Strategic Communication Toolkit: Netvibes

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As a public speaking instructor at a community college, there are several items I always carry in my tote bag. The must-have essentials are textbooks, flash drives, writing utensils, handouts, and deliverables. Since all of my classes are taught in a face-to-face format, integrating creativity can speak volumes. This rings true in an age where visual learning has taken classroom environments by storm. Gone are the days of relying solely on the spoken word, a chalkboard, and a few visual aids. Partarrieu (2015) stresses, "With so much information available through various channels, the issue for teachers is how to help students understand, interpret, and apply the knowledge available to them" (para. 3).

In an age of technological advancements, the strategic communication toolkit is the wave of the future. What an instructor places inside it can mean all the difference. After pondering several possibilities, I decided to share the item that has taken up the most space in my toolkit … Netvibes. Therefore, the focus of this article will be to: (a) introduce Netvibes; (b) address its purpose; (c) identify where it can be found; (d) discuss advantages of accessing this tool; and (e) provide step-by-step instructions on how to use it.

Netvibes Unveiled

Image: courtesy of http://press.netvibes.com

Netvibes is a home page solution that allows users to create personalized pages filled with content they find useful. It was created in 2005 by Tariq Krim, a man who found himself frustrated with his attempts to stay organized in a technologically-savvy world. Netvibes can be accessed from any web-enabled computer (Netvibes, 2015). This dashboard publishing platform can collect elements such as videos, blogs, podcasts, websites, and social media platforms (e.g.,

Facebook and Twitter) in a single location for easy viewing (Brunsel & Horejsi, 2010). A dashboard page can be created and personalized through the use of existing themes or by creating personal ones. Customized tabs, feeds, and modules can also be shared with others. For privacy reasons, only modules with public content can be shared.
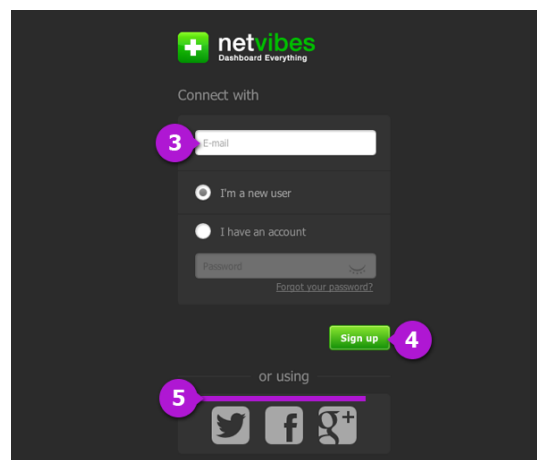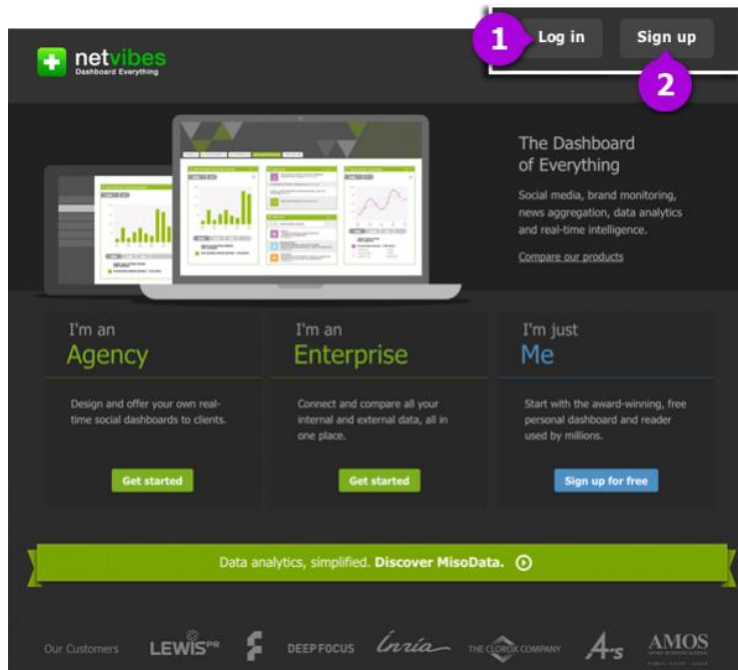
A Significant Purpose

