Learning for All: Teaching Students, Faculty, and Staff with Screencasting

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Three academic librarians from different departments at the Auraria Library—instruction, systems, and technical services—share a common methodology to teach students, academic faculty, and colleagues. These librarians use screencasting as an essential and creative technique to instruct all users. Patrons receive greater value when the authors sacrifice perfection and respond immediately to on-campus and distance learners’ needs with short and rapidly-produced online tutorials. This article presents guidance and rationale for creating, evaluating, and publicizing similar tutorials.

KEYWORDS instruction, online tutorials, professional development, screencast

INTRODUCTION

The Auraria Library is an unusual academic library. It is the home library for the University of Colorado Denver, Metropolitan State College of Denver, and the Community College of Denver. These three higher education institutions provide the library with an opportunity to interact with patrons from a wide variety of backgrounds, from part-time undergraduates to full-time graduate students. The library has approximately 25 faculty librarians and 50 staff members who serve more than 40,000 students. Located in downtown Denver, near the site of the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Auraria campus is an integral part of the urban landscape. As such, members of the metropolitan neighborhood and the campus community embrace the library as a place to meet colleagues and friends, study for tests, drink coffee,
tutor students, visit a student art gallery, and research information. Serving a population with rich diversity and overwhelming numbers provides a constant challenge for librarians.

As librarians in three different specialties, this article’s authors serve a diverse audience with immediate information needs. Karen Sobel is a reference and instruction librarian who focuses on teaching students research skills in the classroom and one-on-one at the reference desk. Systems librarian Margaret Brown-Sica manages the automation department and oversees the hardware, software, Web, and distance education support systems used by library patrons and employees. Denise Pan supervises acquisitions, cataloging, and electronic resources departments and is responsible for providing the students, faculty, and staff of the Auraria campus with uninterrupted access and discovery of print and online resources. While each author has a different role, she shares similar techniques and tools to teach students of all ages and backgrounds.

Sobel, Brown-Sica, and Pan agree that screencasting is an appropriate teaching method to deliver library instruction to undergraduates and teaching faculty, as well as professional development for library staff and faculty. InfoWorld columnist Jon Udell was the first to use the term *screencasting*. In early 2005, Udell described screencasts as “narrated movies of software in action—to showcase application tips, capture and publish product demonstrations, and even make short documentaries” (2005b, p. 11). By 2008 the term had been adopted into library and technology vernacular.

Inspiration for this article occurred after a poster session for the “Learning Virtually: Online Professional Development for Library Workers with Tight Budgets and Full Schedules” program offered during the 2008 ALA Annual Conference (Brown-Sica, Pan, & Sobel, 2008). Casual conversations with other professionals revealed that many have experimented with online tutorials in the past; however, few were able to create screencasts and implement them as an effective teaching method. They were apprehensive about learning a new application and spending time creating the tutorials. In this article, the authors encourage librarians to revisit online tutorials by adopting their practices. Screencasting is an essential and creative method to teach students, academic faculty, and colleagues. All users receive greater value when the authors sacrifice perfection and respond immediately to on-campus and distance learners’ needs with short and rapidly produced online tutorials. This article will expand on this idea and is organized into five sections: 1) literature review, 2) identifying needs, 3) creating screencasts, 4) marketing, and 5) assessment. For each section, concepts are covered in general, as well as in the context of the authors’ specific area of librarianship.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Online tutorials are a relatively new technology. As such, articles and books on this topic have been published only since 2005. For this literature review,
the authors of this article detail the origins of screencasting in computer science publications and its transition to library science texts. The writings on tutorials will be described in the context of different types of librarianship. In addition, screencasting literature in relation to other topics covered in this article—identifying needs, creating screencasts, conducting marketing and assessment—are also detailed.

