

Text verdict on school bands

What's the best way to encourage school children to vote for their favourite school band? By text of course! Here's how PageOne helped a South West client harness the power of JANET txt.

Text message voting decided the winner in a school bands competition run by a leading educational trust.

The annual RockIT competition is organised by South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL), a not-for-profit trust funded by 14 local authorities to arrange broadband connection for schools across the region.

Bands are invited to submit a video of themselves performing an original composition, with the chance to win music equipment.

This year, SWGfL teamed up with PageOne to operate a text voting system via JANET txt. A record number of bands entered and the winner – Epic Journey – was chosen from a shortlist of three.

"It was a very successful project," says Ian Southwell, SWGfL E-Learning Consultant. "We had 3,000 votes once the bands mobilised their fan base and gained some local exposure."

SWGfL has run an online voting system the previous year but Ian worked out that while not all students have access to a PC or laptop, nearly 100 per cent have a

mobile phone, many with free text packages.

"Texting provided no barriers and it's a convenient and quick way for young people to vote," he said. "Also, last year we found some sharp students were setting up auto voting to skew results – with text we were able to check multiple votes from the same source instantly."

SWGfL picked PageOne and JANET txt as their messaging supplier for its ease of use and low cost local authority text bundles, and used the band competition to promote the service to schools and colleges.

Schools are using text to communicate with students and parents about changes to classes, school closure in poor weather and health talks, for example. It also works well to remind young people about additional classes or support – reminders can be scheduled in advance.

"I worked for a college previously and found text was often the only way to engage with students who were regularly absent. Writing to them or their parents, or phoning just didn't work," said Ian.

SWGfL uses JANET txt itself to let schools and local authorities know if there has been an interruption in service and provide updates.

Meanwhile, this year's bands are practising to take part in the 2009 RockIT competition.

Ian said: "I'm not sure if the winners are going to be the next big thing, but last year's winners now have a record deal."

- Annual school band contest needed youth-friendly voting system
- JANET txt was a popular choice for the SMS generation
- Massive response to request for votes

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