For educators**,** Netvibes can be used to enhance classroom instruction and challenge students to explore research options. Netvibes was not intended to be used solely for entertainment purposes (Netvibes, 2015). In fact, it is being implemented in classrooms across the globe. Gordon (2007) explored how librarians are using it to create information portals. Netvibes' do-it-yourself dashboards are being used to alert faculty, students, and staff on college campuses about services being offered at their schools. To gain maximum input, the author stressed how librarians met with staff to discuss the portal and decide what should be included. He concluded that brainstorming techniques helped them create a list of library resources, news sites, local content, and any other useful resources that could be integrated on the dashboard.

Netvibes is also a go-to source for those in the medical profession. McCormick and Dickard (2013) explored how various hospitals are creating portals to provide staff with evidence and support in clinical decision making, while enhancing their professional development. Singer and Stephens (2007) revealed how creating an information portal with Netvibes "does not require much in the way of upkeep, is highly adaptable to the needs of the specific user group, and can be used on any computer either at work or at home, updating RSS feeds automatically" (pp. 44-45).

Location, Location … Netvibes!

Creating a Netvibes account is quite simple. A potential user first needs to go to

https://www.netvibes.com/en to sign up for the service. There is a free version, including a few

upgrade options. On the welcome page, if you already have an account, click on the "Log in"

button (1). If you want to register, click the "Sign Up" button (2) on the top right. For regular

registration, enter the email address (3) you want to use for your Netvibes account, and then click

on the "Sign Up" button (4). If you want to register via social networks, just click on the

Twitter, Facebook, or Google + connect button (5).

Images: courtesy of http://documentation.netvibes.com/doku.php?id=main

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Numerous Advantages

Since I teach public speaking courses at a community college, there are numerous advantages for integrating Netvibes in the classroom. One activity could be to have students create dashboards for public speaking topics (e.g., informative, persuasive, and demonstration). They could also use this medium to research information for their oratorical and event analysis papers. A significant advantage is that dashboards can provide up-to-the minute details in one location. For example, a person wishing to do an informative speech on the 2016 presidential race can include numerous RSS feeds, videos, websites, and podcasts on a dashboard (June, 2013). Polling information from major news organizations could provide real-time results, including a wide range of reactions before, during, and after scheduled debates. Analyses could also be streamed "live" from national and local networks.

A Closer Look

Many teachers integrate Netvibes to promote critical thinking because it can be used to create blogs. The dashboard platform enhances them because it allows students to include other resources. Sperl (2012) adds, "There is much ease in arranging posts, which enables students to break up the strict timeline you need to keep in blogs" (p. 6). Indeed, it is important for students to be able to incorporate other data and ideas in their blog posts, enhancing their own critical thinking, while motivating others to do the same. Cutler (2013) explored how dashboards such as Netvibes could be used at the university level to assess real-time data on water and energy consumption at Cornell University. The overarching goal was to promote energy conservation. The findings helped guide the development of a broader campus-wide energy dashboard system that provides real-time energy usage readings for over 50 campus locations. Dusenberry (2008) researched the Dashboard Management System. This platform was implemented by Washington