Popular computer science magazines provide the earliest references to basic information and evaluation of online tutorials. The term “screencasting” is attributed to Jon Udell, an “evangelist” at Microsoft, while in his previous role as lead analyst at the InfoWorld Test Center (Wikipedia, 2008). In his article, “Fast-forward Learning,” he explains why screencasting is so useful: “[W]ith video playback at my disposal, though, fastforward and rewind trumped navigation and search... I still had to revisit scenes in order to learn the details, and thanks to the video, I could” (Udell, 2005a, p. 10). He found this tool extremely useful in the area of teaching technology skills, “…for better and for worse, human experience is becoming intertwined with software systems of growing complexity. If we are going to make sense of our software-mediated lives and contemplate the values these software systems embody, we will need a means to tell one another stories: about how things are, how things might be, and how things ought to be” (Udell, 2005b, p. 11).

Articles in the business and computer science literature advocate this technique as a teaching tool for other disciplines. Gorham wrote “screencasting is popular with software developers, of course— they use it to promote applications in a far more enticing way than a text description would provide. But members of other professions, from teaching to business, can use screencasts to produce and distribute great multimedia presentations” (Gorham, 2006, p. 118).

Within library science literature, screencasting generally has been advocated by instruction librarians. Academic library science articles about screencasting primarily focus on the content of tutorials. However, the body of literature on screencasting and online tutorials integrated into college level library instruction is surprisingly small, considering its prevalence in actual practice. Few articles address rapid production as a goal in screencasting. None gives this topic significant attention except for Lauren Pressley’s excellent article “Using Videos to Reach Site Visitors: A Toolkit for Today’s Student.” Pressley discusses why employing short videos or “toolkits” of specific, target skills is superior and more attractive to students than using a long, linear tutorial approach (Pressley, 2008, p. 19).

Given the rate at which technologies, software, and preferred multimedia formats change, it makes sense that librarians have been reluctant to write articles or books describing how to create screencasts. Some of the best practices information regarding screencasts comes from blogs and other online information, such as librarian-produced “ANTS: The Animated Online Tutorial Sharing Project” (2008). This void in the formal published literature
suggests the need for guidelines that transcend technical variations. This article is an attempt to fill this niche.

On a related note, little has been written about the marketing of online tutorials. As the popularity of distance education and electronic educational tools grows, this will be a crucial area for practical research. One exception to this pattern is Pamela Sherwill-Navarro and Beth Layton’s 2006 article “Instruction 24/7: Developing a Web-based Tutorial for CINAHL (EBSCO).” While creating a tutorial for the CINAHL database, Sherwill-Navarro and Layton recognized the value of noting their own best practices, and making its content and developmental process serve as models for their own future work. Another strong piece in the small “best practices” genre is Tempelman-Kluit and Ehrenberg’s “Instruction and Online Tutorials: Developing Best Practices for Streaming Desktop Video Capture.” The authors present basic technical suggestions for using Camtasia and other screencasting software. Although most of the recommendations are still valid, the subject deserves renewed attention since more software packages and additional options within many packages have become available in the past five years. Bradley Brazzeal and Deborah Lee’s 2006 article “Captivating Library Instructional Services” summarizes enhancements to Captivate’s capabilities since the software first became available. New or prospective Captivate users may find this article instructive. Terry Henner’s 2006 article “How We Used Demonstration Authoring Software to Create Tutorials” will also prove helpful to prospective users, as it details the decision-making process of selecting tutorial creation software by the Savitt Medical Library at the University of Nevada. Most of the software mentioned in the article is still available, and the arguments for or against a particular application are still applicable.

In “Casting the Net: Podcasting and Screencasting,” reference librarian Gregg Notess identifies a variety of ways tutorials can be used in addition to online instruction and distance reference services. Specifically, he suggests recording problems and error messages so that they can be sent to technical support and customer service representatives. Saving screencasts of demonstrations in advance provides peace of mind when relying on Internet access for a presentation. When speakers record themselves with their PowerPoint presentation, they enable audiences to hear and see their speech after the event or from afar (Notess, 2005, p. 43). These examples demonstrate alternate uses of online tutorials applicable to numerous professions including librarianship.

