

## **Learning Bytes: Session 28: Monday 26 November 2012, 12:15-13:30**

### **Screencasting**

The session was facilitated by:

- Andrew Raistrick, Senior Computing Officer, Computing and Library Services
- Steve Bentley, Learning Technology Advisor, School of Applied Sciences
- Cath Ellis, University and National Teaching Fellow, School of Music, Humanities and Media

### **Sue Folley – Computing and Library Services**

#### **Introduction**

Sue explained that the session would focus on the pedagogical benefits and application of screencasts in teaching and learning, planning and designing of screencasts; software packages suitable for creating screencasts; techniques for enhancing your screencasts in order to focus attention; and making screencasts available through UniTube and UniLearn.

### **Andy Raistrick – Computing and Library Services**

#### **What Screencasts Are**

Screencasts are basically a video recording of the activity on a computer screen accompanied by a voiced narrative, they tend to be either:

- Instructional i.e. skills based; for example how to use computer software for a particular task. This can be a really useful way of providing this type of information; there are numerous screencasts available on the internet for how to use software.
- Informative, or knowledge-based , i.e. a kind of video lecture

#### **What Benefits do Screencasts Bring to Teaching?**

Screencasts are time independent, so can be viewed at whatever time and as many times as suits the individual. They can also be stopped and started, rewound and forwarded as desired; because of this students tend to make notes (rather than taking notes). Screencasts can be accessed remotely on a number of different platforms, allowing users flexibility. Screencasts make really good revision materials, and are often revisited by students coming up to assessment time. They are concise and precise, what might normally take 30 minutes in a lecture can often be done in half the time. Parity

of experience is achieved, so if you are teaching the same topic to a number of cohorts, all will get the exactly the same thing. Simple animation techniques can be used to focus attention on important aspects. In particular screencasts are really good for demonstrating how to use software and for the 'flipped classroom'\* model of delivery.

\* The flipped classroom is a phenomenon whereby traditional teaching methods are inverted. So via the use of technology e.g. a screencast, the lecture is delivered outside of the classroom, students' can watch it as and when it suits them and as many times as they need. When the class meets the lecturer is then able to focus on activity-based learning, which builds on the concepts delivered in the lecture. Effectively the homework happens in class but in a collaborative learning environment and with the support of the lecturer, who is able to spend more interactive time with students.

### **Software options and equipment**

There are a number of options available regarding software for screencasting;

- freely available software includes: [Jing](#) and [Screencast-o-matic](#)
- commercial: [Camtasia Studio](#) and [Adobe Captivate](#)
- a screencasting facility is available in PowerPoint

The main benefit of free software is that it is free, however the down side are constraints in terms of length (often maximum 5 minutes), no editing facilities and limited options regarding end output format. Although commercial software comes at a cost, the advantages are the means to edit, no limitations on length, and output can be in numerous formats.

In terms of equipment, colleagues would need either a microphone or a good quality headset. Which you choose is down to personal preference, there is a technique to using a microphone but people who move around a lot may find that a headset provides more flexibility. Your final sound quality is really important, use a quiet room, and prepare your resources in advance. Use a quiet computer and make sure you close everything down a part from what you need. Do work from a script, doesn't necessarily need to be word for word, but enough to remind you what you are doing. You need to familiarise yourself with the software, be patient, and practice. If you plan to use commercial software which offers editing capability and more functionality it may be worth getting some one-to-one training with someone who already uses the software. Screencasting is a really useful technology that the students do engage with.

### **Cath Ellis – School of Music, Humanities and Media**

Cath has been using screencasting within her teaching for some time now. In order to make this form of delivery as effective as possible she has been reflecting and evaluating its impact on her students. The 'on demand' aspect is appreciated by students; being available for when convenient to students who can work ahead, can watch either before or after primary reading, can catch up if off sick and use for revision at assessment times. It is also about the flexibility of being able to view

on a variety of platforms and locations, at home, on the bus etc. Flexibility is key, chunk up contents so students can dip in and out, and consider the most appropriate time for release. Content can be interspersed with questions and tasks, and it is critical that the screencast is visually stimulating (incorporate multi-media) to hold attention.

The self paced nature is fundamentally the most important aspect, with the ability available to pause, rewind and fast forward thus allowing the reduction of cognitive load – which is the amount of information most people are able to take in at one time. Screencasting can be particularly useful for showing things that one wouldn't normally be able to, and it is important to make sure things match, so 30 second explanation should take 30 seconds.

Cath explained that prior to developing and recording a screencast it was necessary to consider its 'shelf life'. So one would obviously want to put more time and effort into a screencast that will be useable for a longer period of time e.g. up to 5 years. For something with a short life, quick and rough is perfectly acceptable. So for example subjects such as languages and physics, have a long half-life, where as something like nutrition has a short half-life as due to rapid changes. Theory tends to remain unchanged for a longer time whilst technical subjects tend to change very fast.

If you choose to use screencasting to replace taught teaching or lecturing, do think about what you will usefully use the time for in order to invest in some active engagement with your students as opposed to just more lecturing.

## Steven Bentley – School of Applied Sciences

### **Pencasting /chalk and talk technology**

Steve demonstrated a ['Livescribe' pen](#), a piece of technology which can be used to produce pencasts. A pencast is an interactive document which allows you to hear, see and relive your notes exactly as they are captured. Special paper is used which incorporates controls at the bottom of each page. To download a recording, plug the pen into a computer via the USB connection, the file/s can then be saved as a PDF; this is a single file which includes audio, and which can then be uploaded to UniLearn.

Basic screencasting can be achieved using PowerPoint providing your computer is equipped with a soundcard, microphone and speaker. Once recorded, slide timings can be synched to run with the recorded narration. Narration can either be embedded in or linked to the PowerPoint presentation, which option you choose will have file size implications. If you plan to use this facility in PowerPoint a lot it might be worth investigating the 'authorPOINT PowerPoint Add-in' which can be used to convert presentations to Flash, which will result in a much smaller file size, for downloading to UniLearn. It is advisable to include slide notes if producing a screencast this way, as an alternative to the audio for accessibility. Ensure that the quality of the audio is high.

## **Questions and Discussion**

Sue Folley explained about an iPad app called 'Explain Everything' photographs either taken on the device or imported can be used, as a base for an annotated recorded explanation. Completed recordings can easily be exported and emailed in video format, making this an ideal medium to provide students with feedback. There is lots of support available on YouTube for using the app.

In terms of making screencasts available to students it is best to upload them to either UniTube or YouTube which are streamed servers, this means that the video is downloaded a bit and then starts playing as it continues to download. UniLearn is limited in disc space so it is not ideal to upload video directly to this platform. However a link to UniTube or YouTube can be included, or the video converted to the Flash format which is a much smaller file size.

If colleagues require support to produce screencasts the main source of expertise available is via School-based Learning Technology Advisors. There are also centrally run staff development sessions for both screencasting and for using Camtasia Studio software.