State's Transportation Improvement Board to provide transparency for project funding and

development. A final assessment of advantages revealed it would be a great model to adopt in
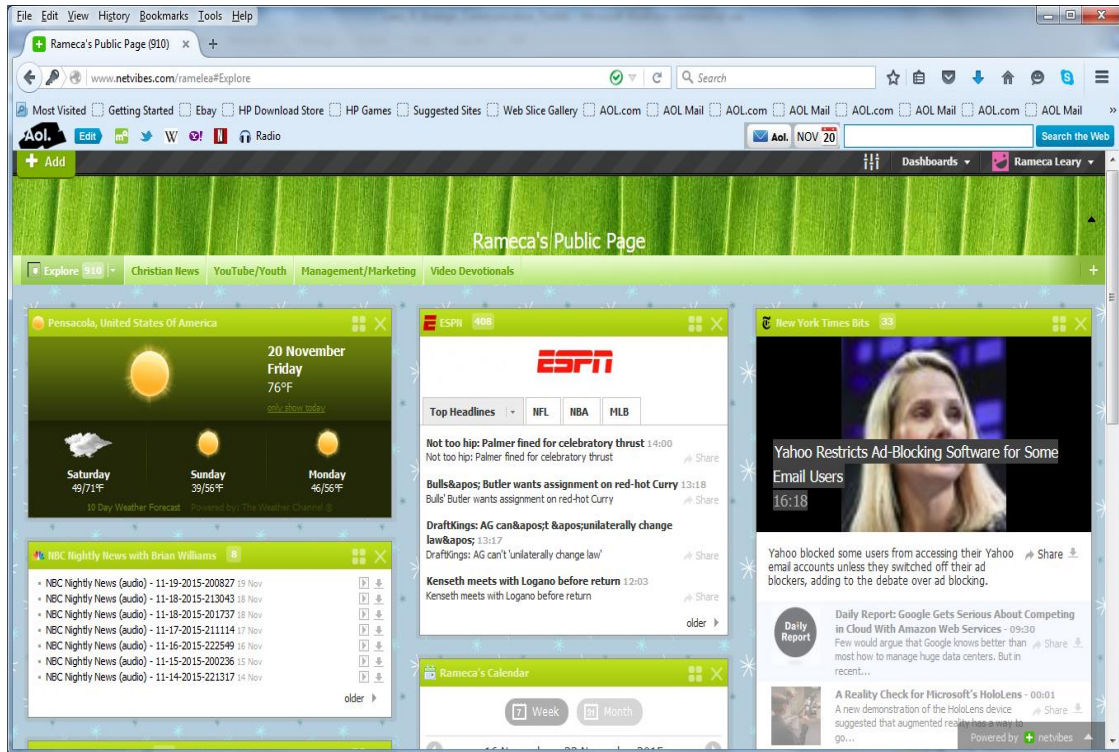
other state agencies.

My Turn: Your Turn

After some minor tweaking, I decided to share three tabs from my Netvibes public

dashboard. The first link contains my "Explore" tab: http://www.netvibes.com/ramelea#Explore.

In terms of classroom instruction, this is something each student creates in my public speaking

courses. It contains personalized information regarding climatology, preferred news sites, feeds,

etc. This public dashboard tab also helps keep them organized. The next tab explores church

management and marketing skills, which focuses on how their personal and professional lives

can be enhanced http://www.netvibes.com/ramelea#Management%2FMarketing. If I were a

student presenting an informative speech on church marketing techniques, the specific blogs,

videos, and news articles contained here could enhance my research. The last tab contains

Christian news from various sources: http://www.netvibes.com/ramelea#Christian_News. It is a

means to have daily devotionals located in one place. I can view this anywhere, and that is

something I cherish.

Ready, Set, Go!

Since you just explored how a Netvibes dashboard can look, I am going to take you

through the step-by-step process of creating your own. You will first need to visit the Netvibes

site to register for the service: https://www.netvibes.com/en. Upon completion, creating your

personal dashboard will be your next task. Remember, a dashboard is the name of a standard