Little has been written about the value of screencasting for electronic resources and serials librarians. Most of the literature is only tangentially related and applies more directly to system librarians. Working in the back offices and basements, technical services departments do not serve patrons directly. Rather, they train the trainers. Therefore, most of the articles focus primarily on professional development programs, and only a few describe how they use tutorials to teach colleagues.
Alan Krissoff and Lee Konrad aptly ask and answer the question “how do we go about providing better patron training when we ourselves are being overwhelmed by change? One solution lies in information agencies making a formal commitment to staff computer and technology training” (Krissoff & Konrad, 1998, p. 28). Written in 1998 for Computers in Libraries, their article “Computer Training for Staff and Patrons: A Comprehensive Academic Model,” provides a checklist of core competencies and insights into creating a professional development program. Training staff in a constantly changing world continues to be a struggle for libraries. Seven years later, in 2005, Computers in Libraries published another article that chronicles the activities involved with creating computer training for library staff. Anita Jennings explains that “teaching computer skills allows us to have a more well-rounded staff that is better able to use the applications and to provide technology-related services to patrons” (Jennings, 2005, p. 15).

The common thread between these articles is that they describe the need to train library staff and the process of creating professional development programs. However, they do not describe how they will implement the training. Similarly, in an article for Technical Services Quarterly, Linda L. Eells and Janice M. Jaguszewski painstakingly detail their task force’s efforts to design and administer an online self-assessment survey of staff computer skills (2008). They admit not addressing curriculum or materials in their article and merely state that “significant efforts were undertaken to identify training opportunities offered locally and online, in multiple formats, to enable training staff to formulate a new training curriculum” (Eells & Jaguszewski, 2008, p. 29).

Only a few articles focus on providing professional development with screencasts. In 1999, Monica Webster associates teaching skills to online tutorials. She wrote the article “Let Your Fingers Do the Training” for Library Software Review. She describes tutorials as “a convenient method for delivering staff training.” Six html-based tutorials were developed at the University of Toledo Libraries in response to staff requests for software training (Webster, 1999, p. 4). More recently, in her 2008 article “Training When They Need It,” Carol Coffey quotes trainer Diane Mayo, who expressed why screencasts are so important and effective: “[A]dults don’t deal with information when it comes to them, they deal with it when they need it.” She also emphasizes information at the point of need and using screencasts when screenshots just are not enough (Coffey, 2008, p. 10). Only Danielle Hinton makes the transition from computer training to instruction on using e-journals. Her article “A Question of Access: The Electronic Journals Tutorial at the University of Leicester” was published in Serials Librarian in 2002. Over the years, Hinton’s library has subscribed to an exponentially increasing number of electronic publications. At first, she assumed the tutorial would be most beneficial to distance learners, however, “it soon became clear that not only on- and off-campus students but also staff—both library and
academic—needed instruction in the use of e-journals.” This perspective is unique. She explains further, “it is hoped that it will serve as an inspiration and basis for others to develop the concept further. As a community we cannot afford to continue to pay increasing monies for e-journals without providing more user training and support” (Hinton, 2002, p. 95–96). The authors wholeheartedly support Hinton’s message, and hope to expand upon it with this article. In this limited literature landscape, there is room to describe a technology that will enable librarians to teach technology to their colleagues and students.

Several articles provide detailed discussions of assessment options for screencasts. Elizabeth Blakesley Lindsay et al.’s “If You Build It, Will They Learn? Assessing Online Information Literacy Tutorials” covers the skills tested and how assessments measured these skills (2006). The selection of skills as well as the techniques for assessing them is applicable to most student-oriented screencasts. Holliday and colleagues outline Utah State University librarians’ process of evaluating how their screencasts meet distance learners’ needs in “Instruction in a Virtual Environment: Assessing the Needs for an Online Tutorial” (2006). Keeping distance learners in mind is a topic of particular concern to the authors of this article.

