

Local Service Initiatives

Name of Initiative: Thinkport.org

Station: Maryland Public Television

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Briefly describe the initiative and be as specific as you can be about the products or services that the initiative includes.

Thinkport is the centerpiece of a major education initiative for Maryland Public Television. Launched in March of 2003, Thinkport.org is a comprehensive Web site developed for Maryland's K-12 education community and families. This powerful supersite provides a rich collection of multimedia resources for the classroom, including interactive Online Field Trips, downloadable video clips (most are repurposed from MPT productions) and a searchable database of standards-based lesson plans from MPT, PBS TeacherSource, Marco Polo, the Library of Congress and the U.S. Department of Education. A wealth of online professional development offerings and an innovative suite of technology tools aid teachers in their profession. An area for families builds connections and communication between schools and homes.

How does this initiative fit into your "portfolio" of other Local Service Initiatives? Is it one of many initiatives and projects, or does it take the bulk of your "Local" resources?

Thinkport is a key local education initiative. Delivery of resources and services to the K-12 education community is significant along with considerable service to the pre-k and child care community. A particular strength of Thinkport is the ability for the site to grow and extend its reach as new products and technologies become available. Built as a database driven digital platform it is the primary delivery system of instructional content for the station. Other resources are integrated into Thinkport, as for example the broadcast schedule of MPT's instructional programming and other select shows. A datacasting test has been conducted transmitting Thinkport content to select Maryland schools.

What station assets, competencies and/or relationships does the initiative build upon?

The development of Thinkport as a state education portal has provided numerous opportunities to partner and collaborate with state agencies, school districts, and private and public institutions. Partnerships have included the State Department of Education and the Center for Technology in Education at Johns Hopkins University. Development of products such as the Online Field Trips, have afforded opportunities for museums and organizations to join MPT as content partners. Further, the innovative nature of Thinkport and the high production values of its resources showcases public television as a leader in cutting-edge educational technology. Thinkport provides the opportunity to clearly highlight the station's commitment to education with the Board and to the community-at-large.

How would you describe the community benefit of this work? What needs are being addressed?

Thinkport benefits the community by providing high quality educational content at no cost. Educators can comfortably use Thinkport materials in the classroom because content is aligned with the Maryland State Curriculum and the Online Field Trips have a focus on Maryland related topics such as Maryland history. Thinkport also affords the opportunity for community organizations to list their events on the Thinkport community calendar thus providing a vehicle for wide distribution.

Who is the “customer?”

Primary target is the Maryland K-12 education community and families. Although the site gets heavy usage outside the state.

How do you know or measure if the customer’s needs are being met?

- Several scientific evaluation studies were conducted of instructional resources developed for Thinkport (the Online Field Trips) measuring student achievement.
- Web traffic measures site usage

Who benefits from the initiative?

Teachers, students, parents and community organizations are all beneficiaries.

How do you measure the benefits?

- Independent scientific evaluation of Thinkport Online Resources showed 1) improved reading performance among struggling middle school students and most significantly among the poorest readers and low-income students.
- Thinkport and the Online Field Trips have been awarded numerous national awards including, Webby Award for Best Education Web site; NETA Best of the Best Award; National Emmy Award for Local Public Service Campaign; APTS Edge Award; Eppy Award (Editor & Publisher and MediaWeek Magazines), Best Overall Design of a Web site
- Site traffic has increased steadily since the site debuted in March Of 2003 now reaching on average, one million page views per month and 120,000 visits per month.

Describe the financial model for the initiative, being as specific as possible. How much does it cost? What are the sources and amount of revenue? How does it fit into your station’s overall economic model?

To date, Thinkport has been supported by federal funding, and grants have been secured for the next five years. Sustainability models are being explored along with a business plan to maintain future growth.

Could other stations use this idea or model? Would it work for any size station or licensee type?

Yes. MPT is currently in discussions with several PBS stations interested in securing Thinkport as their education portal.

***Please send this information to Brian Edstrom: bedstrom@tpt.org**