page in Netvibes. Take a look at mine (located on next page). It is a dynamic workspace where
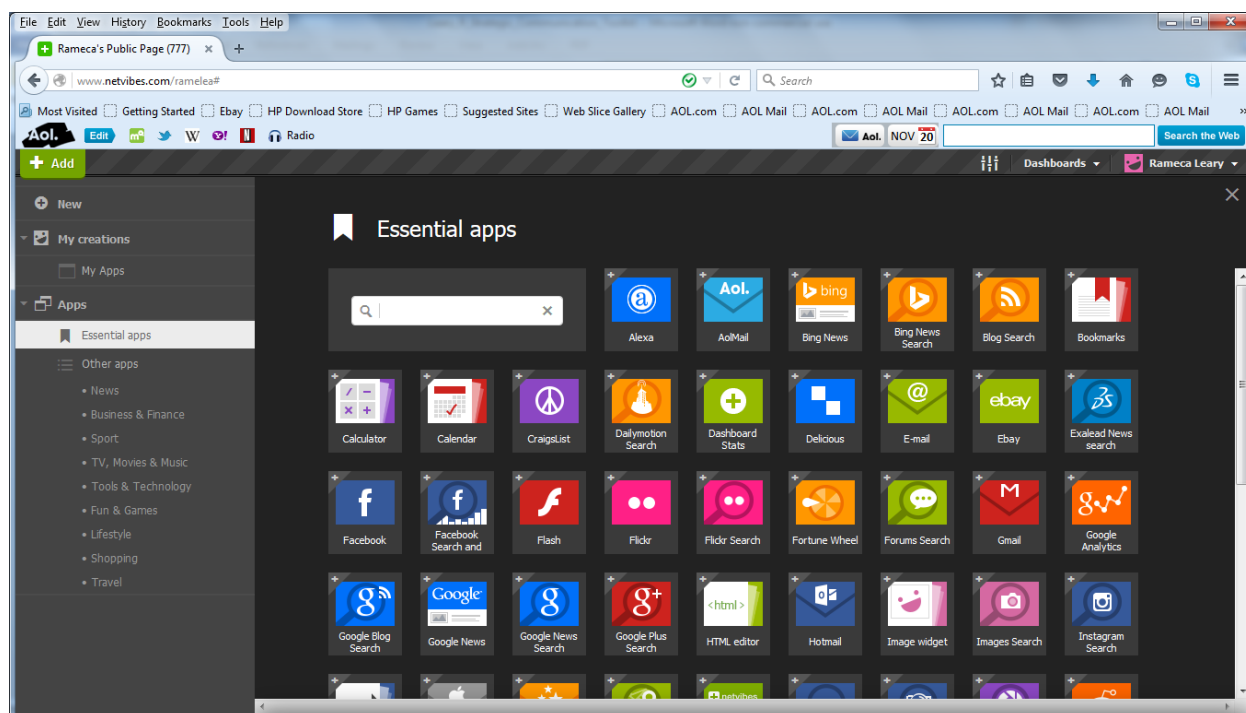
you can add modules called Apps (or widgets), which are small applications that provide specific information or functionality (Netvibes, 2015).

