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INTRODUCING ONLINE SEARCH SERVICES USING VIDEOTAPE

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Abstract. The medium of videotape is well suited for introductory presentations about online searching. Several library schools and vendors have created videotaped instructions for novice searchers, but some libraries have now begun to use the medium to produce introductions aimed at potential patrons of their online search services. Reports of several of these presentations are examined in this paper. The library at the University of Hawaii at Manoa produced several videotapes to introduce online search services to their patrons. The problems encountered, uses and potential of these productions are discussed.

As interest in online literature search services continues to grow with faculty, students, and other patrons, the need for a basic introductory message increases. Many academic libraries have produced introductory brochures or pamphlets; demonstrations or in-person introductions are offered by many reference departments as time permits; and some libraries have prepared audiovisual productions which provide the patron with a general explanation of online search services. The medium of video is uniquely suited for introducing online searching because of its capability to record an online search directly from a CRT terminal. The familiar television is also a comfortable medium for viewers, videotapes are portable and easily reproduced, they can be lively and nonstatic, and the cost of a video production can be low if suitable equipment is available.

Although many library schools have used videotape for training online searchers, only a handful of videotape productions aimed at introducing potential users to online searching have been reported in the literature. This paper examines some of the reports of videotaped presentations on online services and relates the experiences at the University of Hawaii in producing several videotape programs which introduce online searching to our library patrons.

PREVIOUS REPORTS

Several library schools in the United Kingdom recognized the potential of videotaped introductory programs in the mid-1970's. Lucy A. Tedd and E. Michael Keen of the College of Librarianship Wales included the following advantages of recording searches onto videotape for later reutilization: (a) no problems of computer accessibility (b) no telecommunication network problems (c) no computer system failures (d) no telephone line failures (e) ability to use with any size of group (f) reduced costs. (1: p. 453-454)

The College of Librarianship Wales produced several complete videotaped productions comparing manual searches with online searches. As of 1978 an ERIC version and an Historical Abstracts videotape had been produced, with several more planned. These 20 minute introductions make it possible for a potential patron to learn about online searching at his or her convenience and, while the videotapes do not teach the viewer how to search, they do provide him or her with the concepts of online searching.

Tedd and Keen point out that such complete stand-alone productions, although worthwhile, can also be very time consuming. Alternatively, a silent videotape recorded directly from a terminal which has video output can be used with appropriate handouts during an introductory lecture. The quality is good and the effect is the same as watching an online demonstration.

Other U.K. library schools which have produced instructional videotapes include Brighton Polytechnic, Liverpool Polytechnic, and the Polytechnic of North London. (1: p. 462)

Excluding uses by online vendors such as Medline and LEXIS or library schools to train searchers (rather than patrons) (2,3,4,5,6,7) there have been very few reports of produced online introductions in this country. Lorretta Kiersky of Airco, Inc. produced a nine-minute videotape "commercial for announcing literature searches, translations, reference and order services, and two weekly bulletins." (8: p. 383). She praises the many advantages of videotape which include flexibility, portability, and the ability to view and edit immediately.

Undoubtedly many libraries have produced small-scale videotapes which introduce a variety of library services such as the one described above, but uses by academic libraries for instructional introductions to online searching concepts or capabilities are not often reported. DIALOG now offers a videotape which describes their system and which can be used in any type of institution. Laslo A. Nagy and Martha Lou Thomas of the University of California, Irvine reported in the January 1981 issue of College and Research Libraries on evaluation of the effectiveness of two library videotapes. (9) One of UCI's videotapes is titled Searching Computer Data Bases to Meet Your Instruction Needs. This thirteen-minute videotape provides a humorous, yet instructive, overview of how an online search is performed. The evaluation does not separate this online searching videotape from another on writing research papers, but the combined evaluation showed a significant improvement in student's knowledge of library use skills after viewing the two videotapes.

OUR EXPERIENCE

The need for a standardized package to introduce our online search services, coupled with the capabilities and advantages of videotape,
led the University of Hawaii to develop a set of videotaped introductions to online searching. Our videotape productions fall into three categories:

1) stand-alone color productions which introduce online searching to potential patrons,
2) raw footage of actual online searches to be used in conjunction with a lecture, and
3) a recording of an introduction to online searching seminar given for in-house staff.

These three categories have different purposes, uses and audiences.

