

Information Literacy and Research Skills Program at USC Sumter

Jane Ferguson
Library Director
803-938-3736

jane@uscsu.edu

Pat Schultz
Library Manager
803-938-3736

pschultz@uscsu.edu

Constance Pender
Library Technical Assistant
803-938-3736

penderc@uscsu.edu

Sharon Chapman
Media Resource Specialist
803-938-3736

hamptons@uscsu.edu

University of South Carolina-Sumter
200 Miller Road
Sumter, SC 29150

Abstract

This session will demonstrate how USC Sumter's Anderson Library recently developed information literacy and research skills program uses information technology available through the library introduce students, faculty and patrons to the methods and ethics of information research, with an emphasis on analyzing and defining information needs and resources by presenting it in multiple formats.

During the Spring 2005 semester we used Camtasia™ to record both image and voice for instructional use outside the classroom. Our goal was to reach every student member of our campus and educate them on the offerings available in the library. Selected faculty received a CD tailored to their specific needs in the library. We used previous bibliographic instruction records to select the initial group of educators for the CD system. The library intends to provide this type of resource for any faculty member based on their feedback and their needs.

Students who are skilled in assessing and exploring their informational needs and defining what type of information will benefit their needs are well on their way to academic success. Using Camtasia™ we are able to reach the USC Sumter community in a familiar format.

Using the technology available in the library we will create a classroom setting to begin Fall 2005, which will allow participants to attend scheduled classes to aid in discovering the technology available and will provide assistance in navigating through the vast amount of information available.

Introduction

The American Library Association defines information literacy as a “set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information.” ALA also states that “information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organized, how to find information and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning, because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.” It is our goal at USC Sumter’s Anderson Library to give our university community the tools to become efficient, lifelong learners that can navigate the sea of ever-changing information with ease and stealth.

As a small library with limited resources, we are constantly looking for cost effective technology that can produce the most “bang for our buck”. We simply do not have the resources to adopt every new technology that is out there, but we are not satisfied to become technologically obsolete. “It is important that small libraries operate strategically, adopting only those technologies that are the most beneficial to their patrons” (Roberts). In an attempt to put our money where our mouth is, we have chosen Camtasia as our vehicle to promote information literacy and the plethora of other services that are available to our students, faculty and staff. We also hope to produce media for our community, two public school districts, partners in our specialized programs and other special interest groups that utilize our services. Camtasia™ provides the opportunity for every patron in our library, both traditional and non-traditional, to have the library staff at their fingertips through a detailed tutorial of the services and search techniques available to them online either from their personal computer or in the library.

The presentation is up to date, not on the bleeding edge, but certainly compatible and recognizable to our new students that are no longer simply online, they are constantly connected in one form or another to information 24/7. It is important for our university and community to see us as the connection to all that is interactive, both online and in print. It is vital that our learning community not forget the power of the written word on the leaves of a bound page. Our students, faculty, and staff must recognize and evaluate material more efficiently than ever.

Library vs. WWW

As librarians and university professionals, we often hear students and colleagues alike say “I don’t need to come into the library for anything, it’s all on the web.” Although we recognize this as a gross exaggeration, it is not altogether untrue in the eyes of our patrons. Research has shown that 80% of people have never been in a library.

Many of our learning communities do not see the necessity of the traditional bricks-and-mortar institutions. They are often perceived as mausoleums of out-dated, historical rhetoric that is dutifully maintained by old ladies with reading glasses and sensible shoes.

This perception is fueled by information providers that have placed holdings online for consumers to access from just about any web accessible device obtaining a signal from anywhere in the world. In fact, the library is capable of providing millions of pieces of media at any given time to those same devices with the same signal requirements. Our life’s blood depends on our ability

to advertise, package and present the information in a vehicle that would rival any commercially produced interface with blinking lights and scrolling banners.

Many of our patrons feel that the task of leaving the comfort of their home, getting into the car, walking into the library and physically searching the stacks is more labor intensive than the end result is worth. They consider their time better spent browsing the web and letting their favorite search engine handle the task of sorting the information into order by rank. What the patron does not consider is that the information classified and sorted on the web “has the feel of a universe sorted by bulldozers and the Shopping Channel” (Plotnik). The surfing patron spends their time filtering through thousands of questionable citations and then begins their research. The library has this same information organized by a universal system that is user-friendly and provides staff to answer questions and evaluate patron’s needs a lot quicker and more effectively than Jeeves (although he does have impeccable manners).

In an attempt to be self sufficient, the patron uses one of numerous search engines to start a search on any given topic. What the user does not often consider is the time spent filtering through erroneous retrievals because of the “human element”. It is inevitable that a user will misspell a word, use a term or string of terms that the search engine does not combine as a phrase and spend valuable time trying to guess what terms to use to find the highest ranking link for the information. When the search is complete and the results ranked the user must then begin to peel away the layers of each link in a desperate attempt to filter through information that is irrelevant and just plain incorrect. The web is not governed nor regulated for accuracy of content. In an age where a majority of our learning communities have never known life without the Internet and immediate information, it is vital to equip them with the tools to evaluate and verify the information they receive. After all that digging the user may still come away unsatisfied and the search begins again. The old adage, “Trying to find a needle in a haystack” has never been more appropriate than in this very situation.

