MDDE 610, Assignment #3: CAI Portfolio – Evaluation/Reflection

Celtx Tutorials: A Review of Wiki and Screencasts in Online Learning

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Introduction

The objective of this assignment was to select a Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) program to learn a new skill and evaluate the learning experience. This document focuses on using Web-based instruction (WBI) in the form of wikis and online video tutorials or 'screencasts' as a novice learner of the Celtx scriptwriting software (see www.celtx.com). Some advantages and disadvantages of using wikis and online video tutorials or 'screencasts' as educational technologies in distance learning will also be outlined based on this experience.

Web-Based Intruction: The Computer as Tutor

Web-based instruction (WBI) offers distance learners the capability to exert self-pacing and control with their online learning, as well as 'network' with instructors and other learners. Computer-assisted instruction (CAI), with its roots in Keller's Personalized System of Instruction (PSI), represents a very structured approach to learning, emphasizing individual study, mastery through quizzes and practice, as well as feedback (Driscoll, 2005). Both models use the computer in the delivery of instruction, and given that Web-based instruction (WBI) is an outgrowth of the CAI 'drill, tutor and test' model of learning (Kulik & Kulik, 1991), there is a similar relationship between learner and content, with the primary focus on computer as teacher or tutor. In both cases, learning effectiveness depends not only on the structure of the information contained in that delivery model but also whether the learner has had the opportunity to control the pace of their learning, as well as practice their learning and receive feedback (Driscoll, 2005; Sitzman, Kraiger, Stewart & Wisher, 2006).

An Example of Web-based Instruction (WBI) Going Web 2.0

The Celtx screenwriting software (see www.celtx.com) selected to learn for this assignment was based on interest to: 1.) potentially use the scriptwriting skills on a work-related project, and 2.) explore 'free' Web-based instruction (WBI) from user-generated content typically found on video web sharing web sites such as YouTube. The criteria for selection of the scriptwriting software was also based on preference to support an open source software product that was available at no cost and would operate on multiple platforms. In this case, a stand-alone or 'non-networked' program of instruction was not an option, therefore providing an opportunity to experience how to learn software skills using a wiki-based, collaborative approach to learning. The next sections in this document review the learning effectiveness of using wiki-based resources both as a collective system, and as a collection of individual resources in the form of online video tutorials or 'screencasts.' Both are very prevalent Web 2.0 applications being commonly used in distance learning settings (Burke, Synder & Rager, 2009).

The Trouble with Wikis

The appeal of editable websites or wikis in distance education, and more broadly in the read-write culture of today's Internet, is that learners or users who have access to them can change and update their content in real-time. This very wide open nature of wikis allows multiple authors to create a rich tapestry of 'ego-less' knowledge with deliberate gaps (Lamb, 2004). This is a double-edged sword in that participation with wikis, as in indifference in supporting or correcting the knowledge contained in this medium, can become problematic over time (Lawler , 2008). The very design principles upon which wikis were founded, that of being 'open,' 'simple,' and 'organic' (see http://c2.com/cgi/wiki?WikiDesignPrinciples), also give rise to some

of the issues that users find to be barriers with their effective use, such as being too unstructured and chaotic, having out-of-date content, and not being well-maintained (Edwards, 2007).

Impressions of the Celtx Wiki.

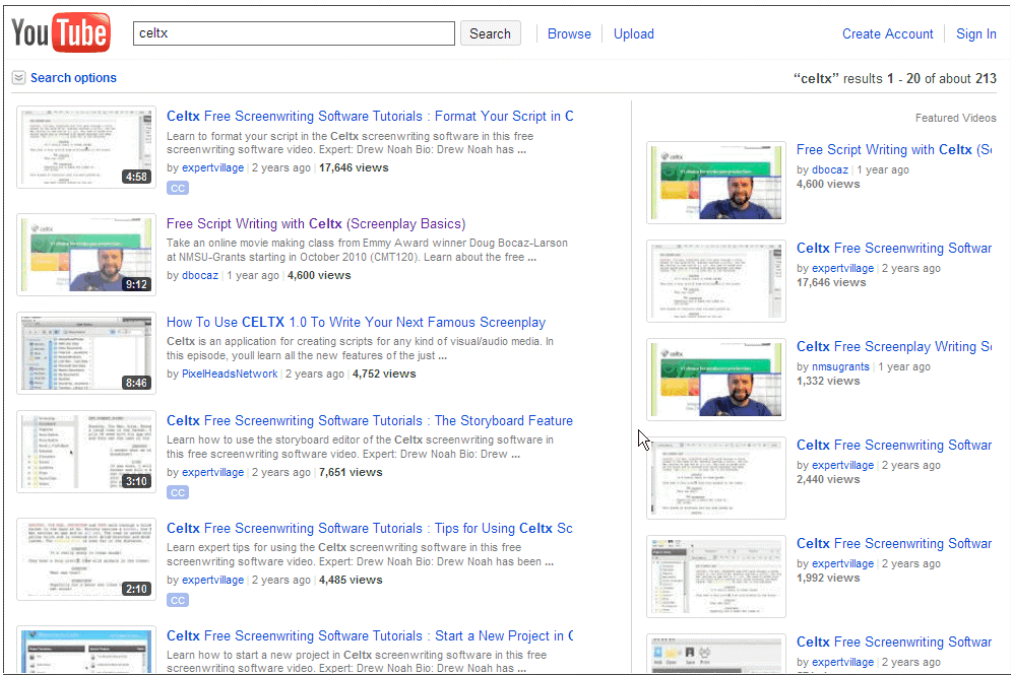
The Celtx learning and support wiki (see http://wiki.celtx.com/index.php?title=Main_Page), is filled with content but my experience was that it fell short in terms of providing the right entry point as a novice learner and guidance to the next level of learning. The links to online tutorials were numerous, disorganized and ultimately, hit and miss in terms of learning basic tasks with the software. As illustrated in Figure 1, there was no chunking of content by level of learner (i.e. novice vs. Expert), and a few links to resources were broken.

