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When is Multimedia not the Answer?

When Faculty Expertise and Instructional Design Fundamentals Unite!

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Looking Back...

In early 2004, a team of library faculty was tasked with developing a unified approach to online patron assistance documentation. The team concluded that multimedia could be used to enhance pedagogical usefulness of topics in some cases, but would not define the project. As Staley wrote, “ubiquity of technology is an insufficient rationale for inclusion.” (Educause Quarterly, 2004, Volume 3).

Looking Inward...

To ensure the final product would be useful to patrons and faculty, accessible on- and off-campus, and based on solid learning theory, we kept the following in mind:

- Instructional design and content generation can be made less daunting for busy professionals who know how to teach.
- Faculty subject matter experts need to efficiently encapsulate answers to common questions with a minimum of expertise in web layout, instructional design, or multimedia development.
- Patrons need information presented in a predictable, standardized format.
- Diverse patron base needs access to resources from many locations on- and off-campus.
- Solid content is more important than an exciting delivery mode.
- Branding would help promote and unify the final product.

Moving Ahead...

Our process included the following:

- Online patron assistance materials of comparable institutions, such as UT-Austin and University of Washington, were evaluated.
- Instructional design faculty collaborated with library subject matter experts to define appropriate content and scope for the project.
- A content template, standardized layout, and style guidelines were developed by the instructional design and web teams.
- Subject matter experts created content on their own within the standardized template.
- Assistance with instructional design of content, screen captures, and web testing, was available upon request from instructional design faculty.

Thinking About...

We learned the following from our experiences with the first year of the project:

- The template allows subject matter experts to focus on content, not technical or instructional design hurdles, resulting in quick development for diverse range of topics.
- Patrons and library staff are using the How Do I pages on a regular basis - the portal page is among the top 30 pages accessed on the Library's site.
- Development of new content continues at a steady pace, with suggestions for new topics coming from library faculty, staff, and patrons.
- Library faculty continue to develop content with minimal technical assistance, but with active collaboration with instructional designers.

Teaching On...

Popular topics completed include:

- How do I...connect to UVA's wireless network?
- How do I...find images to use in my presentation?
- How do I...choose which bibliographic management software to use?
- How do I...verify an incomplete citation for a journal article?
- How do I...find the best evidence for clinical care?

Looking Forward...

Future plans for this well-received project include:

- The formalization of a review and revision process.
- Exploration of topics of expanded scope, requiring greater use of multimedia and conceptual, rather than technical, subjects.
- Conducting focus groups of service desk staff and patrons for topic suggestions.