Numerous articles discuss assessment of information literacy tutorials. However, these tutorials typically cover a wide variety of general information literacy skills. They do not have the focus and brevity of the screencasts discussed in this article. Thus the authors have chosen not to outline these articles.

Based on previous publications, this article satisfies a need in the screencasting literature. The authors fill an important omission, since the literature review reveals only minimal efforts have been made to describe how to create, market, and assess screencasts. Although other librarians have written about online tutorials in relation to instruction, systems, and technical services librarianship, they have done so in a different framework than Sobel, Brown-Sica, and Pan. Instruction librarians focus on the content of online tutorials, and technical service librarians emphasize on creating professional development programs. None of the other works describes screencasting as a critical and innovative teaching method for all users or emphasizes short and rapidly produced tutorials that satisfy needs of learners.

IDENTIFYING NEED

As the old saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Showing a new application, Web site, or database interface to most students or colleagues can render them speechless. Despite patient face-to-face demonstrations, again and again, they stop asking questions because they are embarrassed or intimidated. They back away saying, “Thanks. I have the general idea. It’s easier if I learn on my own now.” Screencasting eliminates these potentially frustrating
exchanges by allowing the person to rewind, fast-forward, and play a demonstration over and over, and over again at their own discretion.

Screen recordings have many outstanding attributes, especially when they are posted on a Web site where they can be accessed 24/7. The moment when essential knowledge is required often occurs outside standard business hours. Traditional in-class and in-person teaching methods are not always convenient or available. Alternatively, screencasts can be delivered on demand at the point of need. Learners are empowered to decide when to watch a tutorial. No matter how many times users play the footage, what they see will be consistent. Moreover, visual learners, who struggle with written instructions or verbal directions, will benefit by viewing the exact mouse clicks and keystrokes they will need to recreate for themselves. Teaching with screencasting enables an instructor to offer repeatable and alternative education options. Since anyone and everyone can benefit from screencasts, they are an effective method of teaching and training for all areas of librarianship. Demonstrating how something works and providing additional explanations from a computer screen is helpful for library patrons and employees.

From personal experiences, the authors of this article can address how online tutorials have been incorporated into their work for public services, systems, and technical services departments. As a reference and instruction librarian, Sobel works directly with students and the teaching faculty. She gives instruction sessions to classes throughout the humanities and social sciences; however, the bulk of her teaching is with freshman composition classes. Similarly to the other Auraria Library reference and instruction librarians, Sobel embraces teaching information literacy. At the time when the authors composed this article, their public services department began reevaluation and reorganization efforts to integrate information literacy into a comprehensive and strategic instruction plan. Since screencasts provide a convenient and consistent teaching tool, now they are an important component of this initiative. However, previously only individual librarians, such as Sobel, incorporated online tutorials into their instruction classes.

Sobel covers a lot of ground during a 75-minute class, and naturally students forget some skills by the time they go home and try by themselves. Screencasts allow her to “be there for them” when they need a reminder. Auraria Library also serves a large nontraditional student population—many students have little experience using computers and may not spend much time on campus. This creates both opportunities and challenges related to screencasting. Students who spend most of their research time off campus often express appreciation for the Auraria Library’s various online learning tools. However, those with the lowest comfort level with technology may either become confused with or decide not to even try using these resources. While there is no perfect solution, Sobel has simplified usage of her tutorials as much as possible by including URLs for relevant tutorials on class handouts and placing a single, large “Start the tutorial” button on the
Nearly all of the tutorials focus narrowly on the process of achieving a single goal. For instance, one tutorial demonstrates the process for finding a particular electronic book in the library’s catalog and accessing content (Auraria Library, 2008a). While the viewer watches a specific search for a book on Jane Austen, instructions provided as text balloons, boxes, and highlighting generalize the process (Auraria Library, 2008b).

