**Unit 1 The Online World**

**Online communication 1**

One of the most common reasons for using the internet is to communicate. This section is about the different ways people communicate online.

**Contemporary social media**

People with common interests tend to gather together to exchange views and put forward ideas. Often this takes the form of a club such as a sports club or a society such as a historical society. However, the internet has had a dramatic impact on the way people communicate and share information.

**Online communities**

People who are computer literate, and have the equipment, can form groups or ‘societies’ online. These groups are known as ‘online communities’ and they provide a place for people with similar interest to come together and exchange views. Where the community involves a group of people who keep in up-to-date contact with each other, they may be referred to as a ‘network of friends’.

Sometimes the communities exist in a virtual world online. This is an unreal world created by the computer. Popular examples include SecondLife, Twinity and Habbo. The World of Warcraft virtual world is another popular example of a large interactive gaming virtual world which supports multi-player gaming.

Communicating online requires a special behaviour or etiquette, known as ‘netiquette’. This is a set of rules designed to prevent abusive behaviour online. If a user breaks netiquette, then other users can report them.

**Information exchanges**

Online communities make use of contemporary social media to publish, access and exchange information. They use several online tools to do this:

**Web logs (blogs)**

These are frequently updated online journals with diary-like entries that allow people to express their thoughts and feelings and give details of their daily activities. Typically, a blog includes text, photos and sometimes video.

**Microblogging sites**

These are sites that allow users to create and exchange very short text entries. A popular example of this type of site is Twitter.

**Wikis**

These are websites that provide information that visitors to the site can extend and edit. They allow users to share information and are useful for research. The best-known example of a wiki is Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia that can be updated by contributors.

**Chatrooms**

Online communication within communities is sometimes referred to as chat. Some of the large interactive communities where people take part in the same conversation or type of chat at the same time are known as chatrooms.

**Podcasts**

Podcasts are a series of audio or video files that can be downloaded from the internet. If video is published in episodes like a blog, this process is known as a vlog (video blog). YouTube is an example of a video-sharing website where individuals can share vlogs.

**Virtual learning environments**

A school community may make use of a virtual learning environment (VLE) to distribute resources, support learning and assess progress online. A VLE is an education system based on web facilities. The system is a virtual world that mirrors the real world of education – it contains learning materials, tests, projects, lectures/lessons and allows interaction between teachers and learners. The system also records and tracks learners’ progress and performs other class management functions.

Sometimes the system can work in real time. Learners can communicate using microphones and speakers, or by text exchanges. At other times learners can be left to work at their own pace to meet specified deadlines. Lectures and lesson notes, as well as exercises, are all held on the system and can be accessed by learners.

Learners ‘hand in’ their work to the teacher electronically using the VLE. Teachers assess the work online and give feedback electronically via the VLE.

**Social networking sites**

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, allow members of the online community to interact and communicate by setting up a profile. Users can then add links to friends’ profiles and post personal information, including photographs, videos favourite music and blog entries.