Figure 1 – Celtx Wiki

A high degree of ‘self-regulation’ was required to sift through the quality and usefulness of the instructional videos and tutorials as shown in Figure 2. Accuracy and credibility is often cited as a key challenge with learning from online video tutorials hosted on sites such as YouTube (Burke et al., 2009). In this case, as illustrated in the example, the emphasis or hierarchy on

learning results is based on variations of the words ‘Free Screenwriting Software’ rather than a grouping of results by level of learner (i.e. novice or advanced) or by related tasks.

Figure 2 – Link from Celtx Wiki to YouTube Tutorials



Self-regulation in the form of tracking one’s performance is vital to the process of learning (Driscoll, 2005). This is a little more challenging when learning from online video tutorials hosted on sites such as YouTube. As such, there’s no prescribed ‘formal’ quiz or feedback as you might find in a more traditional form of Computer Assisted Instruction; you the learner are essentially responsible for leading and assessing your own discovery of learning the software.

The Trouble with Screencasts

Screencasts are a relatively new hybrid of the video tutorial afforded by current educational technologies that enable the capture of one’s computer screen for the purpose of demonstration or communication (Good, 20005). Many reasons are cited for their popularity such as allowing the learner to control the pacing of their learning and the ease in which they can be created

(Despotakis & Palaigeorgiou, 2010; McGovern, 2010; Sugar, Brown & Luterbach, 2010). Typically used to demonstrate software skills, screencasts often show an 'expert' using the software to perform a series of steps. They are often regarded as an 'authentic' learning experiences in that they represent the flow of events in real-time (Sugar et al., 2010). However, Despotakis & Palaigeorgiou (2010) contend that the authenticity of screencasts cannot guarantee transfer of learning, in fact, they may even create an 'illusion of capability.' Current research (Sugar et al., 2010) cites a more basic issue with evaluating the effectiveness of screencasts; that is the inconsistent production and application of instructional strategies. Based on a review of a cross-section of screencasts (Bocaz-Larson, 2009; ExpertVillage, 2008; Lawson, 2009; PixelHeadsNetwork, 2008) demonstrating the use of the Celtx software, I would agree that these two factors can be a stumbling block for the distance learner to overcome, and possibly affect one's attitude towards an effective study model when using these forms of self-paced learning.

Impression of Celtx Screencasts.

Of the over 200 online tutorials available on YouTube (see http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=celtx&aq=f), I consulted approximately 20. (See Appendix A for an example of the screencast 'styles' encountered). The overall impression of them was that they were helpful and provided a 'just-in-time' approach to self-paced learning. While the Celtx software is relatively straight-forward in terms of its user interface and functionality, it was still difficult to switch between the environment of observer to doer in order to practice. It was simpler to watch a screencast, or a series of screencasts, and then perform a task(s) later once transitioned to the software's user interface. This study model is consistent with my approach when trying to learn new software unaided until an impasse in achieving the learning outcomes

is reached but this may not be an effective model for those who want or need scheduled practice (Despotakis & Palaigeorgiou, 2010).

For additional impressions of the effectiveness of the use screencasts in learning software skills, refer to the following table.

