Choosing Content-Creation Products

The LMS Embedded Librarian as a Content Creator

Once librarians enter the learning management system (LMS) and become involved in individual courses, they are able to create and embed learning materials that students can use. The prior chapters examined the content that libraries provide (articles, e-books, data, etc.) and the finding tools that researchers use; this chapter will cover products and methods for communicating the value of these items and identifying how to use them to their fullest. This is where the embedded librarian can use the platform of the LMS and her presence in the course to easily share chosen resources and to directly teach students. The expectation that students will turn to the LMS to learn about their assignments and look for guidance in completing them creates a teachable moment for librarians.

Librarians can create many types of instructional objects and collections of resources to include in a course site. Course guides or subject guides can be utilized to list links of fitting resources for a course. These guides can be created for a specific embedded course, or a librarian can utilize guides that were linked on the library website for students conducting research in a topic area. Online presentations can be created to help students work through the process of planning their research or learn the important elements of citing sources or using a particular database. Screencasts often take a similar approach to that of a linear presentation, perhaps even including some slides or images created for a presentation and adding video of searching for articles or moving around on a website to make the guidance easier to understand in context. Interactive tutorials or games can be created to teach information literacy skills by, for example, asking users to decide which sources are the best to use in a particular case or to try their hands at evaluating sources. Whether it covers a broad search strategy for assignment-focused information, lists key databases, or shares the essential details of navigating a finding tool, creating custom content for a course is key for librarians in sharing library resources in the LMS.

Course and Subject Guides

The LMS lends itself to easily posting documents of several kinds. A librarian could compose a list of database URLs and other helpful text in word processing software, save it as a PDF file, and post it in the course site. It is just as easy to compose a document in the LMS's content editor (or HTML editor if you are comfortable working with HTML) and offer that page to students in the course. Pretty much any method you have for creating a list of resources for students to read over and click on will work in your LMS. But many librarians are using products outside of the LMS to accomplish this purpose. One reason is that course or subject guides are useful ways to communicate relevant resources not just to students in a specific LMS course, but also to students who are taking similar courses or studying a related subject. Librarians can create a guide that will work in multiple venues and can save time by building the guide only once. The guides can have a common style that makes them more recognizable as being associated with the library or parent institution, and a common format also makes it easier for students to learn how to navigate the guide. The guide can be linked on the library's website, embedded in the LMS for one or more courses, and shared by URL in e-mails, in chat

sessions, and on library instruction handouts for individual users or groups.

A method that has been used in a number of larger academic institutions is the automated loading of course or subject guides into LMS course sites. This is a great way to get library resources into every course that uses the LMS (and that is likely a growing percentage of all courses offered at an institution, given the statistics shared in chapter 1). This plan works, however, only if librarians at an institution have created enough guides to match the courses offered at the institution. This can be done by creating a set of guides that match all of the departments represented in the curriculum or by creating a larger, more specific set of guides for subject areas within the larger disciplines or even for each individual course. Generally, a university library might have some mixture of large subject and specific course guides to connect with course sites and then also create a general purpose research guide that can be used in courses that lack a more tailored guide. Working with the folks who administer the LMS, links or widgets can be included that will lead students from the course site back to the full course or subject guide, or perhaps the entire guide will be embedded on the course site.

LibGuides from Springshare are a popular method of providing course- or subject-related guides to library resources. Guides can be created and categorized for broad subject coverage, specific topics, individual courses, or other purposes.[1] The guides may include both links to online resources and call numbers for print materials and content may include either bulleted lists of links or segments of explanatory text. The creation of individual guides in this product is supplemented by the presentation of all of the guides in a categorized, searchable list. The process is a great mixture of flexibility in creation choices—adding different widgets, search boxes, and so forth—with the ease of standardization of layouts and overall look.

Alternative approaches to creating course and subject guides lack the organizational options built into the LibGuides system. There are easy web document creation services available like Smore.com, Google Sites, or WordPress.[2] Librarians could also code their own guides in HTML on their library websites. All of these options require the creation of style guides and templates to keep the same look and features in the guides; this process generally might require content editors to know how to create and edit HTML documents and to regularly update them. Master lists of guides also need to be updated by hand to accurately reflect changes in the names of guides, to add new guides, or to remove deleted guides. In some environments, staff availability and expertise could keep these alternative approaches running flawlessly. For others, having the structure of LibGuides in place will be extremely helpful.

