



### FAST FACTS

**Name:** Jeff McMahon

**Role:** Chief Information Officer

**District:** Metropolitan School District of Decatur Township Schools. Decatur, IN

**Challenge:** Exercising good control over student video posts on a safe, secure video management platform while helping students flourish as content creators and learners.

**Solution:** MyVRSpot video management solution built specifically for education.

**Results:** A safe, secure and protected community of learners with increased freedoms to create in constructive directions; teachers who can easily assist their students with video management and event streaming; a gratified school district CIO confident in student produced work and student data security.

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## Video Management Built for Education

A school district's Chief Information Officer speaks from experience in sharing his overview of a superb video management solution for schools.



**Jeff McMahon is the Chief Information**

**Officer at the Metropolitan School District (MSD) of Decatur Township Schools in Indianapolis, IN, a public school district with over 6,000 students in grades K-12, including a Kindergarten, four elementary schools, two intermediate schools, one middle school and a high school, as well as a charter and alternative school.**

With the district for over 16 months now, Jeff brings more than 29 years of experience in largely technology-centered roles. As Decatur's CIO, he orchestrates all their technology, including student data, student management systems and more. "I've always jumped in on the beginning to some of this cutting-edge stuff over the years by writing a lot of grants," says Jeff, who was part of a \$9 million Department of Education Challenge Grant back in the early 2000's that established Indiana's very first problem-based learning 1-to-1 laptop program, among the first in the nation.

**Cutting edge.** *Jeff McMahon prides himself in staying on the cutting edge when it comes to technology for the sake of assisting students to thrive and flourish as creators of content to further their learning.*

As technology continued to advance, one of Jeff's main concerns had to do with an abundance of student work creating overly hefty file sizes. "Students were creating really big movies and graphics and putting them together to present for their problem-based learning projects — and we often lost everything. There was no way to transfer content back and forth; it was just really clunky. We'd have really good presentations, but no way to easily share and archive them."

**Trusted, safe and secure**

From earlier days, Jeff knew Michael Kessler, a trusted contact with deep experience and success in educational productivity and communication tools. When Michael released MyVRSpot, a video management solution built specifically for education, Jeff recognized it as "the perfect solution. I can give every student an account; when they save their movie they can upload to MyVRSpot where they have a repository of all their movies. Then, we go to the presentation and there's all that web access — and links. We can simply click and see the presentation," Jeff observes.

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—Jeff McMahon, Chief Information Officer, MSD Decatur Township Schools, Decatur, IN



**Effortless to use.** *Students can upload, index, archive and share multimedia content in one centralized location, and it's not on the open Internet, and yes, you remain in control of everything. School districts need solutions such as MyVRSpot to provide safety, security and privacy for their students.*

That there existed a smooth, easy way to share school-related videos in a safe, secure and controlled environment was extremely gratifying. Other benefits took Jeff by surprise. “Grandma and Grandpa could see them, Mom and Dad, other students; you had a way of sharing — and it just grew and grew,” says Jeff.

An early leader in video management, MyVRSpot has only become more robust. “It really was one of the first video tools,” Jeff notes. “Now, every time you turn on your computer, videos are everywhere — but back when this came out, it was really the cutting edge of video production and sharing, in a really easy way. It was just seamless.”

#### **Better than YouTube**

Today, the platform has had the advantage of time and upgrades, so it’s still seamless, secure and easy to use, but now more than

ever — and with more specific attention to school needs than another familiar video platform. “MyVRSpot gives us a safe and secure environment where we can store all of our media files,” says Jeff. “Sure, some students will still go straight to YouTube, but you don’t want all your stuff on YouTube,” he warns. “For one, you don’t own it anymore. The kids like YouTube, so when they see MyVRSpot and say, ‘Oh, okay, this looks like YouTube’ then it works out nicely. And I still think they post things in YouTube, but we have made this available to them so they can safely upload their work.”

