

Teacher's little project goes big

'Did You Know' that millions have seen presentation?

By James B. Meadow, Rocky Mountain News
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Gee, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

Get teachers talking about the future. Nothing big. Nothing that would create a buzz. Certainly nothing that would go, like, *viral* in the cyber world.

All Karl Fisch, an energetic but essentially anonymous educator at Arapahoe High School in Centennial, wanted to do was "start a conversation" among fellow teachers. Detonate a dialogue, a discussion, something that would come up with new ways to "prepare kids to become successful, happy citizens of the 21st century."

So in August 2006, when the school administration asked Fisch, the AHS director of technology, to provide an update about new equipment and programs at its back-to-school faculty meeting, he had a better idea.

He wanted to be like the proverbial stone in the lake, create ripples, prod the teachers to "continue the conversation in their classrooms, amongst themselves."

Working on the weekend

So he went home one weekend and in five hours created an eight-minute PowerPoint presentation he called "Did You Know?" but which soon came to be known as "Shift Happens."

None of the ideas was exclusively Fisch's, the data was pretty much all public domain, and he sort of, hmm, borrowed the dramatic music from a movie soundtrack. But the net effect was anything but *deja vu*.

As the teachers watched, the screen flashed information about the fulcrum of change on which today's world was turning. As in, Did You Know?:

- During the course of this presentation, 60 babies will be born in the U.S. . . . 351 babies will be born in India.
- The U.S. Dept. of Labor estimates that today's learner will have 10 to 14 jobs . . . by age 38.
- The top 10 jobs that will be in demand in 2010 didn't exist in 2004.
- There are over 106 million registered users of MySpace . . . if MySpace were a country, it would be the 11th largest in the world.
- It is estimated that a week's worth of *New York Times* . . . contains more information than a person was likely to come across in a lifetime in the 18th century.



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The Rocky

Karl Fisch, Arapahoe High School's director of technology, stands outside his office last week. His once-modest PowerPoint presentation on growth and change in the world has grown to become an Internet hit around the globe.

- For students starting a four- year technical or college degree . . . half of what they learn in their first year of study will be outdated by their third.

There was more information, of course, enough information that as the room emptied and he saw the looks on the teachers' faces, Fisch knew he had succeeded in his initial goal for Arapahoe.

Then the planet got involved.

Buoyed by the faculty reaction, "I made the 'fateful' - is that a good word? - decision to put the presentation on my blog," he says, shaking his head. "I figured other local teachers might see it and download it, carry on the conversation."

He posted it on the "Fischbowl." Word seeped out. "Prominent" educational bloggers added a link to Fisch's baby.

'The thing went viral'

One blogger in Oklahoma called it "shock and awe." A tide of e-mails arrived. By winter break, Fisch estimated between 50,000 and 100,000 educators had seen it, some as far as away as Australia.

Whoa.

Last January, Fisch heard from Scott McLeod, a professor at the University of Minnesota. Impressive stuff, said McLeod. He'd been using "Did You Know?" in some of his graduate classes. Would Fisch mind if he remixed it, changed a few things, posted it on his blog?

McLeod - who soon moved to Iowa State University - tweaked the presentation. Then he posted it in different formats like Windows Media and QuickTime.

Someone in cyberspace saw it. Liked it. Hello, YouTube.

"Then the thing went viral," says Fisch. Shock and awe are in his voice. On his lips sits a wry smile that adds a curious elfin cast to a bald 43-year-old man with a salt-and-pepper beard.

Overall, the experience was like a two-by-four to the hard drive.

"Remember, I had intended to share this with the faculty at Arapahoe, not the world."

Then the world shrank a little more. In March, he heard from XPLANE, a media company adept at Web productions.

This is good, said XPLANE, but how about an upgrade? Y'know, better visuals. Music that doesn't infringe on anybody's copyright. Oh yeah, and we'll do it for free.

Fisch and McLeod joined forces with XPLANE. Two months later, "Did You Know 2.0" hit the Internet, a somewhat slicker, but no less provocative, product. More people noticed.

Thanks to YouTube et al., Fisch figures his once-modest presentation has been viewed by about 10 million souls - from Centennial to Siberia. Plus, it's been translated into Chinese, French, Russian, Arabic, Spanish and German.

Maybe better, Fisch says he has heard from people at Microsoft, Apple, NASA and IBM, who have commented on the presentation.

And, since he's starting to become known at education conferences now, some of his Arapahoe colleagues have accused him of having "groupies."

"Which isn't true, of course," he says, wincing a little.

Although Fisch has also put together a "2 0/20" video that offers a serio-whimsical look at life in 2035 (Yahoo buys NBC; Google is mass-producing solar cars that go 1,200 miles on a single charge; laptops run on solar power and water vapor), he has no more plans to produce a "Did You Know 3.0."

E-mails keep coming

"The whole thing has been kind of overwhelming and daunting," he says, weary from the ongoing notoriety. (He still gets 50 e-mails daily from people seeing "Did You Know?" for the first time.)

But the reaction only reinforces his premise about a world changing "exponentially." What he's learned from his sally into cyberspace is, "If you have something to say and say it in a way that resonates, you can be heard."

So, will Karl Fisch continue to be heard? What can we expect from the mild-mannered high school teacher whose blog now has over 1,000 subscribers? Who has those alleged groupies? Who has had a sniff of cyber celebrity?

"I'm sure it will all taper off as my 15 minutes of fame goes away. And, believe me, that will be a good thing."

Maybe. Then again, maybe not. After all, once you've gone viral, it may not be so easy to go back.

• **To see Karl Fisch's presentations**, go to his blog at thefischbowl.blogspot.com. Links to the presentations *Did You Know?/Shift Happens* and *Did You Know?/Shift Happens 2.0* are on the right side.