Breaking complicated processes into small, direct tutorials is a common approach among commercially produced tutorials. For instance, customer-focused Apple Inc. keeps nearly all of its tutorials under one minute (Apple Inc., 2008a). Unlike the Auraria Library’s tutorials, instructions are provided verbally. However, developers of Apple’s tutorials have taken similar care to make the tutorial files small so they can load quickly even on older computers. Instructions are brief and focus on achieving a single, concrete goal, such as uploading a homemade video to YouTube (Apple Inc., 2008b).

The debate over best practices regarding audio merits further, nuanced study. While the majority of recent commentary on screencasting advocates the use of audio, conditions in some educational environments will indicate otherwise (Clark & Mayer, 2003; Cox, 2004; Häfner, 2006). At the Auraria Library, the instruction department has decided to avoid the use of audio for several reasons. Most important, the library uses these tutorials extensively in educating its “English as a Second Language” population, as well as the University of Colorado’s Beijing campus. These students and their instructors have complained that including audio in online instructional materials overwhelms their students; text is easier to absorb. While this suggests the need for usability testing, fairly extensive anecdotal evidence supports the department’s choice. Another major factor is that many of the library’s student patrons have low-income family situations; their computers are quite often more than five years old. Both reference and instruction staff field frequent inquiries on how to make particular applications work on home computers. Unfortunately, the answer is often that a student’s computer will just not handle a particular application well. These and other considerations suggest the need to further research best practices on audio.

Students respond positively to on-demand creation of tutorials. During one instruction session, numerous students got “lost” on the way to finding NewsBank: America’s Newspapers. Sobel promised them an online tutorial. One was created and posted within a few hours after class. Sobel also uses screen recording when she is on the reference desk. For instance, she uses an online tutorial she created to teach students how to use Prospector, Colorado’s state-wide interlibrary loan system.

Brown-Sica, as head of technology at Auraria Library, serves a wide audience. It is her job to make sure everyone can use everything the library owns. Users include students, academic faculty, and library employees. As in
many libraries, she does not have enough staff with the proper capabilities or
time to do the kind of training she would like to do. Also, many questions are
repeated over and over by all audiences. In addition, there are problems in
which people do not or cannot ask, because it is midnight and they are at
home, or they are too hesitant to contact the technology department.
Brown-Sica needs to provide information for these situations. For example,
the library recently purchased the Evanced “Room Reserve” software. This
Web-based application is primarily used by the teaching faculty to request
library instruction. Brown-Sica’s tutorials walk the viewers through the pro-
cess of selecting the date and time they would like an instruction session
in one of the library’s classrooms. Similarly, she created another screencast
for students to reserve study rooms. Although the same software was being
demonstrated, the purpose and audience were different. Thus, a separate
screen recording was warranted. Since Brown-Sica purchases technology
for the library, she and her department receive numerous requests regarding
the process of requesting hardware or software from colleagues. In response,
she developed a tutorial showing where the form is located on the intranet
and how to fill it out correctly.

While Pan does not have direct contact with students or teaching faculty,
she serves them indirectly through her colleagues. It is vital that she provides
training materials to her coworkers when they need help. Unfortunately, it is
impossible to be available all hours the library is open. Online tutorials enable
her to teach on demand. For example, after the Auraria Library implemented
Innovative Interface’s Millennium Electronic Resource Management (ERM) pro-
duct, the way in which databases and journals displayed within the library cata-
log changed. At first, she communicated these changes internally at a meeting
with members of the reference and instruction departments. Feedback revealed
they wanted additional training. Instead of scheduling another meeting, she cre-
ated two screencasts; one demonstrated how to find databases and their related
e-journal holdings and one showed how to search for a journal and find out if it is
available online full-text from a database.

