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Using Screencasting to Promote Database Trials and Library Resources

When a library is considering the acquisition of a new electronic resource, such as a database, a trial usage period is arranged before committing to purchase, requiring what Pickett (2011) refers to as the “administrative churn” of vendor negotiations, including the setting of proxy servers and access information. But what happens after the trial has been activated? An announcement posted to the library’s website or campus messaging system, an email sent to appropriate stakeholders, and a posting made to social media platforms can all reach an extended audience, each asking for feedback by a certain date. But all too often, these announcements fall flat, especially among faculty, because the intended audience goes to the new database, conducts a random search, and closes the session unimpressed, with little to no idea of why this resource is special or worth adding. If only the librarian could give the patron a quick guided tour of the resource being trialed. Enter: screencasting.

Screencasting, also called screen capture, has caught on like wildfire thanks to free websites like Jing, a product of TechSmith. It allows the user to make short videos of up to five minutes that capture the activity on a particular computer screen, including mouse clicks, with the option to add voice narration and annotations to post online to share with other users. Carr and Ly (2009) discuss the use of and opportunities for screencasting in reference services, particularly in instruction, but the potential for screencasting extends to technical services as well. Hartnett and Thompson (2010) describe the use of screencasting to “assist with troubleshooting [electronic resources] problems” (pg. 103) with remote users, local patrons,

and vendors, by capturing product errors. It can also be used for staff training, as described by Arch (2009). For database trials, short videos can be made to target various interest groups or stakeholders, to guide the viewer through the resource and highlighting why the resource could be valuable to someone in that particular field. What is this new resource, and why is it something our institution absolutely “must have?” The video, presented as a link that can be shared or embedded, informs the viewer, who can then pass it along to other likeminded viewers such as faculty colleagues, graduate students, and most importantly, administrators who allocate discretionary funds. Statistics or analytics illustrate the effectiveness of the videos: how often was the video watched, and from how many different IP addresses? Best of all, screencasting is available as a free resource from multiple sites, including Jing, and can be upgraded for a relatively minimal expense if needed.

At the University of Mississippi (UM), screencasting was used to promote a trial to the ARTStor Digital Library, “a nonprofit resource that provides over 1.5 million digital images in the arts, architecture, humanities, and sciences with an accessible suite of software tools for teaching and research” (*About ARTStor digital library*, 2013). Rockenbach (2006) examines the development of this resource, which is a “sister sibling” of J-Stor. UM is a growing, medium-sized, public university with approximately 17,000 students on the main campus in Oxford, with close to 2,000 additional students at regional satellite campuses. While the largest college within UM is Liberal Arts, those colleges with the highest national profiles are the professional schools: Accountancy, Business, Engineering, and Pharmacy. Therefore, the collection budget of the UM Libraries is weighted to support those programs, as well as doctoral programs in Liberal Arts such as English, History, and Psychology. While it is relatively easy to promote a resource

like ARTStor as something that would be great to have, it is much more difficult to find the resources for yet another annual subscription. Like many databases, ARTStor uses the model of an annual maintenance fee based on the subscribing institution's full-time enrollment (FTE) in addition to a one time archive fee, also based on FTE, which can be divided into multi-year payments. Therefore, to justify the expense, it was thought to be better to appeal to multiple stakeholders, beyond just the Department of Art, whose library allocation reflects less than 1% of the total materials budget. To appeal to multiple stakeholders, a quick, creative, and cost-effective marketing strategy would be needed. Screencasting proved to be just that thing.

Literature Review

Library literature includes a number of sources on screencasting and on database trials, but none that include the two concepts together. While much has been written about working with vendors to set up the "Big Deal," defined by Frazier (2005) as a "comprehensive licensing agreement in which a library or library consortium agrees to buy electronic access to all or a large portion of a publisher's journals for a cost based on expenditures for journals already subscribed to by the institution(s) plus an access fee" (p. 50), little has been written about what to do to market that database trial once it has been set up. Street (2010) outlines the process for "getting the most from a database trial" from the pre-trial planning, including a "communication timetable" (p. 148) and what to do with feedback after the trial ends. But how to let the community know that there is a database trial for a limited number of days? Screencasting is an easy and cost effective way to spread the word.

