books for reference, *Presentation Zen Design* by Garr Reynolds, *Interface Design for Learning* by Dorian Peters and *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath. Since this website was created in Google Sites I knew my limitations with formatting and templates. As Reynolds (2014) states, “Learn to view limitations not as annoyances but welcome editors that force you to think creatively”(p.12). I couldn’t drastically change the overall design since I needed these pages to look similar to the rest of the district website but I could get creative with the content.

The Google Docs tab, was one I knew was going to see a lot of traffic. Most educators had been using Microsoft Word for word processing but the district wanted Google Docs to replace it for good reasons. Google Docs allows for collaboration in real time on the actual document, the documents can be shared through a web address and Google Docs keeps changes of its history indefinitely. Plus, a Google document is always kept in a person’s Google Drive for easier storage and manageability where it can be accessed from any computer. I found many online resources that could explain these benefits but decided to leave a straightforward explanation of Google Docs as the introduction to the web page. The information needed to be simple and concrete (Heath & Heath, 2008, p. 16). The links I did provide connected to directions about how to set up Google Doc, suggestions for how educators could use this tool in the classroom, and how to save email into a document. I kept this limited number of links and deleted a few links that previously existed and were outdated. I also provided two videos, one that was instructional and one that was testimonial.

Google Slides and the add-on application to Google Sheets called Flubaroo were the next two web pages on the list of tools. Google Slides is a presentation tool similar to Powerpoint but with collaboration capabilities and other advanced features. Flubaroo was invented by Google to help educators create assessments and grading charts using Google Sheets. Both of these pages were text heavy with overly complicated explanations. I left very basic information in text form while providing links to usage and installation of these tools. Peters (2014) talked about “progressive disclosure” or introducing information gradually as to not overwhelm the learner (p.195), which is also important when introducing new technology tools such as these. Too much information with too much detail can cause a learner or educator to reject new technology in place of something more familiar.

Google Sites and Google Classroom, had the most content and were the most difficult to edit and curate. These two tools were some of the most used applications of Google for Education within this district and beyond. Google Sites allows for collaborative website creation, as with this revising project. There are endless resources and examples online involving Google Sites. Google Classroom is Google’s version of a learning module system. Like Google Sites, Google Classroom also had a plethora of information available for reference online and with media. “But remember that

self-restraint is difficult but often leads to greater clarity” (Reynolds, 2014, p.13). Taking Reynolds advice I paired down what text, links and media I could while still retaining the bulk of important information.

Google Sheets, Flip Your Classroom, and Google Forms needed the same adjustments as I previously described. Google Drive was another high traffic, significant page. It was important that this page was easy to use and straightforward. As Peters (2014) notes, “The more of the brain the user has to allocate to the interface, the less is available for learning” (p.66). Educators new to technology can often focus more on the interface if the information is not easily accessible. The next three pages Google Maps, Google +, and Google Hangouts needed some reformatting and selective editing. Though not as significant as Google Drive or Google Documents these tools are still valuable additions to educational technology.

Towards the end of the list of Instructional Tools are pages called Resources and Why Google? The Resources page consisted of a large list of information in a file format from 2012. I changed this format into plain text and links into categories of various resources. The Why Google? page contains a video and slideshow about how the district decided to use Google Tools and the process which that involved. I removed this page entirely since the content is included on a different page labeled “Our Journey to Google”.

The tabs after Instructional Tools included Student Ideas, Our Journey to Google, Global Resources, and BVSD Google Knowledge Data Base. Student Ideas included the subpages, Student Led-Conferences and Student E-Portfolios. Both of these pages had links that needed to be removed or replaced with more current resources. The Our Journey to Google, as mentioned above, had duplicate information as another page called Why Google? which was deleted. Under the Global Resources page were five subpages which led to web pages outside of my domain, where I was unable to alter them. I followed my previous processes in changing the pages where I could. I was also asked by my EdTech contact to create a subpage under this heading to add Google’s Professional Development Handbook. Finally, the BVSD Google Knowledge Data Base was a page outside of my domain that I was unable to alter and thus concluded the needs of this project.

## **Conclusion**

There were a number of factors that challenged the success of this project. At first I was hesitant to rely on my own judgment for making significant changes to such an important website. But, after clear directions and instructions about the vision of the website by my supervisors I became more confident to lead this project. Another issue was that the Instructional Tools pages and all of its subpages were listed in alphabetical order which seemed incongruous to the subjects. Unfortunately, this could not be

changed since this was a formatting feature of Google Sites. Lastly, I was required to keep any links or resources created by BVSD employees whether they were useful, outdated or irrelevant. The rationale is that learning by peers feels more credible and meaningful. Reynolds (2014) calls this “testable credential”, meaning that a reference by a peer makes information feel more credible (p.157). Often educators will feel more secure in trying new technology that a fellow educator has used and documented. Despite these restrictions I was able to make significant progress.

Overall, my work on this website will impact a large number of people in the district in a positive way. These resources will need to be updated periodically as new information becomes available online. Fortunately, I was asked to keep record of all the changes I made to the website on a separate Google document for which the EdTech Team can refer to when in need. I look forward to hearing from the EdTech team about how the IT Team is using these web pages and how educators and administrators find them more user friendly.

Professionally I have gained a valuable experience with this project. I have honed my expertise with Google sites, applied my knowledge about website design for learning and gained more confidence in my research skills. Future employers will see my competence in making decisions and judgement, as well as my ability to work with my supervisors to enable a vision into fruition.

BVSD Google for Educators Website:

<https://sites.google.com/a/bvsd.org/google-for-bvsd-educators/>

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