Cool or REALLY Cool?

By Margaret Watson

So, you receive a couple of dozen e-mails every day, and you have surfed the Net, the World Wide Web, for hours at a time ... cool. You have your own personal computer at home, and it is connected to a small color printer ... cool. You have taken a couple of computer workshops, and have learned programs like Microsoft Word®, or PowerPoint® ... cool. The Labyrinth tutorial on the Libraries' home page has taught you how to find books and journal articles on the Web-based West*Cat* and online databases and indexes ... cool. And, a multitude of other Web access points from the University Libraries' site lead you to seemingly infinite resources ... still cool. But what is REALLY cool?

The answer lies in the Instructional Technology Laboratory located at 3302 Sangren Hall. The IT Lab is an open computer and graphics laboratory that helps students apply all of the technical skills that they already know—and then make the final product "really cool." When students ask a question or indicate a need, the Lab staff will supply answers, special training, and assistance.

To begin with, the Lab's graphics area provides basic, fundamentally useful, and traditional services. Miles (at least a few hundred feet) of laminating and dozens of dry mounting sheets are produced on demand. Document binding is a must and popular since it improves the appearance (and maybe even the content) of the assigned paper. The Copy Stand offers standard slide production from printed images, photographs, and books. Use of the video and/or audio editing facilities helps to produce a polished final video product or audio tape recording.

Then, special things can begin to happen in the IT Lab. There are top-of-the-line computers loaded with software and equipped with all of the fancy gadgets that everyone talks about—and few know how to make work. With staff assistance, and using one of the available scanners, the Lab clientele are able to scan a variety of images onto the Web page, overhead transparency, or even a word-processed document, i.e., the research paper. In fact, one scanner will reproduce slides and negatives in the new format—whether on paper or a Web site.

Of course (but not from any ordinary setup), the IT Lab provides patrons with the capability to print high-quality images directly from its computers. Using the Lab's color laser printer, brochures and almost any kind of word-processed document can be professionally created replete with color images, artwork, and/or images from the Web. If two superior color printers aren't enough, there is always a new Poster Printer that can reproduce color images as large as three feet by nine feet. Still not impressed? Well, there is a new photo printer than can print a color 8" x 10" "photo" on Kodak paper. And, invariably, staff are there to assist the user in scanning an image, designing a graphic, and then printing it—size and photo standard on demand.

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Patrons also can uncover the advanced features of the IT Lab's computer software. By using PowerPoint®, a professional-looking, computer-based presentation of printed "transparencies" or slides is possible; Photoshop® is used to improve the quality of images, design artwork, or enhance scanning; PageMaker® is an excellent tool for developing brochures; and PageMill® is a software program that designs Web pages.

OK, is there something that is even more playful and design-enhancing? Check out the new Slide Maker at the lab. The novice artist/producer can scan, design, create computer images, and then send them to the film recorder that is actually a complex computer device loaded with slide film. The images created on the computer screen are sent to the film recorder and the slide film is exposed. All that the producer needs to do is have the film processed, and, voila, he or she has slides from PowerPoint®, PhotoShop® , or scanned images. And, you have heard of those new digital cameras? IT Lab has one available, a high quality piece of equipment. Anyone can learn how to take and save images on a computer. The "digital photo" can be used in a word-processed paper, brochure, Web page, or printed on the photo printer.

IT Lab's technology can also insure that video can be captured to a computer, edited, and saved onto a CD-ROM disk. Any video recording brought to the lab can be digitized via a special video card installed in a powerful computer. Then the video can be trimmed, clipped, and edited using Premier® software. The final step involves recording the edited product using the new CD-ROM recorder. Now, that's the ultimate cool or is it?

After one or more of the aforementioned methods of producing super-professional products is completed, there may still be a need for a place to display the designer's project. The Instructional Technology Laboratory has a classroom for students and staff to use. There, the end result can be displayed on screen by use of a Pentium-based computer with a high level, "bright" projector. IT Lab staff members will set up the room and test the program for bugs. In addition, anything that has been produced and prepared for demonstration can also be complemented by adding direct views from the World Wide Web appropriately interspersed to demonstrate whatever is needed.

The REALLY cool part of all this "stuff" is that the Instructional Technology Laboratory is staffed by several talented staff members who will take any client from the basics through the advanced development of materials of all types—and intended for diverse purposes. Our phone number ought to be 387-COOL, but we suggest that you call 387-5054 for more information.