Access to electronic resources is complicated and problems ensue for
variety of reasons. To help manage and troubleshoot these issues, the library
uses a blog. Not all employees are familiar or comfortable with using a blog.
Therefore, Pan created a screen recording for each step of the process of
reporting, searching, and commenting on a problem posted on the blog.

Her most popular and most widely used screencast, however, covered
Microsoft Outlook. When she joined the Auraria Library in February 2008,
she discovered that most people did not use the Calendar function. Pan
hoped to encourage her colleagues to change their ways by showing them
how to schedule a meeting. She originally created the online tutorial for
her staff and later made it available to the entire library staff and faculty.

Regardless of their role or audience, these three librarians found a
purpose for screencasting. The common factor they share is a desire to
communicate information to others. They also posted their tutorials on personal Web pages, which made their lessons accessible. However, the conversation is one sided. Screencasting is not appropriate when the learner needs a personal dialogue or one-on-one assistance.

CREATING SCREENCASTS

Sobel presented a version of this material during a poster session at the American Library Association’s 2008 Annual Conference. The most common comment she received from viewers was, “I tried making screencasts once, but I kept getting stuck on ______. I haven’t tried it again.” The second most common comment was, “twenty minutes? There’s no way you can make a screencast in twenty minutes. That one right there would have taken me six hours.” Realistically, when the authors first began using their software, Adobe Captivate, they probably spent several hours on their initial tutorials. A learning curve is to be expected. More important, they focused on trying to reduce overall time to complete a project. The authors rationalized that if the tutorials took too long to make, they would be less inclined to create them. Failing to create screencasts would be a missed teaching opportunity. The screencasts the authors showcased at the conference were far from perfect, but no one seemed to notice. Though plain and imperfectly edited, each tutorial taught the viewer exactly what it said it would—how to request an instruction session, how to send a meeting invitation, how to enter the Newsbank: America’s Newspapers database. While developing their set of best practices, the authors learned that certain errors can safely be left in a screen- cast, while others obscure the information the screencast intends to convey.

Watching the screencast after every few edits will allow the creator to catch problematic areas. One positive aspect about making quick screencasts is that the creator typically does not become so familiar with the screencast that he or she cannot judge its clarity. The general best practices these authors developed are as follows:

- Learn a few features of your screencasting software, and know them well. Do not be intimidated by a thousand features; just a few will help make points more clear. More suggestions are provided later in the article.
- Planning up front saves time at the end. Even when using familiar technology, rehearsing the action before capturing will save on editing time.
- Faster is better. Learning to complete a screencast in 30 minutes, an instructor will be far more likely to use this technology than if it takes three hours or days.
- Shorter is better. No matter who is your audience, they will be more likely to absorb the information and watch the entire screencast if it is shorter. Generally, colleagues will have a slightly longer attention span than freshmen or even graduate students.
• Link to screencasts strategically. Regardless if screencasts are created for single or multiple audiences, they will need to be publicized in different ways. Link from student-focused or professional development-oriented pages to online tutorials posted at a centralized place and easily accessed from the main home page. Privacy also should be a major factor in choosing a location. If any personal information is visible in the tutorial, consider placing it in a password-protected location.

• Make sure tutorials can be viewed at later dates. When publishing a tutorial in a format that can be e-mailed as an attachment (which will be discussed later), post it online so viewers can find it later.

• Audio has its plusses and minuses. When deciding whether to add audio to a screencast, think about where the audience will view the screencast and how much editing will likely need to be performed. Narrating a screencast can add clarity for viewers, but the narration can be annoying if they will use the screencast in public. It also adds another layer of challenge to editing. The authors of this article typically choose to go without audio.

Anecdotally, the proprietary software packages Captivate and Camtasia seem to be the most popular. Free online versions such as Wink are also options. However, “you get what you pay for”—purchased packages tend to create more professional results, even when the screencasts receive minimal editing.