Presentations

The embedded librarian needs to provide guidance to students on finding information for their projects in addition to providing links to the resources that students will use. The course guide approach can allow for the entry of brief notes or suggestions on search strategies or choosing among databases, but for a more extended introduction, a librarian may wish to link to a presentation in the LMS or on the course guide. Online presentation options allow for a generally linear presentation of informative content, giving students a way to learn about information sources, database searching, navigation skills, and related information literacy skills. The presentation can, to some degree, replace elements of a face-to-face library instruction session in that an effective presentation can identify key terms and elements for students to understand and put the use of different library resources into context.

Along with the options mentioned below, there is also the possibility of including images, audio, video, and hyperlinks to resources within the presentation. There is quite a bit of crossover among the tools mentioned in this chapter, where a presentation might include a link to a screencast, or a screencast might include introductory slides created in a presentation, and so forth. There are a wide variety of free and licensed products available for creating presentations to share with students. Some commonly available ones are listed in the gray box, including the licensed Microsoft PowerPoint and the free Google Slides and

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Screencast Tools

Adobe Captivate
www.adobe.com/products/captivate.html

TechSmith Camtasia
https://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.html

Articulate Storyline
https://www.articulate.com/products/storyline-why.php

TechSmith Jing
www.techsmith.com/jing.html

Screencast-O-Matic
http://screencast-o-matic.com

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Interactive Tutorial Tools

Guide on the Side
http://code.library.arizona.edu/gots

HapYak
http://corp.hapyak.com

Office Mix
https://mix.office.com

Twine
http://twinery.org

Zaption
https://www.zaption.com

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Prezi. Slides and Prezi are both web-based tools, while PowerPoint can be web-based through Office Online or may be installed as software on a computer or mobile device.

Screencasts

Screencasts allow audio narration over anything that can be captured on a computer display. This might include still images or individual slides from a presentation, but more commonly includes video of searching a library catalog or other resource. Screencasts can provide step-by-step guidance on the use of a database or demonstrate how to locate various resources on the library website or within the embedded librarian resources in the LMS course site. They are very effective because they show the user just how to get from the point of watching the screencast into the desired resource. In fact, a user can search a database in one browser tab or window and watch a related screencast in another.

Several software applications and online tools are available for creating screencasts.[3] The first three tools listed in the gray box are all licensed products, while the other two are free web-based options (with low-cost pro versions). Captivate, Camtasia, and Storyline all allow a user to add quizzes, video files, and other media along with screen-captured action, which makes them better for multiple types of projects, from short screencasts to lengthier videos or interactive tutorials. Screencast-O-Matic and Jing will do an excellent job of capturing screen activity and combining it with narration for an effective learning object.

Interactive Tutorials

Interactive tutorials take screencasts and presentations a step further by allowing students to not only passively read and watch information on screen, but also make choices and be assessed as they learn about research or other tasks. Tutorials can take many forms and can be created with combinations of approaches. As mentioned above, the licensed software listed in the section on screencasts could be used for a multistep tutorial that combined sections of screencasts with text instructions and quizzes, all laid out in a linear pattern or a user-chosen route through several modules. This is not to say that every interactive tutorial is a lengthy experience or filled with excessive depth on the topics addressed. The key element of these tutorials is interaction, where the user of the tutorial is asked to make a choice or give input in some way. It could involve someone watching a two-minute screencast and then answering two multiple-choice questions to help reinforce the learning. It could also be set up as a game-like trip through the research process jungle, with several choices and junctures connecting sections that cover topic development, the use of reference sources, or article searching. A key element of this experience is that it can provide students with immediate feedback on their learning.[4]

In addition to the screencasting software mentioned already, there are other approaches a librarian could use to create an interactive tutorial. You could start relatively small by adding questions for students to answer at points within a screencast or presentation. The free tools HapYak and Zaption can be used to take an existing video or screencast and add multiple-choice or open-entry questions for users to answer before moving on with the video. You could use Office Mix—a free add-on for PowerPoint—to place polls, quizzes, voice, and video into presentations and save them in a format that will work on devices whether or not they have PowerPoint installed. The open software Guide on the Side works for placing a sidebar next to a live web browser window. Users complete tasks on an actual library website or in a database as directed by the instructions in the sidebar and answer review questions that also appear there. A final tool

to try is Twine, which guides you in developing a non-linear tutorial in which students choose their own path through a series of individual pages or modules, which can be text-and-image-based or include videos. The interaction in these tools can really help students understand the material offered in the instructional object and serve as a motivator for students to continue with the tutorial.[5]

Collections of Instructional Content

Keep in mind that you do not necessarily have to create all learning objects on your own. It is true that at times you will have specific routes to databases or resources that will be made clearer if you can show how to get to the resources from your library website. And great value is added by describing or outlining a search strategy for a specific assignment with expertise gained from working with a specific instructor and the identical assignment requirements that students are facing. But sometimes others have created wonderful introductions to topics or databases that will serve your students quite well, without you having to create your own. A screencast of a navigational guide to a database will show an interface that looks much the same once the user leaves your website. It is wise to create your overall presence in the course with a mixture of self-created and shared resources.