Stand-Alone Productions

The most ambitious project undertaken was the production of three videotaped programs to introduce, describe, and to be available for checkout and viewing. A brochure describing our services accompanies the programs. Emphasized are three subject areas--Education, focusing on the ERIC database, Health Sciences, highlighting Medline, and Agriculture, concentrating on Agricola. Since they are to be viewed by different audiences depending on subject interest, all three videotapes are adapted from a basic outline, dialog, and location.

An attention-grabbing scene of impatient or frustrated patrons bombarding the reference desk opens the production, followed by an explanation of how a computer search can help. The manual searching process is compared with online searching and a reference interview for an online search is shown. Portions of an actual search follow, with narration describing the search process. To supplement the search, the tape shows how pertinent documents can be located and suggests additional relevant databases. Finally, the advantages and limitations of an online search are reiterated and the viewer is directed to the reference department for additional information.

The cast consists of four "patrons", a librarian-searcher, and several walk-in-library users. The narrator, two camera people, director, technical assistant, editors, and two producers completed the crew.

These tapes were produced with the help of an Educational Improvement Fund Grant of $850. awarded by the Chancellor's office at the University of Hawaii. Purchase of a dozen Beta-max 1/2" videotapes, the cost of setting up and recording searches on the three databases, and all charges for graphics design and printing of 500 copies of a brochure were covered by the grant. Equipment and facilities were provided free of charge at the University and all cast/crew members volunteered their time.

The playing time of each final videotape is approximately fifteen minutes, but the time involved for production was much longer. Scriptwriting, revising, storyboarding, and auditioning cast members was a large task, but it paled when compared to the time required for taping, retaping, and editing. We were lucky to have dedicated volunteer help from several library school students and reference librarians. Taping inside the library was done on Sunday mornings when the library was closed, and, because of overtaxed editing facilities on campus, much of the editing had to be done on nights and weekends.

Although it is too early to evaluate the impact fully, we have had good response to the script, layout, acting, and overall message of the videotapes. Technically, however, the tapes are very poor for a number of reasons.

Since the budget did not allow the hiring of video experts, our inexperience no doubt contributed to the deficiencies. For a university of our size (over 20,000 students) our videotape equipment seems inadequate and over-used. Poor or inoperable microphones, a single Betamax editing station, lack of adequate tools (such as a character generator) all compounded technical difficulties. 1/2" tape copies poorly also, so third generation scenes are fuzzy.

Despite these flaws, our videotape productions are still valuable tools for providing an introduction to online searching. Suitable equipment, along with experience and increased competence would improve future productions.

Videotaped Searches

Searches from the ERIC, Agricola, and Medline databases were videotaped directly from a monitor with video output. (We connected an Exequor portable terminal with an acoustic coupler and RS-232 output to a Teleray CRT which had RS-232 input and video output. This, in turn, was connected to a Betamax recording unit. If a terminal has both an acoustic coupler and a video output port this extra link would be unnecessary.)

While parts of the searches are incorporated into the stand-alone productions, the unedited searches may be used by reference librarians in lecture/demonstrations. Since no narration or explanation is on the tapes, they must be used in conjunction with an in-person presentation. Handouts explaining the search or showing offline prints may accompany it.

These videotapes can either be used as backup when the searcher is unable to log on for a planned online demonstration or in lieu of real time demonstrations.

Videotape of an Introductory Session

The final portion of the videotape package is a black and white recording of a one hour session given to library staff members who do not do searching. Since many in the audience are technicians and other para-professionals, this session provides a basic overview of online searching and discusses some of our policies and procedures. This kind of videotaping is easier and straightforward. Camera work is simple, voice levels do not change dramatically, and no editing is required. Copies of handouts discussed in the presentation are stored with the tape.
This tape can be used during orientation of new staff members, for those who missed the actual sessions, as a first introduction to online searching for incoming library school students, or as a guide for librarians who will be giving introductory sessions. Reactions to this tape have been very positive.

CONCLUSION

The University of Hawaii Library Systems staff have developed a set of videotapes which serve as introductions to online search services to a variety of audiences. Despite technical difficulties with the most sophisticated of the productions, all levels are useful tools which provide consistent and easy alternatives to introducing search concepts.

Videotape is a medium which is ideally suited for online searching introductions, and it will find increasing use in academic libraries' literature search programs.

Carol Tenopir was Library Systems Librarian at the University of Hawaii when this project was done.

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