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Keeping Up With the YouTube Generation: Collaborating with Student Video Bloggers to Enhance Library Instruction

Susan Ariew

Introduction

2006 was the year of YouTube, the most comprehensive video hosting site on the World Wide Web. It was a phenomenon that was emphasized at the end of the year when *Time* named "You" as the person of the year, featuring the new "digital democracy" of social networking tools such as MySpace, FaceBook, Wikipedia, and YouTube (Grossman, 2006). YouTube was heralded as one of the fastest-growing networks online. Catherine Holahan of *Business Week Online* reported that "more than 79% of U.S. broadband Internet users watched video in 2006" and that "YouTube was streaming more than 100 million videos a day for much of the year (Holahan, 2007). Another *Time* article "The Beast With a Billion Eyes," characterized YouTube as a surveillance system, a spotlight, a watchdog, a microscope, or a soapbox (Poniewozik, 2006). Examples of YouTube as a spotlight or surveillance emerged last year when Michael Richards was caught spewing hate speech and racial slurs at a comedy club or when Senator George Allen was embarrassed during his re-election campaign because of his calling a young man of Indian descent "Macaca." The new "online citizen journalism" means that celebrities, politicians, or anyone in the public eye are under closer public scrutiny than ever before (Holahan, 2007). YouTube videos are also appealing because they offer news that is missing from the major media outlets. As one journalist writes, "Video diaries took us where TV couldn't or wouldn't—running into air raid shelters in the Israeli-Hezbollah War, crouching behind an armored vehicle with a soldier in Samarra, bullets dinging into metal off camera" (Poniewozik, 2006). The media itself offers more to users in the way of advertising films, television, and the online creation of new media such as TV shows and podcasts. What hasn't been discussed in the articles available about YouTube to date is the amazing educational potential of online streaming video not just to use videos in the classroom, but to create and customize new videos for educational purposes. If YouTube is where the users are, it would make sense to join in the online "conversation" with them about the issues librarians are most passionate about: copyright, evaluating information sources, plagiarism, library services, library as place and a whole host of other topics. The project described here is how librarians at the University of South Florida and a college student YouTube video blogger collaborated to create videos that addressed some issues related to information literacy and promoting library services.

Getting Started - Identifying a Need

The inspiration to collaborate with students on video projects came from a presentation given at the 2006 LOEX Conference, "What Does First Person Shooter Have to Do With Library Instruction?" by Ann Brown, Paola Ceccarine, and Cathy Eisenhower where they described the development process for an information literacy game they had designed for students at George Washington University. They stressed collaboration with "gamers" in the development and testing phases of the project as critical to success. As a result, when thinking about creating videos, the idea of collaboration with a YouTube video blogger became an important part of this project at the University of South Florida.

Librarians at the University of South Florida teach information literacy in a variety of settings. A couple of them teach a three credit information literacy class for undergraduates in the library school, LIS 2005, while the

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majority teach a number of one-shot instruction sessions and orientations for students at all levels. The bulk of the classes, however, include those for first year students, most notably the University Experience and the English composition classes. In searching for quality multimedia resources for these classes, there are very few online videos that seem to relate directly to information literacy. One of the best videos available was *E-Literate*, an entertaining film about carefully evaluating Web sites and sources of information (New Literacies, 2000). Unfortunately, *E-Literate* has become quite dated and there have been no plans to do a new version of it. Because there were few resources available, it seemed like a worthwhile project to engage talented students in the process of creating some current videos related to information literacy issues that could be used in the classroom.

The Process – Getting Started with Brainstorming

To start with, two librarians sat down with a student, who happened to be the son of one of the librarians who was an avid "YouTube" video creator to brainstorm ideas for a video. They began by listing typical problems students encounter in using library resources and navigating the physical library. One problem included students' notions that library subscription resources were the same thing as "Internet" resources, which their professors forbade them to use. Students with such notions would seek out print journals and search for articles "by hand," not realizing that full-text databases had some of the same articles which could be accessed far more efficiently. Another problem identified by librarians was the fact that students were often reluctant to ask for help, so featuring various aspects of the "Ask a Librarian" service from the library Web site seemed to be a good idea. In another video, plagiarism was identified as a problem to be featured. From there the group discussed what types of video scenarios might illustrate those problems. In illustrating the scenarios the brainstorming group decided to create a fictional character that they felt might offer some interest and humor. Thus, "Richard Sly the Library Guy" was created.

Moving From Ideas into Action

Next, the Associate Director of Reference and Instruction created a more formal project team.[1] This group consisted of the brainstorming group plus a new librarian on staff. Everyone in this group worked together to write a script collaboratively, featuring the frustrated college student looking for journal articles being assisted by superhero Richard Sly the Library Guy, a cool dude who knows the library better than anyone. A major challenge in writing the script was reaching consensus about the humorous aspects of the video. Librarians had a very different perspective about what was funny compared to younger members of the group. In the end, after some real discussion about what to keep and what was "over-the-top," they struck what they thought was a good balance between educational content and humor. Once the team wrote the script, the production crew (consisting of the new librarian, the video blogger college student, a high school student volunteer and a graduate assistant in library science) got to work on casting decisions and setting up a filming schedule.