A number of learning object collections are available that may have useful materials to use in your embedded librarian setting. One, Atomic Learning, is a commercial product composed of short videos and longer tutorial collections that introduce users to a variety of technologies and related tasks. The LibGuide Community site is made available by Springshare but may be freely searched without the requirement of subscribing to LibGuides. The others listed in the gray box are collections of learning objects created by librarians or faculty members and intended to be widely shared. YouTube is not precisely focused on learning objects, but it is a widely used channel for providing access to library screencasts and video tutorials. Searching these collections can provide helpful models on which to base your own learning objects, as well as materials you can place (with attribution) in your embedded courses.

Best Practices for Building Instructional Guides, Presentations, and Tutorials

Whenever you venture into online content creation, it is key to consider aspects or characteristics of successful content that influence your creations. Some

Collections of Library Instructional Content

ANTS (ANimated Tutorial Sharing) Project
www.screencast.com/users/ANTS

Atomic Learning (Higher Education)
https://www.atomiclearning.com/highed

LibGuides Community (search for created LibGuides by keyword)
http://libguides.com

MERLOT (Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching; look under Academic Support Services and then the Library and Information Services category)
www.merlot.org

PRIMO (Peer-Reviewed Instructional Materials Online) Database
http://primodb.org

YouTube (search for a database name or library skill topic)
https://www.youtube.com

practices to consider when creating content include the following:

- **Simplify.** Be careful about the length of videos or the amount of text you are expecting students to watch or read. Stick to the essentials you need to share on the topic, knowing that user behavior and just-in-time information needs tend toward a more concise approach.
- **Do not trap your users.** We should simplify things as much as possible, but there are times when topics will take more than a paragraph of text or two minutes of video. Find ways in your creations for users to skip past what they already know to learn what they do not. Modularize what you are presenting so that they can jump ahead or pick out just the video about one aspect of, say, citing articles from a particular database.
- **Watch your language.** Think about your audience, where they are coming from, and what level of understanding they have. Avoid library lingo, except where it is useful for users to learn it. Try to phrase what you have to say in active ways.
- **Context is king.** Make sure that you are including fitting information in your learning object that does not go off on tangents. The learning object should stay focused on the information need you are trying to address so that users stick with it and see its value.
- **Seek interaction and application.** Help users learn the material by having a ready chance to

apply their knowledge. This might be through an interactive addition to a presentation or video, or it might be a case of providing learning objects when students are preparing or working on an assignment connected to library resources.[6]

Keeping these practices in mind, it is key for embedded librarians to put their best feet forward with the students and faculty they are trying to serve. Make content that fits the courses you are working with. Find content that will meet needs and save you time by eliminating repeated effort. Share content with your users and make an impact on their searching skills and choices.

Notes

1. Ruth L. Baker, "Designing LibGuides as Instructional Tools for Critical Thinking and Effective Online Learning," *Journal of Library and Information Services in Distance Learning* 8, no. 3–4 (2014): 107–17.
2. See, as an example of a library guide created with Smore.com, "Research Resources," Villa Maria College, accessed October 28, 2015, www.villa.edu/academics/library/research-resources.
3. Christine Forbes, "Free Web-Based Tools for Information Literacy Instruction," *Library Hi Tech News* 31, no. 10 (2014): 1–5.
4. Katie Greer, Amanda Nichols Hess, and Elizabeth W. Kraemer, "The Librarian Leading the Machine: A Reassessment of Library Instruction Methods," *College and Research Libraries* preprint, accepted April 2015, anticipated publication date May 1, 2016, http://crl.acrl.org/content/early/2015/05/11/crl15-719.full.pdf+html.
5. Mandi Goodsett, "Creating Interactive Tutorials Using Free Resources: Home," Cleveland State University, Michael Schwartz Library, 2015, http://researchguides.csuohio.edu/interactivetutorials.
6. Janice (Ginny) Redish, *Letting Go of the Words: Writing Web Content That Works*, (San Francisco: Morgan Kaufmann, 2007).