Carr and Ly (2009) describe the use of screencasting at California State University, San Marcos, as “a way to quickly create and share one-of-a-kind, customized video clips in IM reference interactions,” highlighting “low-cost and easy-to-use screencasting tools” and “best practices for using screencasting in virtual reference” (p. 409). Educause included screencasting in its “7 things you should know about” series, promoting the tool like “video podcasts” to “provide a simple means to extend rich course content [to anyone] who might benefit from the material but cannot attend a presentation” (p. 2), but the service they describe is more suited for TechSmith’s Camtasia or Adobe’s Captivate, which are more expensive than Jing (which is free), and require more technical skills, including patience. Kroski (2009) also has these products in mind for creating video tutorials, which is appropriate for topics that take longer than the 5 minutes allowed by Jing. She also includes a helpful eight-step checklist for creating a screencast, from storyboarding to map out the structure of the screencast to file type for saving the finished product. Jacobsen (2011) shares a similar bullet-point list to coach the library professional in designing “useful recordings” (p. 142). He recommends other free or low-cost platforms to record in-depth reference questions.

Peterson (2007) describes screencasts used to supplement online teaching at Montana State University. English (2011) compares using JingPro to Camtasia for making 5-minute videos to enhance library instruction assignments at Everglades University: “the most important benefit with library-produced videos,” as opposed to vendor-produced promotional materials, “is [the] personal ‘tour guide’ approach” (p. 21) because librarians know best how to reach their local patrons and how to explain complex concepts. Posters presented in 2010 at the 14th Off-Campus Library Services Conference in Cleveland, Ohio indicate the wide-scale use of

screencasting for multiple purposes in academic libraries: Musser (2010) presents a broad view of screencasting and its implications for libraries including on-demand tutorials, troubleshooting and technology support, and for technology training purposes. Ray and Belanger (2010) examine the use of screencasting in the support of distance education.

Process

Because ARTStor allows only one 30-day trial within a calendar year, it was important to reach a wide swath of interest groups early in the trial so they would then have at least 3 weeks to experiment with the resource. An added bonus to screencasting database trials is that the videos can last longer than a 30-day trial, and can be presented to administrators as time allows, even after the trial has ended, for as long as they are hosted online. As soon as the trial had been activated, an initial email was sent to department chairs in the humanities and an announcement was placed on both the library's website and its Facebook page. In the days that followed, 11 screencasts were recorded using Jing, each lasting between 2 and 4 minutes. Price (2010) illustrates the process of downloading Jing, a free product that can be used to make short videos or for static screen shots which can be annotated if needed. A subscription to JingPro allows the software to be used without proprietary markings. For this project, however, the free version of Jing was used. A Snowball USB microphone was used to record narration. The files were not annotated after recording. Links to the videos, posted to the Jing server (screencast.com), were listed in an online topic guide on the library's website, instead of embedded, to allow for faster loading on the patron's end. Unfortunately, since Jing videos require Flash, they are not (currently) compatible with Apple tablet devices, such as the iPhone

or iPad. Because the ARTStor representative had expressed concern about their subscription-based content being found via YouTube, only direct links to the screencasts on the Jing server were provided to patrons; the content was not posted to YouTube or Vimeo. The topic guide itself (*ARTStor Digital Library: Database Trial*, 2012), however, which includes the links, could potentially be found using a search engine.

There were three categories of screencast videos: first, “How to Create an Image Group.” Unlike full-text or abstract and index databases, ARTStor is a collection of high resolution, museum-quality images that can be collected and shared by one user with other users, preferable to blurry images pulled from Google without metadata (or permission). A professor or student can create an image group for a particular class and share a link on Blackboard, WebCT, or equivalent. This first 3-minute video walked the patron through the process of creating and managing folders, at both private and institutional levels, and image groups within those folders. The next category, “Searching for Images to Keep in an Image Group” included nine screencasts of between 3 and 4 minutes each, for Art History, Art (Studio), Classics, History (World War I), Medieval Studies, Religion (Islam), Science (Cancer), and Social Issues (AIDS). Each video illustrated the process of finding relevant images, pointing out the metadata section, and saving the images to an established image group both as full-sized and as close-up/detailed. An additional video entitled “Bonus Features” consisted of a demonstration of ARTStor’s QuickTime virtual reality panoramas of world architecture. These 360-degree images from webcams placed at points of interest around the world offer an interactive view of sites that may not be otherwise available to the average patron, from the Pantheon in Rome to the Friday Mosque of Herat in Afghanistan. The third video category, “What to Do with Your Image

Group?,” showed how to export an image group into PowerPoint without the need to save each image as an individual file. The goal of the short screencast was to highlight the basics of the product as well as the “bells and whistles,” to replicate elements from the vendor’s site demonstration in a manner tailored to specific campus stakeholders. While they were invited to meet the ARTStor representative during her visit and presentation, few stakeholders outside of the library attended.