Of course the landmines do not stop there. The user may attempt to locate a website that carries the name of the company, location, association, etc. and the user simply types www.fillintheblank.com and may end up on a very explicit site that has more pop-up advertisements simply because the wrong end tag was used in the address. The website that is found can turn the search into a seek and destroy exercise and the user will again lose valuable time sorting through the endless quantities of useless information and dead links/link rot that the web administrator has not updated since the day the site was published. However, with only a few key strokes and clicks, users can have at their fingertips valuable information that is stored within the walls of the library, virtual or concrete, and not the large quantities of incorrect information.

Arthur Plotnik makes our case with this statement:

No one denies the Web is a miracle for [users] and a barmy alternative to certain research drudgery. Even its so-called ‘advanced’ searches are like pumping brewskies from a barrel. But take it from an avid Web user with career backgrounds in writing and library service: The true font of inspiration, knowledge and reliable, in-depth information is still the library—better than ever and, more than ever the [user’s] best friend.

Reaching Our Patrons

Does it feel like we are spoon-feeding our patrons? Making it too easy? They aren't learning how to perform research because they don't have to click more than 4 times? That's GREAT! We don't want them to work too hard or the user will head straight for their favorite search engine and perpetuate the myth that libraries' can not keep up with technology. Spoon feed the patrons until they are sick! They will know where to come the next time they get hungry for knowledge!

“Only librarians could love the concept of drilling down in some hierarchy or other—or search return—to find hard data. For mere mortals it is confusing and frustrating to have to click through three or four screens of a web catalog [to find viable information]” (Weissman).

Our modest goal as “user-friendly information experts” should be to have our library's web page at the top of our patron's favorite list or dare we dream and become the home page!

Camtasia™ provides a slick, edited, production quality venue to display our library's media both print and electronic. We also use it as our “librarian in a box” for our students and faculty. If our patrons are doing research in the wee hours of the morning, they can pop in the Camtasia CD and find research tools, search tips and locate subject specific databases with pin-point accuracy all the while being guided by the voices of their university librarians. The voice over adds a personal touch and allows the instructor/librarian to talk about what is happening on the screen without cluttering it with unnecessary text, bubbles or blinking buttons. The user is a patron of the library as soon as the disk begins to play. They can review it over and over again until they are familiar with the most effective techniques for research and information literacy.

The applications of this software are only limited by the user's imagination. The presentation can be produced as a PowerPoint slide show, streaming video, web based tutorial, CD, DVD, etc. The creator can produce live searches to show the viewer exactly how to do proper research. As an educator, professional, instructor or any other group we find ourselves identified with, we have the opportunity to create tutorials that showcase skills, procedures or services that are otherwise repeated and begin to expand the student's skills for more in depth research.

We began our production by using the combined programs of SnagIt® and Camtasia™ to record Anderson Library's home page and placing the captured image as the first in a series of files that will introduce the viewer to the library. SnagIt® works in tandem with Camtasia™ to offer the producer the opportunity to capture text, pictures, streaming video, live navigation and other media to place into Camtasia™ to edit and produce. SnagIt® also provides options to highlight important information using colors or shades of light and dark insert text bubbles or insert graphics that emphasize points of interest.

After the library's home page was inserted we used a recording device to insert voiceovers that introduce the student to our schedule and some of our basic services. This voiceover adds a personal touch and the viewer will hopefully come to know the person behind the voice. The next series of images began at our home page and we recorded a live navigation to the database

screen. It is put into the presentation as streaming video and we were able to edit the information, speed or look of the page easily. Once we entered the databases we were able to tailor the searches to the specific class requirements. Viewers seem to like having specific information about the searches they were expected to perform instead of generic search techniques that may take them through numerous databases before finding useful information. Professors are able to send us information a few days in advance and the library staff can produce a CD for their classroom instruction and have the option to loan it to students who are absent or need to see the information for reinforcement. This approach frees up the library instructor's time to produce new media and offers the professor's the flexibility to use the information when it is appropriate for the class and not try to work around a busy bibliographic instruction schedule.

Camtasia™ and SnagIt® are opening new doors for Anderson Library. Our library and the services offered are in a medium that is familiar to the technical generation and makes us available all hours of the day and night. This format allows educators, professionals and paraprofessionals to streamline information and present it in a way that is convenient and efficient for the user and the creator. Time is a waning commodity and many professionals simply can not afford the time to create and recreate information for every instance that is required. Camtasia™ and SnagIt® allow time for revision, editing and production to be perfected and effective.

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