Technical and Scheduling Problems

A major problem with the project was obtaining the proper equipment. Up until the time these videos were created, only two people in the library had access to video equipment, which was very expensive. They were reluctant to turn over filming to a group outside their area of responsibility and unit. Because the campus had a central office, Campus Technology Services, where faculty could check out video equipment, the group opted to borrow a camera and tapes from that facility. This was fairly dated equipment, but serviceable for a pilot project. Another problem was scheduling the video production in the library without disturbing patrons. To address this, the group secured permission to do the videotaping when the library was closed or very early in the morning when few people were in the library just as it opened. Once the taping began, the group realized that they had miscast their main character and had to make a last minute casting change between participants on the team. There were also technical problems which included the accidental erasure of an entire segment of the shoot because of sloppiness in rewinding and retakes for shots. This forced the group to reshoot part of the script another day, in addition to dealing with problems with audio quality in the video product related to the age of the borrowed equipment. Once all the filming was done, the final challenge was transferring the taped footage to a computer and editing it with software. Just as the library didn't have the video camera equipment, it did not have editing equipment available to the group, so the college student used his own computer to make the transfer and do all the editing. The equipment the student used was an iMac G5 with plenty of hard drive space on it. Videos before they are edited and compressed take a lot of space. He used iMovie HD6 software that comes pre-packaged on all Macs along with Garargeband for audio loops, sound effects, and songs. Also included was VisualHub and Quicktime Pro software for converting videos to useable formats. But after all that work, they were able to produce a pilot video entitled *Databases* now available on YouTube.

The *Chronicles of Libraria*

After the group created the first pilot film and it was deemed a moderate success, three members of the team decided to create a rap video, *The Chronicles of Libraria*, a take off on *Saturday Night Live's* music video *Lazy Sunday*, featuring SNL cast members Chris Parnell and Andy Samberg. About *Lazy Sunday* the Wikipedia reports:

> After the film aired, it was available for free download on iTunes. Additionally, it was posted to several Web sites and shared via e-mail. The film was viewed more than five million times at YouTube before NBC Universal asked the site to remove it, along with several other copyrighted NBC video clips, in February 2006. NBC later

placed the short on its SNL site, although it's labeled "The Chronicles of Narnia". In late 2006, the short reappeared on YouTube and remained online for the rest of the year, but was pulled in mid-January 2007. (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lazy_Sunday).

Because of *Lazy Sunday's* popularity, there have been many YouTube imitations of the video created by video amateurs everywhere. USF decided to join in the fun. The script, planning for the visuals, and entire production was organized and executed by three people: the young librarian, college student and high school student volunteers from the first video project. Again, the group worked on a written script and visual ideas for the rap video before shooting began. Because of their experience with the first video, they were given permission to use the expensive equipment owned by the library and filming was easier because it was done on campus as well as in the library to provide a variety of shots. Editing for the video was still outsourced with equipment belonging to the editor. The "Richard Sly" character from "*Databases*" came into the story at the end to provide advice about plagiarism. All the music and sound effects in *The Chronicles of Libraria* were created using Garageband copyright free music so the film could be distributed widely.

Using the Videos in the Classroom and on the Web

Since the *Databases* video illustrated a student foundering in his efforts to do a class assignment, the USF librarians thought it might be a good icebreaker for several general classes as a way of introducing students to the basics. The video was used in three University Experience classes. These were classes that introduce students to the university. The library orientation part of it is very general. Student reactions to the video were mixed. The first group seemed quiet and unresponsive, though two of them commented positively about the video in their evaluations of the class. In the second class, librarians introduced the video and set up the context for it a bit more carefully. Reactions seemed to be more positive. The video was also used in two freshman composition classes. In one class, students laughed and enjoyed the humor in the video; however, the instructor did not seem to like it at all. In another class, librarians coupled the video with a class activity. Students were asked to discuss and identify the problems the student in the video had and the solutions that were offered to those problems. Using the video directly as the "teachable moment" seemed to work best. The video generated some discussion and students were more engaged as a result. In contrast to *Databases*, *The Chronicles of Libraria* was used as a promotional resource, linked off the USF library home page. While it wasn't used instructionally, many libraries have linked to it. It was featured in *ALA Direct* and received a great deal of exposure.

Beyond the Particulars

Creating videos that highlight one's library and one's own campus are powerful ways of promoting that library to students and users since, as YouTube statistics bear out, streaming video is a new medium of choice. Librarians learned from this experience that the videos by themselves will not always get the point across in an instructional setting. One also has to put video into context for students and make sure that the teaching points in it are reinforced with classroom objectives and activities. Some tips for video production include the following:

- Encourage participation from the ground up by involving a diverse production team of students, graduate students, and library faculty.

- Participate in the process yourself so you know for future projects what equipment you will need and what expertise you want to engage.

- Find ways to collaborate with student talent on campus either through the student employee population, by collaborating with students and faculty in multimedia production classes (or in the fine arts), creating or promoting a student "friends of the library" group, or promoting a student video contest.

- Involve library instructional staff in the process so there is more "buy in" to use the videos in the classroom.

Conclusion

As librarians at USF struggled to find a balance between the educational points they wished to make and student humor, creativity, and input, librarians learned that they can work with students in a team environment to make videos that can reach and teach their students. They also found that video production does not have to stay in the hands of a small, select group either on campus or within a large academic library. As YouTube and other streaming video hosting sites become commonplace, it is important to realize that a new visual literacy among young people has emerged and that they have much to teach librarians and educators about the power of the new media. By positively engaging students to help the library educate their peers, the library 2.0 phenomenon continues to grow.

Endnotes

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