USE OF VODCASTS BY THE UNISA LIBRARY FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING: CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT THIS EMERGING TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to share and describe a practical experience in the development of a vodcast from beginning until completion. The main aim of the paper is to describe the developmental phases of a vodcast, its use for teaching and learning and the impact vodcasts have on librarians and users. This paper is looking at how vodcasts can be used in the future to enhance the teaching and learning experience of the librarian and the user. A literature review and the practical experience have given a comprehensive insight into the use of vodcasts in teaching and learning. Information Technology has the ability to revolutionize University teaching and learning. The adoption level of emerging web technologies is increasing in academic settings. (Saeed 2009) and the creation of blogs, wikis, instant messengers (IM), social bookmarks, podcasts and vodcasts and the web is transforming into a fully interactive space and the control of content has been decentralized to allow everyone to collaborate, create, publish, subscribe, and share information. Users have urged the library staff to develop vodcasts for information literacy and database training and UNISA library staff have expressed interest in using vodcasts for staff development exercises. Vodcasting has been implemented at the Unisa Library with immediate practical benefits for both library staff and users and this pilot project has led to future vodcast initiatives e.g. developing vodcasts for teaching library's subscription databases and general information literacy.

Keywords: Emerging technologies; Vodcasts; Distance education; Open distance e-learning

1. Introduction

The role of the library and the services it offers to the community is rapidly changing. With online resources and new technologies, libraries interested in enhancing user services and providing independent access to library services and collections have begun looking at new ways of creating online communities. (Kajewski 2006). New technologies allow librarians to provide a better service to users by offering simple access to what they want, when they want it and how they want it, through the creation of virtual communities, using social software such as blogs, RSS feeds, wikis, podcast and vodcasts and instant messaging. The integration of these tools into new and existing services allows libraries to connect with users in various ways (Jones 2008).

2. Background on use of vodcasts at UNISA Library- a brief overview

A group of personal Librarians from the UNISA Library were tasked to develop a vodcast on citation analysis for NRF ratings. This task team was responsible for making use of some form of digital recording technology for the teaching and process. The aim was to explore a potentially instructional medium for researchers. The main aim of this team was to use a multimedia platform to reach out to researchers. This project was a pilot to develop future training material for the UNISA students and staff.

3. Definitions

3.1 Emerging technologies

Emerging technologies provide librarians with a unique opportunity to enhance user-centred services and to facilitate and promote collaboration between libraries and their users. Examples of free and inexpensive technologies include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, podcasts, vodcasts, web conferencing and instant messaging (Kajewski 2006).

3.2 Vodcasts

Vodcasts, commonly known as video podcasts, are a continuation of and progression from podcasts, but differ from podcasts in that they are not only audio in nature, but are visual as well. They contain visual information either in the form of still images, animation, or video (Brown). Vodcasting is an acronym where "vod" stands for "video on demand" (Kolbitsch 2006). Since vodcasts include audio and video they require larger storage capabilities. Vodcasts by nature are, therefore, a series of *audio-visual* files hosted on the internet, which can be downloaded to a personal computer or any other video-enabled connected device (Greef 2012). Libraries are using vodcasts to illustrate what the library has done and to attract the community to future programs. The vodcast enhances the lecturer-student interaction by allowing the relationship to go beyond the classroom in a more time-efficient manner, reducing the need for face-to-face consultation (Sutton-Brady 2009).

3.3 Distance education

Distance education denotes a form of study not led by teachers present in class-rooms but supported by tutors and an organization at a distance from the student. (Sewart , Keegan, and Holmberg 1984)

3.4 Open distance learning

ODL is a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social, educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning and on flexibility of learning provision, student-centeredness, supporting students and constructing learning programs with the expectation that students can succeed (Makoe 2014)

4. Stakeholders

Various teams within UNISA were responsible for the culmination of the vodcast: the personal librarian team, instructional designer, the sound, video and photography team, the library marketing team, the corporate communications and marketing team and the library technology services team.

5. Developmental phases of making a vodcast (production methodology)

The workflow in developing the vodcasts within a specific time frame is of utmost importance. The following steps are important to take note of as described by Roberts (2007): use a planning checklist, organize content and edit content by scriptwriter, record sound files at sound and video department, edit sound files, create online space for hosting files, add files to online space with RSS tags, include metadata descriptions of content, market the series to users.

Brown (2007-2008) mentions that the following important aspects must be taken into account when planning a vodcast: technical support, increased bandwidth and storage, media clip size and accessibility.

Donelly and Berge (2006) explain that creating a vodcast involves several steps. The first step is to plan your podcast. During this step, a script is written and music and sound effects are selected. Vodcast creators need to plan not only the content but also the tone, inflection, emphasis, and pace of the performance. Smith included three key tips for vodcasting success: keep the vodcast short; make longer messages modular; and pay attention to simple elements of spoken presentations.

The second step is to record the voice file. You can use a microphone with your iPod, PC, or digital voice recorder for this step.

The third step is to mix your voice file with music and sound effects and save it in MP3 format

The fourth step is making your new MP3 file available and creating the RSS feed. To accomplish this, you must post your MP3 file in a web folder on a web server. Then create the feed. Once this work is done, you are ready to announce your podcast to the world by submitting your feed to several podcast directories, like Podscope for example. Each time you update your podcast with a new episode, you must use a ping service, such as Fresh Podcasts to export your new update to subscribers.