Once the topic guide, with all of the screencast URLs, had been posted to the library’s website, separate emails were sent to the chairs of eight departments, primarily in the humanities but also in science and social science, to 14 individual members of the Medieval Studies faculty (an interdisciplinary collective from multiple departments), the director of the University Museums, and appropriate contacts in Ole Miss Online, responsible for online instruction, the Center for Writing and Rhetoric, and in the Office of Outreach. Because this process took nearly a full week to set up, we can compare analytics of the first week of usage to that of the 3 weeks that followed the posting of the topic guide.

Results

Access to the database during the first week of the trial was low, as expected. There were three primary users, two of whom were in Technical Services: one setting up the trial and the other preparing the screencasts. The third user was an assistant professor in the Department of History, who admitted to being “less than impressed” after just browsing on his own. After seeing the video tutorials later in the trial, however, he returned to the database and got a few images that he might not have found by using Google. The database was activated on October

1, with notification posted to the library's listserv and webpage on October 2. The chair of the Department of Art was also notified that day and emailed her faculty members that afternoon. The screencasts were created and posted to the online topic guide, which went live on October 11. The trial ended on November 6. Therefore we can examine the usage statistics and static page analytics before and after the period in which the screencast videos were shared with stakeholders.

Looking at the Google Analytics report for the online topic guide for a period of 50 days, including the length of the ARTStor trial and the 2-week period immediately following, there were a total of 187 page views, of which 124 (66%) were unique. The average time on the page was approximately 3 minutes, allowing enough time to watch at least one screencast. The day that the guide went live, October 11, saw the highest number of page views, nearly 50, after which there was a mostly steady stream of three to five hits per day, with October 23 and 29 having more than ten per day. After the trial ended on November 6, there were a few stray hits. The screencasts were useful in showing potential patrons how to navigate the database, and were unlikely to be visited more than once. Looking at the usage statistics from the database itself will illustrate how helpful the videos likely were.

The usage statistics provided by ARTStor consider all types of activity as "events": view image, browse, keyword, as well as the creation of user accounts and logging into accounts. Over the course of the 37-day trial, there were 6,892 events that included 1,755 images viewed, 50 images exported, 3 images printed, 124 browsed searches, 695 keyword searches, 735 advanced searches, and 1,005 faceted searches with 22 accounts created which logged in an

additional 48 times. The first 11 days of the trial, when the screencasts were created, represent 58% of total use, but the subsequent days of the trial saw 19 people create additional optional accounts. While accounts were not required for browsing or searching ARTStor, they were required for sharing or exporting images.

It is difficult to compare these results to those from other database trials because ARTStor is an image database and not a full-text database, or even an article-and-index database. Before ARTStor, our most recent institutional trial of a similar humanities database which provided statistics was the International Medieval Bibliography Online, part of a suite of databases from Brepols trialed over 9 months that included the Monumenta Germaniae Historica Online, the Library of Latin Texts, the Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique (bibliographie), and the Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques. Each database received 10 sessions in 9 months, with the exception of the Library of Latin Texts which received 21 sessions. It is possible that more users would have tried these databases had there been a series of screencasts demonstrating some of the products' features, but it is more likely that had the trial to ARTStor lasted more than 37 days that the usage count would have been even more impressive.

Conclusion

With its low costs and ease of use, screencasting is an effective tool for many projects within any library, in both public services and technical services. From enhancing instruction to reporting errors to vendors, screencasting adds an extra layer to services that have become practically irreplaceable. Though it didn't exist just a few years ago for the majority of libraries, it seems odd to imagine life without it. As this study has illustrated, screencasting can also be

used to promote additional services in the library, including database trials. Feedback from users was positive in comments via email and in personal interactions, and in the usage statistics themselves. The short videos, focused in content and message, were an effective tool to push patrons to the database trial. Because this was a product with interdisciplinary appeal, multiple videos were made to illustrate sample searches for a variety of stakeholders. For a product with a narrower focus, the preparation phase would undoubtedly have been shorter. At our institution, this is a process worth repeating for future trials.

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