

Topic: Competitive Events: E-commerce Winning Advice

Advisors: Suzan Newberry, Wyoming
Philip Como, New York
Keith Ronkowski, North Dakota

For this month's column, we are featuring advice from several advisors who have succeeded in the E-commerce Management Team Decision Making Pilot Event and in the E-commerce Business Plan Pilot Event. Interest in these events will be growing among your students, so here are some remarks to ponder on how to approach and conduct them in your classroom.

The team from **Campbell County High School in Gillette, Wyoming**, garnered first place at the ICDC in Salt Lake City. Their advisor, **Suzan Newberry**, a veteran teacher and advisor of 23 years, also produced another first-place and two second-place winners at ICDC. Suzan notes that the e-commerce subject is a natural for lots of students these days. One of her first-place team members has his own Web-based business and even bought his own server with money he saved.

Looking for her secret? She says there is no secret. Students just need to work hard at the general competencies. Her strongest advice is to teach, teach, teach. Teach the basics well before you allow students to choose an interest area for competition. She pledges that in her class students will interact with material for the whole period—in her case, a 90-minute time span. This doesn't mean nonstop lectures. She challenges the class with activities that relate to the concepts she is teaching and with questions that will make them "think, talk and express themselves." This emphasis on the basics gives her students the advan-

tage of confidence on the event tests and a lot of experience working through challenges like those presented in competition. The only secret, she says, is hard work from everybody.

When students finally choose an area to compete in, their interest often grows out of their work placements. That is the best way, says Suzan, because they will have solid real-world experiences to help them. One of the first place winners had job experience helping a company set up a mall. But Suzan says you can get new students interested in an area like e-commerce by giving them a small project to get their feet wet. Maybe then they will get ready to tackle an e-commerce event—taking a computer class, for example.

Further motivation? The success of DECA competitors rubs off on other students. Suzan says once he or she has a little success, "It's hard to stop a motivated kid." This Suzan really understands. She reports that she herself "hated high school" until she joined DECA.

Advisor **Philip Como at Smithtown H.S. in New York** taught the team that captured first place in the E-commerce Business Plan Pilot Event. Como has taught for 8 years and has been a DECA advisor for 5 years. This is Como's second year teaching a year-long e-commerce marketing class. He sees the popularity of this course as indicative of changing times and believes that DECA's e-commerce events will flourish. The team's project was a "mature online learning community," with online

resources including video role-plays, an online chat, and resources for connecting to industry. The class has published all of their business plans on a Web site at www.smithtownschoolofbusiness.com/tradeshow.

One of the impressive aspects of Phil's approach to teaching e-commerce is his use of business mentors, many drawn from his chapter's advisory committee. Each student in his class has a mentor and can work online with that business contact during class. In fact, when the winning team met with a contact from Invision Technology, that mentor asked questions that led the team to return to the drawing boards with their project, rewriting the entire event.

Keith Ronkowski at Red River H.S. in Grand Forks, North Dakota, has been teaching marketing and advising a DECA chapter for 28 years. In Salt Lake City, one of his teams earned third place in the E-Commerce Business Plan Event. Their

project was a Web site for a local tennis club. The site sold both services and products from memberships to tennis balls and clothing.

In Keith's program all second-year students are required to write a business plan for an event: E-commerce, Entrepreneurship or International Marketing. (First-year students are involved with marketing research and series events.) To help students choose an area for their business plans, Keith uses lots of outside resources, including bringing in speakers in each area. He says that one area of difficulty is estimating costs involved in setting up the business. To answer these kinds of hard questions, Keith uses a variety of resources: the local university, members of the chamber of commerce, even an e-commerce trade show. He says the resources are there if you look around outside the classroom.