Table 1 –Summary of Impressions Using Celtx Screencasts

Positive	**Negative**
Use of multimedia (sound, images, animations) enhanced the learning experience. I liked to be able to hear the commentary by the expert while they performed the action.	Poorly-produced or amateurish screencasts made me question the credibility and accuracy of the instruction.
A variety of screencast styles was available (see Appendix A for examples). I wasn't bored watching or listening to the screencasts.	Over-produced instances made me feel like I was watching an infomercial.
Starting and stopping the screencast or replay it affords you a great deal of control and flexibility. If I missed something I could go back and review.	Product ads were featured in screencasts hosted on user-generated video sharing web sites such as YouTube were a complete turn-off.
Being able to view the expert perform the actions and see the software's response gave me a good feeling about the actual time it would take to perform the task and the results that would happen in the real environment.	Screencast titles were not descriptive of the instructional contents. The majority of the time in a 'How to install Celtx' screencast was spent explaining the overview of the features rather than performing the steps to intall the software.
Knowing the exact duration of the screencast helped me plan my mode of study.	Moving back and forth from the tutorial to practice the skill in the software did not fit with my mode of study.
Screencasts are a great way to get familiar with software skills as a novice.	Sometimes watching the tutorials made me feel as if I didn't need to practice and gave me a false feeling of accomplishment with the software.

Note: These impressions were based on viewing a cross-section of user-generated screencasts about how to use the Celtx software (see Bocaz-Larson, 2009; ExpertVillage, 2008; Lawson, 2009; PixelHeadsNetwork, 2008).

Conclusion

With the proliferation of online video tutorial or ‘screencasts’ widely available on YouTube and other video sharing web sites, it’s clear that these new web 2.0 forms of Web-based instruction have been made easier to create and consume. My experience using the Celtx wiki and online video tutorials leads me to conclude that they have a great deal to offer distance learners wanting to learn new software tasks and skills. Learners can view screencasts at their own convenience and location, and review as many times as needed. They can be powerful aids to learning software tasks in that learners can see the result of an action by observing what happens on the screen in real-time, all of which is amplified by the combination of sound and image (Sugar et al., 2010). However, like any form of Web-based instruction, or even classroom instruction, it is the instructional methods and strategies contained within the delivery, as well as the distance learner’s ability to monitor and regulate their own performance (Driscoll, 2005), that will make the difference as to whether learning is effective (Sitzman et al., 2006).

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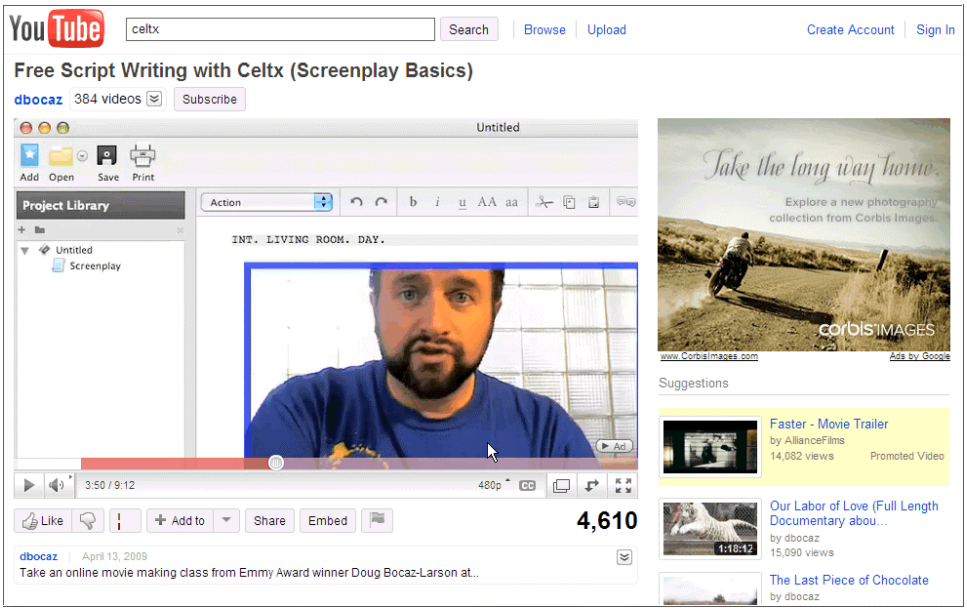
Appendix A– Screencast Styles

This appendix provides examples of the various styles of screencast encountered while using the Celtx software online video tutorials available on YouTube.

Guide on the Side

The following figure shows an example of the 'expert' as an integral and persistent part of the screencast and learning experience attempting to establish a more personal connection (Bocaz-Larson, 2009). These can be very well produced with a defined 'beginning' and 'ending' by way of identity and/or providing credentials. For example, "Hi, I'm Bob, I teach digital film-making at NYU and today's episode is how to storyboard your script."

