



Use of slidecasts in higher education settings: A pilot project

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A pilot project generating slidecasts for use in four undergraduate and postgraduate education courses was conducted to gauge the level of acceptance by both staff and students with a view to possible expansion in the future.

What is a slidecast?

The term, slidecast, is used to describe an audio podcast that is combined with a slideshow presentation. It is similar to a video podcast in that it combines dynamically-generated imagery with audio synchronisation. It differs by using presentation software, such as PowerPoint, Keynote or OpenOffice, to create the imagery and the sequence of display independently of the audio podcast's original recording.

What are the advantages?

- Slidecast can be created simply and efficiently using the presentation features of PowerPoint, Keynote or OpenOffice, the audio-editing capability of Audacity and production facilities of Camtasia Studio and/or Windows Movie Maker.
- Has a file size significantly smaller than that of a video podcast (e.g., Lectopia) thus reducing the time to download and signalling potential for use with mobile devices.
- Can be embedded in Web 2.0 applications such as blogs, wikis, video sharing services and learning management systems.
- Allows for lectures to be disseminated for revision purposes.
- Can be generated by students to demonstrate their virtual presentation skills.
- Can act as a stimulus for discussion about a topic.
- Can be used to build up a body of resources over time on a particular topic.
- Can provide a means for IT and e-Learning staff to encourage academics to boost the amount and variety of digital content in their blended courses.

What are the disadvantages?

- Hyperlinks cannot be used in this video format, even if the original slideshow had clickable links.
- The large size, although smaller than a vodcast, causes the file to take a long time to download in computers with slow internet connections.
- Poor design layout and excessive text exacerbates difficult reading under mobile environments.
- The availability of slidecasts might encourage students to skip classes and review later (though this has not been the authors' experience to date).
- Like any content uploaded to a university host, care must be taken with respect to the use and acknowledgement of the intellectual property of others to avoid copyright infringement.
- By posting a slidecast onto certain Web 2.0 applications, permission to use or distribute content may inadvertently be granted to the host.

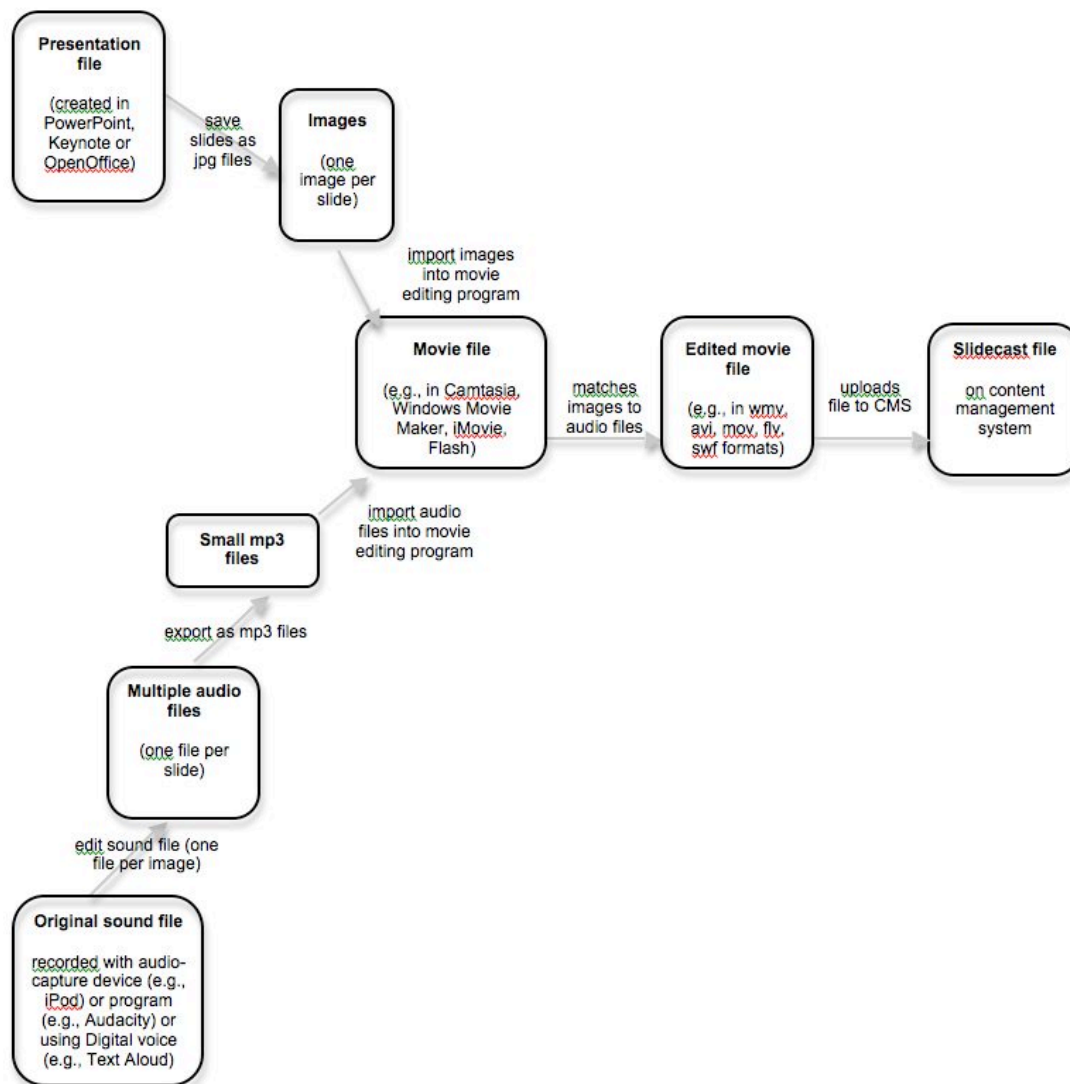
Findings

Potential disadvantages of slidecast presentations were avoided by implementing the following measures.

- Flash Professional proved to be an excellent alternative when links need to be preserved. However, this solution required technical expertise.
- Images for presentations were optimised for web (72 DPI) and audio compression was employed to reduce output file size. The following output sizes for a one hour slidecast were achieved: mpeg4 (45 MB), FLV (15 MB) 3GPP for mobile (5 MB).
- Legibility was enhanced under a mobile device environment using layouts that contained light backgrounds in combination with web-safe fonts (Arial, Verdana, Times New Roman, Courier New and Georgia).
- Copyright issues were avoided by incorporating the appropriate terms of use and legal references that covered the material belonging to third parties.
- Intellectual property was retained by uploading the slidecast to a university host.
- Further staff training with respect to the application of key principles of multimedia design to slidecasts is recommended so that split-attention and redundancy do not mitigate against the potential learning benefits of this audio-slideshow combination.

Anecdotal evidence from staff suggested a positive reaction by students to the use of slidecasts as a tool to complement face-to-face teaching in the classroom.

SlideCast production workflow



Conclusion

Academic staff were enthusiastic about employing slidecasts in their courses and students reportedly found the innovation engaging. Slidecasts added to the repertoire of existing e-learning tools available in the university learning management system.

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