Initially, Jeff just wanted a place for videos, wherever that might be, where he could easily store and retrieve them. However, in Jeff’s experience, that kind of ease of use is simply not workable in a classroom or school situation. Overburdening existing machines with files, dealing with weakened memory, overloading laptops — all catches up to any user very quickly. He desperately needed an easy storage and management system, and got much more than he expected. “They could store a lot more stuff with MyVRSpot, and even gather people to share it and see it. But I didn’t even consider you could just send someone a link and be on it, or other kids could be in your group and see and rate videos, and things like that — like YouTube, but safer and more controlled.”

#### **Control is good**

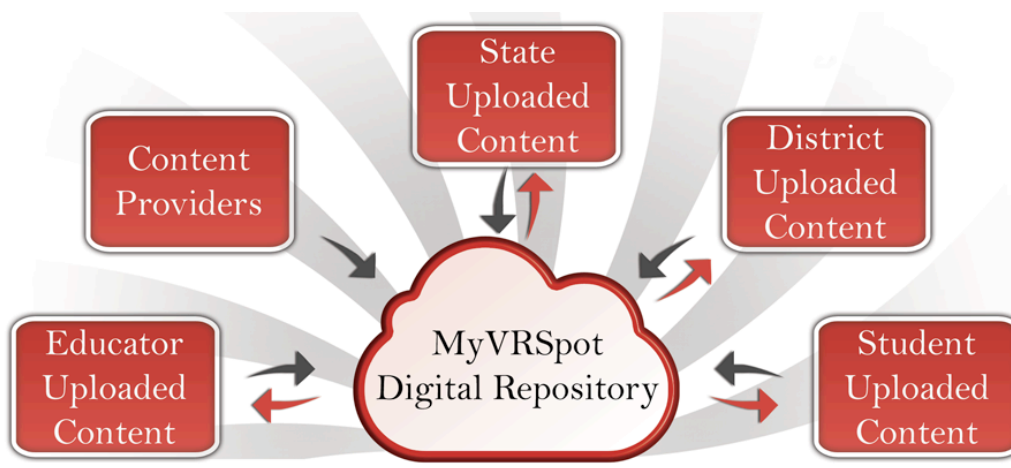
Is it really worth it? The answer to that question depends on how much a school district values safety, security and privacy, and could have legal ramifications as well. “Part of my job is to ensure our student data is kept safe, and one thing I don’t like is for our students to post materials into a third-party system that I have no control of,” says Jeff. He wouldn’t know if they were doing something inappropriate or even what they were doing. “And if it represented our school district [poorly], I wouldn’t have any control over it. The administration piece in MyVRSpot allows me access to every student’s account, so if something wasn’t right I could handle it. I have total control. With YouTube, I don’t feel that I have the control that I need to have. YouTube’s cool, but I don’t feel comfortable with them having control over our students work.”

When it comes to safeguarding a community of learners, control is a very good thing all around. With MyVRSpot, Jeff says he likes the way that “the teacher has control of what her

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#### The right environment.

Multimedia can be condensed into one centralized location for end-user consumption on a variety of devices. This allows files from every tier of the educational scaffold to be shared instantly. Students and teachers can access content 24 hours a day. This shared environment saves time and resources compared to the traditional "top-down" distribution model used for content and curriculum distribution.

class is doing. And the district has control of what's happening with the whole video piece.”

#### Fun features, live from Decatur

And now, MyVRSpot has so many new features, including one that Jeff especially finds useful. “We call it Video Showcase. With a small bit of code that MyVRSpot provides to us, when we post videos into MyVRSpot, we can simply checkmark them and they’ll also appear on our website. That’s been a really neat feature for us.”

Another feature MyVRSpot now offers is streaming video. “It’s just an easy 1-2-3 and we’re streaming,” says Jeff. And after an event is complete, with a click of a checkbox, the recorded video can upload to the school website. In fact, the school district recently live-streamed a holiday performance. With only a couple days warning, the district used their Facebook page to announce their intention. While physical attendance was excellent, even on short notice, over 50 more devices connected to the performance online as it happened. “A teacher set up the computer right in front of the stage and let it go.” And those absentee relatives? “They could watch it as though they were sitting in the audience,” he says. “It’s almost too easy. It used to take engineers to come and help us do it. Now, I can send the teacher in and she can do it for us.”