The authors of this article use Captivate to create their screencasts. Brown-Sica and Pan generally create stand-alone screencast files and link directly to these. Sobel tends to use Dreamweaver software to embed the screencasts in a Web page. She provides written instructions for the subject of the tutorial, which users can read after viewing.

The following Captivate features have proven most useful to the authors. They suggest learning them first. Similar features are available using most free or proprietary pieces of tutorial-making software.

• Explanatory text balloons. Use these cartoon-ish balloons to point out relevant features and explain actions.

• Slide timeline. Learn to adjust the timeline to speed up parts that are just too slow; adjust sequence of displaying objects; align mouse movement with text balloons, and more. This can be learned quickly!

• Adjusting the path of the mouse. Shaky cursor movement from one point to another typically does not present a problem; however, if it is difficult to tell which of several links the cursor clicks on, viewers will become confused.

• Publishing in various formats. Each software package provides various options. Some can stand alone and be linked or e-mailed, and others are intended to be embedded in Web pages. Find out what works best for your audience.
• Making “start this tutorial” and “repeat this tutorial” buttons. Use these to give viewers some control over the tutorial. Here is how the authors make these in Captivate. To make a start button: After filming your tutorial, click on the Edit tab. Copy the first slide. On what is now the first slide, add a button labeled “Start this tutorial.” Set the button to “jump to slide 2” when clicked. To make a repeat button: After filming your tutorial, click on the Edit tab. Copy the last slide. On what is now the last slide, add a button labeled “repeat this tutorial.” Set the button to “jump to slide 2” when clicked.

SCREENCASTING RESOURCES ONLINE

Librarians and other educators experienced in screencasting have posted a wealth of advice online. The following are some of the authors’ favorite screencasting sites:

Association of College and Research Libraries’ Peer-reviewed Instructional Materials Online Database
http://www.ala.org/apps/primo/public/search.cfm

“Peer-reviewed instructional materials created by librarians to teach people about discovering, accessing and evaluating information in networked environments.”—Beth’s Blog: How Nonprofits Can Use Social Media.

Beth Kanter’s Posting “Screencasting Primer: For NTC [Nonprofit Technology Conference] Screencasting Panel

Provides detailed commentary on why nonprofits should consider screencasting as part of educational efforts, and provides extensive production advice and links to other resources.

The Common Craft Show
http://www.commoncraft.com/show

A small business that produces simple but impressively creative screencasts for some major corporations.

Courtney Greene’s List of Screencasting Links on Del.icio.us
http://del.icio.us/crgreene/screencasting

An academic librarian’s list of links to free software and tools, information on popular software available for purchase, high-quality screencasts, and more.
Libcasting: Screencasting and Libraries
http://www.notess.com/screencasting/

A blog that addresses many issues related to screencasting in libraries. Covers topics ranging from basic starting advice to complex technical issues.

Smashing Magazine’s Article “Screencasting: How to Start, Tools and Guidelines”
http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2008/08/19/screencasting-how-to-start/

Concise yet detailed summaries of screencasting software options, plus guidance on production and distribution. Users’ comments at the bottom of the page provide additional advice.

MARKETING

Marketing is an area in which the authors differed greatly. Sobel’s tutorials were aimed at the general library user, that is, students and faculty who do research using the library’s collection. As part of her duties, Sobel presents bibliographic instruction classes. She does many sessions for freshman composition classes, and these are a great target audience for her tutorials. She also uses that time to promote her set of screencasts. Graduate students teach many of the composition courses and will often put in an enthusiastic pitch during class. Sobel then points out that the students may not need this information today, but later on they can relearn it with the tutorial. Typically she only markets tutorials for individual databases when she demonstrates that electronic resource in class. However, students can access any tutorials they want through her tutorial index page.