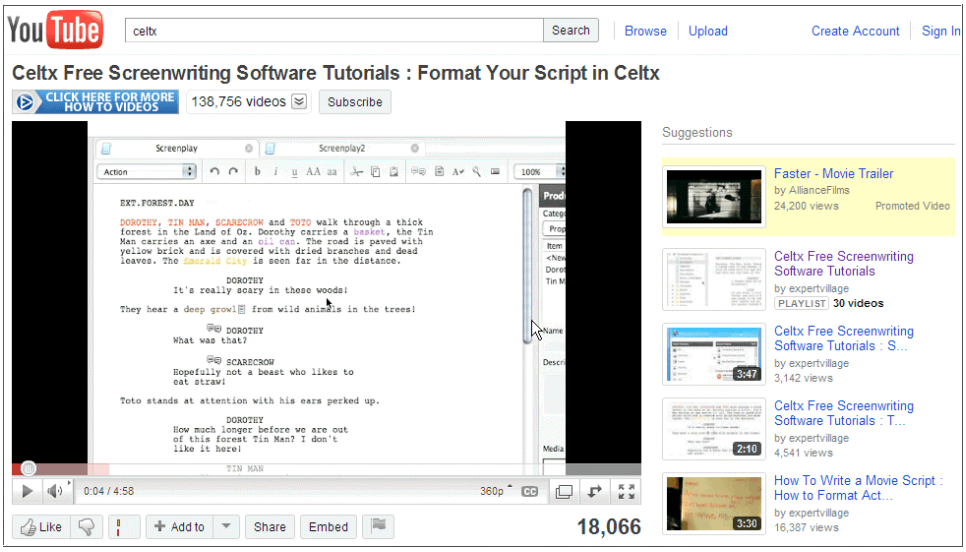
Figure 1 – Example Screencast:'Guide on the Side'



The Anonymous Expert

The following figure shows a more typical approach to screencasts where you only hear the expert's voice and see their recorded actions (ExpertVillage, 2008). There is typically no introduction by the expert or context setting about the task to be accomplished. The mood is more low-key and to the point.

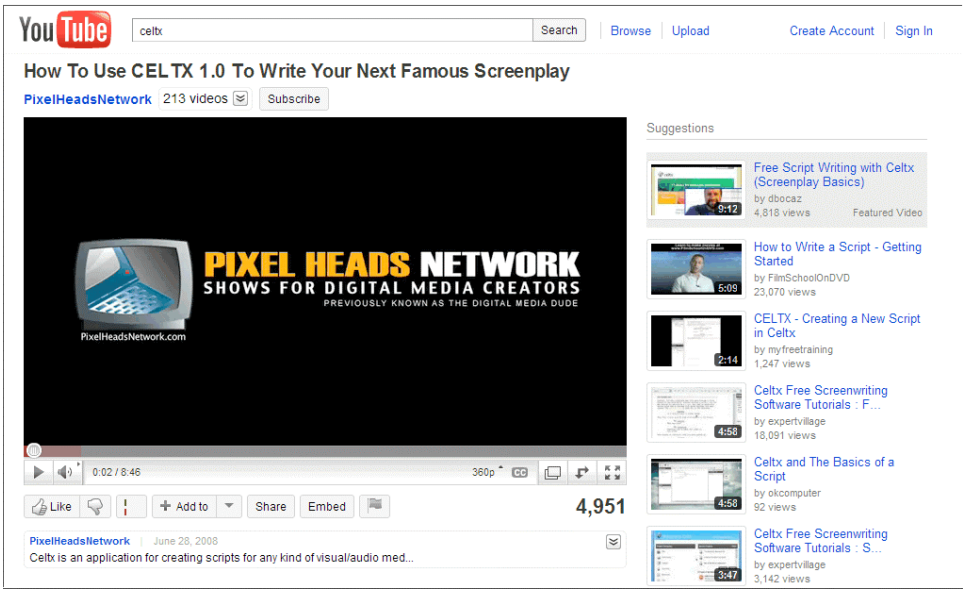
Figure 2 – Example Screencast: Anonymous Expert



Slick Production

The following figure illustrates a much more professional style. There is a stated identity upfront but the mood and tone of the production may be more polished with well-mixed audio, and sharp animations and transitions (PixelHeadsNetwork, 2008).

Figure 3 – Example Screencast: Slick Production



The Serious Amateur

This style varies from being well-produced (e.g., good sound quality and visuals) to poorly produced (e.g., poor sound quality) where the 'expert' shares their discoveries and tips with you (Lawson, 2009). The tone is often more casual.

Figure 4 – Example Screencast: The Serious Amateur