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YouTube and libraries

It could be a beautiful relationship

Have you ever wished there was some way of reaching a mass amount of patrons with the least amount of effort? Have you wondered how to let distance education students know what is at your library? YouTube could be the answer. One article stated, "YouTube is the most popular internet television or video distribution site on the Internet and currently ranks number 16 on Alexa for most visited websites. YouTube offers anyone with an Internet connection the ability to upload video clips and share them with friends, family, and the world, all for free."[1]

YouTube is a social software application that could radically change how we look at library instruction and training . . . if we let it.

Getting started

You will need to create a YouTube account if you want to fully benefit from what this tool has to offer. The first step is to go to www.youtube.com, and then click on the sign up link. The sign up page is very basic in the information it asks for. All you need to enter is your e-mail address, set up a password, postal code, gender, and date of birth. It is one of the easiest forms yet for setting up an account.

After you have created your account, you can then edit your channel information. When they say *channel* information, remember this site is playing off the television theme, they use channel as a term to indicate either your user profile or that of another YouTube member. You can add as little or as much information to your channel as you want.

You can enter in the name of your library in the channel information section, and in the description you can enter information regarding your library, such as the history of your library, the services you provide, and so forth.

Under personal information, you can be as detailed as you would like. You can use the random information section to list data about your library. In this area you can also add links to your catalog, making it easier for the students to get to the information they are looking for.

The advantages

One of the largest advantages of using YouTube is the ability to upload videos of anything you like in any format. According to an article in *Slate* magazine, "To post your own video, sign up for a free account and go to the Upload page. Select your file, click the Upload Video button, and you are done! YouTube's servers covert you vid to a standardized format, but you don't need to know what that format is. If you send a URL to your aunt, it'll play on her browser without spraying the screen with pop-ups and errors."[2]

There are some regulations for the material you upload to YouTube. The maximum file size is 100 MB, and the maximum length is 10 minutes. Be very careful about what you upload onto YouTube. You need permission before you can upload any television shows, music, videos, music concerts, or commercials. If you created the content of the video entirely yourself, you are fine!

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The advantages to using this software to promote your library are amazing. YouTube has a feature that allows you to add a video to a blog, or it allows you to send video to a cell phone, providing easy access to guides anywhere.

In addition, anytime you add any new material to your YouTube site, it can be set up to notify the patron of your new material immediately. There is also an RSS feed to notify patrons of new content.

How could it be used?

One of the possible uses for YouTube is a storehouse for instructional videos with a link that could take the viewer to the library's Web site for more information.

America's CareerInfoNet has used You-Tube to list their videos about different occupations.[3] This Web site is not exactly library oriented, but take a look at the YouTube page they created. The page titled joemnscu, states it purpose, it has career videos. It provides a link back to the main Web site and they have loaded 149 videos to date.[4]

Why couldn't a library film its various services, load them to YouTube, and then make the link available on its Web site for its patrons? It is not hard to imagine how beneficial this could be to a variety of patrons: students who need help when the library is unavailable, an instruction method for distance education students, and another method of directing possible patrons back to the library catalog.

Another creative use of YouTube for a library can be as a method of introducing resources that are available on campus. In many incoming freshmen-orientation sessions there are training sessions on how to use the library. Why not combine a video added to YouTube with library services training? Williams College Library did exactly that with the video entitled "The Library Mystery Tour."[5]

One video viewed was very simple, yet very dynamic in concept. In addition to giving written, step-by-step directions to the library, why not add visual helper, as well? Imagine how much simpler it could be to guide your students to your library Web site and have them click on the link that takes them to the library's YouTube account.

Valdosta State University might be on to something with its visual guide to the reference desk. "How to Find the Reference Desk" begins its video at the south entrance of the library and follows through to the reference desk.[6]

You could also create tutorials to teach your students how to use databases and put them on YouTube. You could purchase screen capture software, such as SnagIt or Camtasia,[7, 8] and build tutorials about what software the library has to offer and how to use it. The Georgia Tech Library created a step-by-step guide like this for its engineering students.[9]

These four examples are only the beginning of how YouTube can be used to help develop libraries, provide services, and meet the needs of the patron. Do not be afraid to use this service to improve your library. This is yet another way of directing the patron back to the main resources we provide for them, letting them know that the library is able to keep up with the 21st century.

Notes

1. S. Rothman "Review of YouTube, Internet Television and Video Distribution Site." Associated Content, August 8, 2006.

2. P. Boutin, "A Grand Unified Theory of YouTube and MySpace," *Slate*, April 28, 2006.

3. CareerInfoNet, www.careerinfonet.org.

4. Joemnscu, www.youtube.com/profile?user=joemnscu.

5. Williams College Library, "The Library Mystery Tour," www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-t0LHnw-fc.

6. Valdosta State University, "How to Find the Reference Desk," www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-M1kF3YiMk.

7. SnagIt, www.techsmith.com/.

8. Camtasia, www.techsmith.com/.

9. Georgia Tech Library, youtube.com/profile?user=GTMechEngVids.