#### Ease of use, service and support

Back in 2005, without MyVRSpot, Jeff describes students alive with ideas for the local utility companies. “They created these great videos they were going to present, where they were trying to solve problems in their community, but we didn’t have a place to put them. We’d try to run them off our hard drives, but they’d be slow or didn’t fit. When MyVRSpot came out the student could just upload it, and whenever we went anywhere we could just login and we were streaming.”

Of course, anyone who’s ever done a presentation using any kind of technology can attest to inevitable technical glitches (including, in a famous example, Steve Jobs himself). So, how exactly is the service and support from MyVRSpot? “That’s probably my favorite part of it,” Jeff laughs. “With Michael’s previous company, support was unbelievable. So I knew when this came out it would be good. And yes, they’re just amazing. When we were doing the streaming, I had direct contact with support as needed. They also have training and tutorials — it’s been really great. I’ve dealt with a lot of companies and I put MyVRSpot at the top of the list for support.”

Even with such benefits, wouldn’t some school leaders just opt for what’s free? Why go with MyVRSpot and not something like YouTube? “I get that all the time,” says Jeff. “We have to be careful with our kids and what we put out there,” he says. Regardless of the cost (“it’s not much, you pay a little bit for it,” says Jeff), he



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**Account hierarchy.** *The MyVRSpot system has an extensive hierarchy system designed around an understanding of needs of K12 school districts. Accounts can be purchased for Administrators, Administrators and Teachers, or for all Administrators, Teachers, and Students within the district.*

MyVRSpot is not just any video management system, but one that has been built specifically for education. Jeff says, “I’ve honestly not seen it at the level that they have. I’ve had cloud-based storage people say, ‘We could just put that in the cloud and have an account up there.’” But Jeff says the user interface wouldn’t be familiar or workable, and that’s another benefit of the system. “You hardly have to train anybody.” Of course, his district provides teacher training, “but students look at it and they know,” says Jeff. “It’s intuitive. They see it and figure it out.” When it comes to video management, he’s never seen anything as comprehensive as this. “It’s comprehensive yet still simple and intuitive enough so that it doesn’t take a whole lot of training time. We do a lot of

does it for the privacy, security and the administrative piece behind it — “that’s the best,” he says. “The technology speaks for itself. Today, in 2015 where everything is YouTube, video oriented, Vimeo — even kids that don’t have hardly anything know what that means, so it’s important that we have our own video system, that we have control of it, and that it’s going to work for the district and it’s not just out there where I can’t have any control of it.”

training on everything, but with this, they catch on really quickly. It’s like YouTube, but better.”

#### **Bigger picture, great partner**

In the broader view of education, Jeff says, “We need to be careful with what we are trying to do with students. And not focus so much on the technology, but what we are trying to do.” In

other words, he says, improving student achievement, or making core content better, and not having technology for technology’s sake. “I still get beat up with, ‘Oh, you need to teach students Microsoft Office because that’s what the world uses. But kids need to know how to do Math and Reading and Writing, and then they can do anything they want. We’re using all these technology tools to make a better student, not just a better technology user,” he says.

“Our goal is to have kids be the creator of their own products. They are creators, they create things. So as creators, they create videos, presentations, audio files and they have a way to store it and get to it. We have had kids video taping themselves doing a math problem on a whiteboard, they video record it and post it up. That’s a good thing, nothing wrong with that. They can go back and look at it, they can show their teacher later how they did it, but the real thing is students being creators of their own work and being able to create things and put them all together into a format where you can see the critical thinking and problem solving skills on all these projects and that they get to show them to other people and have an audience.”

As for partnering with MyVRSpot, says Jeff: “I’m really impressed with how they stay out there and ahead, they really are amazing with what they come up with. They’re a great partner to have, I’ll tell you.” ●

#### **CREATORS OF CONTENT**

A superb video management solution will help schools:

- ☑ Easily showcase video content
- ☑ Link to external videos
- ☑ Transcode video to a format suitable for Internet viewing
- ☑ Attach standards to content
- ☑ Embed videos into LMSs
- ☑ Seamlessly create video documents and messaging
- ☑ Allow students to focus on being creators of content
- ☑ Allow for web-based live streaming

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