6. Technologies and equipment used for the UNISA Library vodcast on citation analysis

The sound, video and photography team used: sound, lighting and studio cameras; Camtasia software for the screen captures (software for recording and mixing); software for encoding; microphones computers, speakers or earphones/headphones.

7. The use of the vodcast for teaching and learning in an Open Distance Learning environment

The vodcast can be used for a variety of services which are listed below:

- Use vodcasts as training tools for databases and online library resources
- Provide short episodes about an issue with voice-over by a narrator and interviews with users
- Give weekly updates of what is happening in your library
- Review new books by users who have read them
- Incorporate recordings, lectures and tutorials into vodcasts
- Provide library tours on vodcasts
- Provide professional development for staff, e.g. on demand tutorials, copyright discussions and discussions on new services and polices

8. Impact of these technologies on the user community

Vodcasts are appealing because they have four unique attributes according to Donnelly and Berge (2006). Firstly they include the voice of the developer which makes information more personal than written words alone. Secondly their inclusion can provide learners with control over their learning such as reading, listening or doing both. Thirdly it allows learners to listen to portable files while engaging in other tasks. Fourthly it allows educators and learners to time shift informational content. (Bolliger 2010). Vodcasts offer many benefits in that students can access them outside the traditional classroom, e.g. via a learning management system through Blackboard. Lecturers record lectures or provide supplementary materials to students for access outside the classroom. According to Copley (2007), most students in traditional courses rated podcasts as very useful and reported very positive experiences. It appears that this technology has potential benefits for students in distance learning environments.

9. Usefulness of vodcasts across the continent

The user experience

Short snippets of information or content can be mixed and matched, therefore allowing users the opportunity to:

- Students can access the vodcasts from anywhere in the world and watch and/or listen to them at any time they desire. (Greef and Barker 2012).
- Vodcasts engage library users and promote interaction.
- Vodcasts use rich media and stimulate interest in delivering content to students.
- Students can revisit the vodcasts and review what they might have missed or forgotten.
- The format allows for peer sharing.
- Vodcasts make use of simulation, animation and visuals.
- Students experience a multisensory environment which is very effective for learning to take place.
- Users can completely review a single vodcast in a short period of time
- They can easily review the vodcast for homework or examinations in a way that makes sense to the individual (Brown 2007)

Although vodcasts have proven to be rather useful and fairly easy to produce there are challenges.

10. Challenges experienced in the development of the project

The task team encountered various challenges from inception until the end of the project and these are listed below:

- The team was unclear what was expected , i.e. understanding the terms of reference
- Method of writing a script
- Inclusion of clipart
- Team members having different opinions
- Availability of team members for numerous meetings
- Having to repeat the voice-overs on numerous occasions
- Lack of communication between various stakeholders in UNISA
- Implementation of the project
- Quality check by the Department of Corporate Communications and Marketing

Despite the challenges experienced, the experience from developing a vodcast gave rise to various opportunities and lessons learnt as discussed below.

11. Opportunities

Despite the various challenges, the vodcast also brought about many positive opportunities for the librarians:

- Standards are now in place to develop a proper workflow amongst the library staff and various other stakeholders.
- Future vodcast projects will be simpler.
- Less time will be spent in developing future vodcasts.

12. Lessons learnt

The team learnt various lessons from the vodcast project:

- Importance of working as a team
- Acceptance of criticisms
- Being flexible
- Acquiring the appropriate skills with regard to writing a script
- Improvement of PowerPoint techniques
- Voice projection, posture and producing a video
- Achieving the correct technique regarding reading the script from the screen

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13. Emerging technologies impact on the role of the research librarian and the user community

New technologies such as the vodcast allow the research librarian to provide a better service to users by offering simple access to what they want, when they want it and how they want it. In an effort to improve service delivery and provide access to content, creating virtual communities through social software is an effective means. (Kajewski 2006)

New technologies allow librarians to collaborate and connect with their user community. It's a two-way process which allows for effective interaction and spontaneous feedback.

Integrating technology into the library platform addresses basic challenges that can lead to new services that satisfy both librarians and clients. Emerging technologies play a pivotal role in resolving problems, broadening the library service and ensuring service viability whilst increasing effectiveness and saving money. Librarians can use these technologies creatively to serve the needs of library users better.

To illustrate further how vodcasts impact on users, Baro (2015) explains that new tools such as vodcasts have the potential to enable users to search, identify, select, manipulate, use, communicate and store more information easily, instantly and in an inexpensive way. Services are more efficient and the tools provide a versatile means to satisfy users. Libraries and librarians in Africa now face challenges on how to offer services effectively to satisfy the new expectations of users. Emerging technologies assist in delivering high quality, comprehensive, user-friendly and new generation services. In order to improve the quality of library services and attract more users, librarians in university libraries in Africa must take advantage of innovative and emerging technologies. (Farkas 2005)

Some studies in Africa, however, show that certain institutions place restrictions on what web tools can be accessed because of bandwidth challenges, lack of time, etc.

14. Conclusion

Vodcasting is an exciting technology that has captured the imaginations of instructors, students and the news media. As the use of vodcasts for instructional use increases, issues arise, including those related to development, technical support, bandwidth, storage and accessibility that must be addressed if vodcasting is going to realise its full potential as a teaching tool. (Brown 2007-2008)

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