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Veni, vidi, video... making a library video for new students



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If you've ever wanted to make a video to promote your library service or as an aid to information literacy, but didn't know where to start, here's our story from City University, London, to give you the encouragement you need.



City University library video

HOW IT ALL STARTED

At an induction meeting at the end of June we discussed ways of providing the best introduction to the library for our new students in September. We considered the usual topics: welcome stalls, freebies, tours, treasure hunts, QR codes, sweets, Prezi online tours (<http://prezi.com/arbdivzjgp1oi/discover-your-library/>), posters and traditional paper guides. Then we had the idea of producing video(s) for 'how to' guides, such as renewing books, using databases, registration, etc.

IT'S ALL IN THE TIMING

Of course, being subject librarians, we like to keep ourselves busy, so having decided to make a video, it had to take a back seat to other summer projects including new subject guides, updating presentations, producing new workbooks, updating reading lists, desk cover and even managing to squeeze in some annual leave.

With the three of us based on different sites and time being scarce, we met on only a handful of occasions in total to produce our video:

- filming days
- a planning meeting
- an editing day
- a polishing it up meeting

Not bad for beginners!

BUT FIRST: THE PURPOSE?

The induction group had been asked by senior management to look into producing a video. We had seen videos produced by other librarians and we liked their informal feel and their immediacy. A short film that we could display on our webpages would be a great way to present our libraries to our students. We quickly realised, however, that we were too short of time, money and expertise to produce a long, crisply-filmed, expertly edited professional video. We had originally envisaged our purpose as more instructional, covering topics such as 'how to use the self-issue machines', rather than being simply a 'marketing' tool, but we decided that it would be worth filming all kinds of things, then reviewing the footage, and seeing what worked and what didn't.

OUR FILMING DAYS

We had no experience of filming, but we knew where we could borrow a camera. As you will see

later on, our lack of experience with the technology meant that we did not ask a crucial question at this stage, and we assumed that using the handheld JVC HD camera would be fairly easy.

The filming on the first of our five days was, to put it mildly, random. We filmed each other passing through gates, using computers, checking books in and out and performing all sorts of other tasks, but no clear purpose emerged. However, when we looked at our footage afterwards, the film quality, whilst decidedly amateur, was fine for our purpose. It certainly looked informal!

In the next filming sessions, we plucked up the courage to film ourselves talking to students – this meant being armed with a big stack of filming permissions forms, to allow us to use clips of the students. Obviously, some people did not want us to film them at all, but most were happy to sign the form. One person did not want us to use her image, but was happy for her voice to be on the sound track.

We were really pleased and surprised about how positive the students were when we asked them our hastily-planned questions, particularly as several of them were quite vociferous telling the imagined new students to keep to the rules of the library! We had come up with the ideas after watching a few videos from other libraries, including Warwick's Library Advice video, where they had asked students some prompt questions about how they liked the library and what advice they would give new students; we added one of our own, about our newly-refurbished fifth floor, where most of our books are kept.

For the final session we roped some younger colleagues into posing as students and we filmed some 'filler' shots of them using various facilities, looking thoughtfully at books and walking through the building, with a vague idea that we could cut them into the video when we edited it to add interest. We took this opportunity to get some still shots, which turned out to be a great idea because we have also been able to use them in all sorts of printed and presentation material.

OUR (INADVERTENT) PLANNING MEETING

Armed with our video footage, we met to start putting our film together at the end of August. This is when we encountered one of our biggest hurdles: a mistake we will only make once. We had assumed – as we had borrowed the camera from our IT department – that it would record

in a format compatible with the editing software in the Media and Innovations Learning Lab (MILL): Final Cut Pro (.mov). This was not the case. Having unsuccessfully tried to find some free software on the internet to convert our files, we eventually gave up. One of MILL staff kindly helped us out by converting our files for us. This was going to take more than the four hours we had set aside for editing.

We could still watch the clips, so we reviewed what we had done instead. This turned out to be a really good idea because the extra planning time helped us make a better video in the end. By just watching the excerpts, rather than trying to edit and plan at the same time, it became clear that students were identifying common themes in relation to the three questions, so we decided to structure the video around their words and themes:

What do you like about your library?

- quiet environment
- space to study
- study resources / online catalogue
- flexibility / staffed / someone to help
- reading lists
- finding books / e-resources
- self-service

Where do you like to study?