Rameca's Public Page: Netvibes

Easy Process

As a user, you can choose one of the popular dashboards or enter a specific keyword. Netvibes will do the rest and populate your page with a few relevant sources to get started. You can also create a title for your dashboard by clicking on the "Enter the title of your page here" and replacing it with the title you want (June, 2013). Adding new content is easy. Netvibes allows you to add resources from all your favorite websites via RSS. If you do not know what RSS is, explore this page. You can also add Apps (or widgets) with various purposes (e.g., weather, Twitter, and Facebook feeds). To do so, click on the Add button (seen on the next page), then choose one of the following (Netvibes, 2015):
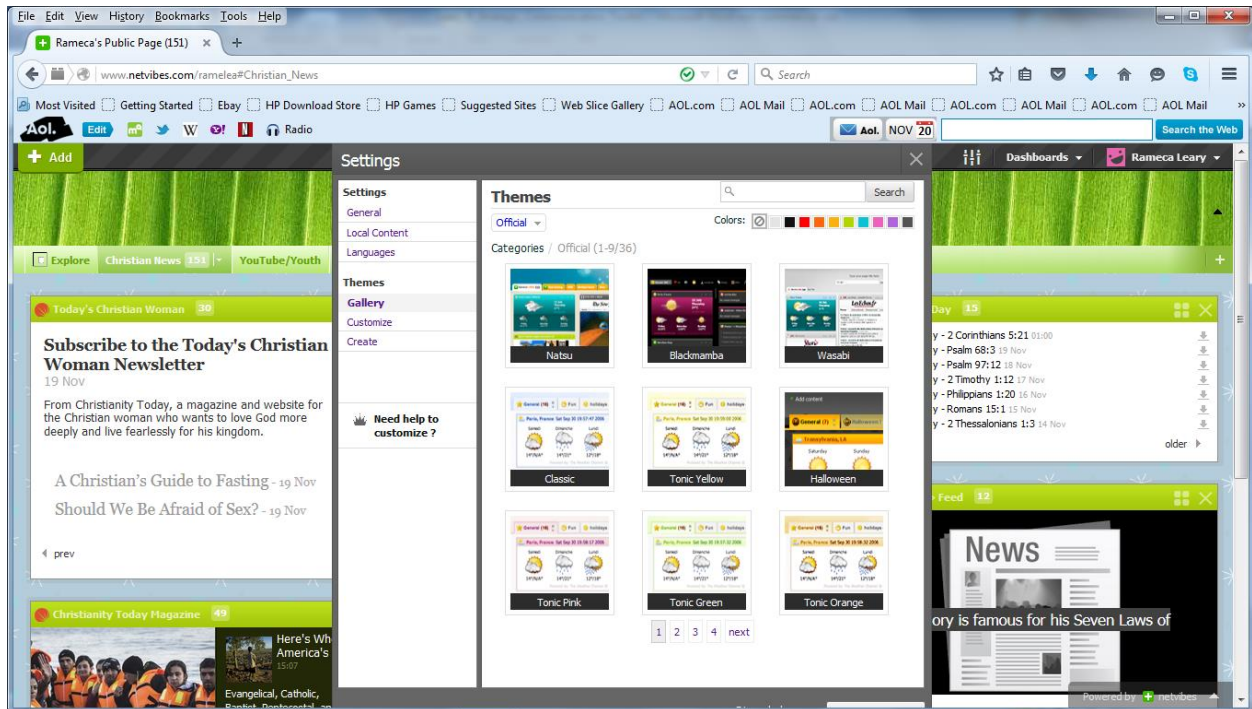
Rameca's Essential Apps: Netvibes

- **Essentials:** contains a selection of essential widgets to manage emails, monitor social networks, write to-do lists, etc.

- **Categories:** offers a selection of news feeds sorted in categories (news, business, sports, games, etc.)

- **Feed:** can be used if you cannot find what you need in the two previous sections. You can also add the URL to any website you like. Netvibes will automatically detect available RSS/Atom feeds. If the site you entered offers multiple types of RSS/Atom feeds, you will be presented with a confirmation window asking you to select one.

Customization

Netvibes pages are sorted automatically into three columns. Users can change that by clicking on the small arrow located on the right side of a tab. A new panel will appear, allowing you to change tab colors, rename them, share tabs, and change the number of columns (Netvibes,

2015). Users can also change the dashboard theme by selecting a new one from the options

menu on the top right-hand corner of the screen (pictured below; looks like three bamboo rods).

Netvibes offers a lot of customized themes, but you can also design your own, using the theme

creator: http://eco.netvibes.com/users/16257/netvibes/themes

Rameca's Snapshot (Themes): Netvibes

Conclusion

In our age of technological advancements, many instructors want to be savvy. Innovative

classroom pedagogy can definitely keep students engaged. That is why the Netvibes dashboard

platform is a great strategic communication tool that can enhance students' educational and

professional lives. From researching public speaking topics to assisting staff members at

libraries and government agencies, dashboard platforms are flourishing. The level of creativity

is in the eye of the beholder. The possibilities are endless.

Leary, R. V. (2017, April). Strategic communication toolkit: Netvibes. *Journal of Media Education*, *8*(2), 54-58.

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