Pan and Brown-Sica’s promotion efforts depend on the audience. Their audience differs according to topic, being library employees, general library users, or both. In some cases the screencasts have been posted on a librarian’s personal Web page. Pan and Brown-Sica at times sent library employees e-mail about a particular screencast and a link to the tutorial. The screencasts will eventually be linked from the new Auraria Library intranet and from the department home pages.

As a general rule, the marketer should consider the location of the target group and map out a strategy depending on whether they are within or outside of the library. Also, when possible, place screencasts at the point of need such as on class or subject guides, instructor Web pages, and in course management software such as Blackboard and eCollege for instruction-related screencasts. Another choice is where the user accesses a specific piece of software or database, such as where a faculty member might be requesting an instruction class using the application the tutorial explains, or in the library catalog on an
e-journal record. Some options for tutorials aimed at library staff might be on an intranet, a personal webpage, a shared drive or training blog. Two general rules should be remembered: Provide the training opportunity where the user needs it and also where the user can find it again when it is needed.

ASSESSMENT

Once a screencast has been made and shared, how will it be determined if it has served its purpose? Gathering feedback through both formal and informal methods will help improve the just-completed tutorial, as well as plan for the future.

Often the best way to collect feedback on a tutorial is to offer both formal and informal collection methods. The authors of this article sometimes either link a satisfaction survey to Web-based tutorials, or send a link to a survey in an e-mail introducing the tutorial. Response rates vary dramatically by audience type. Because, for example, a group of colleagues in the midst of a hurried project may not provide much written comment, gathering verbal feedback can prove crucial. Even a few opinions on whether the tutorial achieves its goals effectively will be quite telling. Collecting responses changes a “one-way” method of communication into a two-way conversation between screencaster and audience.

On an even simpler note, counting site traffic to a tutorial embedded in a Web page can help measure its impact. While a web page “hit” does not necessarily mean that the tutorial accomplished its creator’s goals, it is a positive indicator of the audience’s interest.

One possible assessment idea Brown-Sica has for the future involves tracking the number of questions she receives on a screencast topic before and after the creation of a screencast. For example, if she received seven questions about a particular Microsoft Office feature in one month, she could create a screencast explaining the feature, and link it prominently on the library’s intranet. If she received only two questions about the feature in the following month, she could guess that her efforts were helping. Of course, many other factors might have come into play. Simply asking colleagues whether they had taken advantage of her screencasts could help her understand cause and effect.

Current relevance is another factor to consider in assessment. The advantage of learning to make tutorials quickly is that the authors can delete them without (much) regret. Often it proves much easier to recreate a tutorial than to update it, for instance when a database changes its interface.

CONCLUSION

Although Sobel, Brown-Sica, and Pan focus on different areas of librarianship, they share the same approach to screencasting. Developing imperfect
yet effective tutorials as quickly as possible, they can respond immediately to their learners’ needs. The literature review revealed that instruction librarians concentrate primarily on their screencasts’ content rather than rapid production. Technical service librarians emphasize creating professional development programs for their colleagues more than describing their teaching methods. This article fills a gap in the canon by describing how quickly-made screencasts can be used by different types of librarians to demonstrate Web sites and applications for students, university faculty, and library staff. Online tutorials can fill the learners’ educational demands at the point of need. Authors created tutorials to present library skills to students during instruction, to teach students to reserve study rooms or faculty to request a library class, and to present coworkers with training materials on changes to the catalog. From their experiences creating screencasts, the authors provide general best practices as well as highlight insights into using Captivate’s features. Depending on their audience, the authors market their tutorials in different ways, such as providing personal introductions during a bibliographic instruction class, posting on Web pages, or sending e-mails to library staff. To assess the effectiveness of their screencasts, they collect informal verbal comments from coworkers and students and gather formal responses from surveys. Typically the online questionnaires were presented via a URL in an e-mail or imbedded in the tutorial itself. By presenting their best practices, the authors of this article hope to inspire other librarians to start or reconsider using screencasting as a viable way to teach all learners at their library.

REFERENCES


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