- Group-study booths
- sixth floor – quiet, and books you need

What advice would you give to other students?

- obey the rules
- find the library early on and familiarise yourself with it, as you will need it!

OUR EDITING DAY

Finally, with our files in the right format, we edited our film with these principles in mind:

Information

We used questions/themes as our structure, so we chose clips that made the points we wanted to demonstrate, clearly and concisely.

Noise

We tended to use the clips in which there was less background noise.

Smiling

We tried to pick students who smiled a lot, as we thought that gave a friendly impression of the library.

Finish

We chose a final shot to give a very positive message of the library to end on a high note.

Clips of facilities in action

Once we had most of our student footage in, we overlaid clips of the facilities they were talking about, e.g., when a student talked about how great our group-study booths are, we interlaid a clip of the booths being used; when a student mentioned how easy our self-issue machines were to use, we interlaid the speech with a shot of other students using the self-issue machines.

Cutting ourselves out

We did not want our own voices interrupting the students' stories.

TECHNIQUES

We used stills to demonstrate library services; for example, when a student mentioned books on the reading list, we showed a shot of a reading list and another of how to find them on the library catalogue while the student talked about the process.

In order to make the final product as professional-looking as possible, and to keep our clip joins as tidy as possible, we used basic editing techniques such as overlapping video and audio; we also spent a lot of time fiddling with our 'in' and 'out' markers, which allowed us to define the start and finish of the clips down to the millisecond.

Positive feedback from the MILL manager gave us confidence that our video was of an acceptable standard and fit (enough) for purpose.

MARKETING – FOR STARTERS...

We put our video on YouTube as there were already other City University videos there, students are very familiar with the medium and these videos play on mobile devices. The video was publicised in the library newsletter, Twitter, Facebook and the subject guide for new students: <<http://libguides.city.ac.uk/newstudents>>. We are hoping to get next year's video put on the City University homepage.

We have set up our own YouTube channel, so we can put all our library videos in one place. They will publicise each other by appearing next to each other and they are easily findable on Google. But we need to do more...

WHAT WENT WELL?

Teamwork

We had fun making the video and undertaking it as working in a group of three meant we learnt

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Last update: Oct 3, 2011 | URL: <http://libguides.city.ac.uk/newstudents> | [Print Guide](#) | [RSS Updates](#) | [SHARE](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#)

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Students talk about the Library

City University London Library Video



0:00 / 2:15

Subject guide for new students

from each other, especially as we were not very familiar with video-making.

Working with the students

The students who wanted to help were all positive and friendly.

Timescales

We were happy with the end product, particularly considering our short timescales.

Questions

The format of asking the students questions worked really well: our video definitely comes from the student point of view.

Informality

Having so many shots of students talking about the library also leads to an informal format, which we think gives the video a friendly and accessible feeling.

Length

We aimed to keep the video short and focused in line with current trends for quick 'bites' of information and we think the length is just right.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Equipment compatibility

Plan for potential pitfalls. This was the most important lesson.

Sound/light

Next time we would use better microphones to minimise background noise; poor sound quality spoiled a few good interviews. We would try to film by a window to improve the brightness of our shots, maybe using a tripod.

Training on filming and editing

With training and more experience, our video could probably have been more professional, though we like the rough-and-ready feel it has.

Questions

If we went down the questioning route again, we would use more open-ended questions.

Clips of facilities

These were used to good effect, but next time we would use students for all these shots (and not library staff, not that this help wasn't much appreciated!) for a more authentic outcome.

Marketing

Or should we say lack of? This is an area we still need to develop.

Vouchers

All our students were kind and helpful, but we felt we had taken up a lot of their time. Next time it would be nice to offer them a small Amazon/book voucher to say thank you.

FUTURE PLANS

Now we all have the video-making bug and are already planning our next efforts. We are pleased with our first attempt, but would hope for a slightly more professional finish next time. And of course, we are always open to feedback, so let us know what you think. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VCFwmeH-FY&feature=youtu.be>

OTHER LIBRARY VIDEOS

University of Warwick Library: <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/library/main/help/training/advice/>
John Rylands University Library: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eA7-af2NIZs>
Middlesex University Library clip: <http://www.play.mdx.ac.uk/videos/2p6o>
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