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TECH TALK with Sherrilynne Starkie

## **A-Level Revision for the MySpace Generation**

The half-term break is just around the corner and soon after that, students, teachers and parents will start to turn their attention to getting ready for testing and exams. A-level students especially will be under a lot of pressure to do well and beat the competition for a spot at their university of choice.

I've vivid memories of my daughters getting ready to sit the SATs, America's closest approximation to A-levels. I joined the other concerned mothers who spent hours combing through bookshops trying to find the best study guides in the hopes of my girls getting the best scores possible. Of course having the texts book and study guides was one thing, getting the girls to use them was quite another.

So when I met Joy Sandifer, the woman behind Camrose Media, who has created a series of interactive study guides on DVD, I took note. These digital guides look and feel like some of my kids' favourite telly programmes. The DVDs combine images, music and video with interactive learning tools. In fact, they look a bit MTV-meets-MySpace. It seems a great solution to get today's students, who are used to sophisticated media, ready for A-level exams.

"The digital revolution has fundamentally changed how consumers use the media and young people have been at the forefront as early adopters," explained Joy Sandifer, managing director at Camrose Media. "Our study guides package the curriculum into a format that today's students are used to and make important revision tasks seem less of a slog."

Joy and her partner Ian Smith, a graphic designer, came up with the idea because, as a teacher, Joy found many of her students learned more effectively when subjects were presented visually. Together, they scripted, filmed and edited most of the DVDs themselves with help from experienced examiners and a handful of young presenters.

What struck me about the idea was, this seems like an obvious way to package content for young people. Why hasn't it been done before? It seems like a winner to me...make kids watch TV so they can do well in school.

"You have to be a bit mad to take on a project like this," joked Joy over a cup of coffee at bookstore café. "It's taken us three long years to develop a seven DVDs, all of the most popular A-level courses, and as far as I know we are the only ones to have done it. We wanted to provide a solid revision framework that is informal, entertaining and easy to use. Feedback from kids that have used them is extremely positive."

I've had a chance to look over one of the DVDs (AS Media Studies...and I passed the quiz, by the way, thank goodness!). I can see the appeal. The presenters all look like they've walked off the set of 'Friends' (only with British accents). The content is broken into shorter packages, ideal for the attention span of the MTV generation. There's lots of guidance about how to best structure answers to examination questions along with hints and tips about what examiners are looking for.

Apparently it's not just parents and students that are buying these disks. Educators are finding them to be great teaching aids. Joy explained, "Teachers like them because they are concise, focused and relevant. They can save hours of preparation time and are completely flexible to support teaching at any pace. Teachers know what works."

Camrose Media's products are available in high street and online book retailers. And, schools making bulk orders can get special discounts. They can be played on a TV, a PC and some games consoles. They are available in the following titles and few additional ones are in the pipeline:

- AS Biology
- AS Chemistry
- AS English Literature
- AS History
- AS Law
- AS Media Studies
- AS Sociology

-ends-

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