Library Keeping Pace: Online, Media-Rich, and Interactive!

by Michael C. Alewine and Cynthia E. Saylor

Have you had a look around the Library's website lately? If so, you will have noticed some really cool resources that we have created to help people learn about the Library and what it has to offer. Included are podcasts, online tutorials, interactive maps, and video tours.

Although designed to guide patrons of all ages, these new resources are specifically targeting traditional college students (those between the ages of 18 and 22). Educational theorist Donald Tapscott refers to these students, those who have grown up with the Internet and who prefer to communicate, learn, and interact with their world via online environments, as the "Net Generation."

Many of these students come to the Library, but not necessarily to take advantage of research services and resources. They use computers; they check out videos; they talk with friends; and almost all of them, or so it seems, have and are constantly using mobile electronic devices such as iPods and MP3 players.

The Library is keeping pace with technology advancements by expanding its audiovisual material collections, providing an online integrated library catalog, and utilizing e-mail and instant messaging to answer reference questions. Now with the explosion of chat, web communities, iPods, cell phones, and other types of mobile devices, the Library is attempting to become more accessible to its wired population.

A recent project that the Library undertook was an online and interactive map of the Sampson-Livermore Library. The map of the two levels of the Library allows users to click on it to see pop-up information about and photos of various locations within the building. In addition, the Library's online catalog, Bravecat, now includes links to a map so that it is easier to see where materials are located.

It seems that many library users often do not realize what our Library has to offer. This includes people who come to the Library on a regular basis but are still unaware of our resources and services. Many users in the University community do not know that we check out wireless laptops and DVD players for three hours (library use only), check out MP3 players for three weeks, and that we do not charge for checking out videos.

Traditionally the Library has notified users about new library resources and services via posters, fliers, and our newsletter. In an effort to reach out to our students, **Cynthia E. Saylor**, Assistant Dean for Research Services and Systems, decided to create a weekly podcast called "The Library Minute." These podcasts, highlighting library services and special events, can be listened to online, downloaded to a mobile device such as an MP3 player, or via an RSS feed. The Library is expanding its podcast use throughout its various webpages for such things as highlighting new resources, focusing on Friends of the Library events, and audio versions of our FAQs.

One of the central functions of an academic library is providing information literacy instruction. We do this in a variety of ways: through one-to-one consultations; through the use of guides, both print and online; and through course-specific instruction in the Library's electronic classroom. The Library's newest online tutorial is the general *Guide to Library Research*, which includes html pages, screen captures, flash videos, and an interactive self-quiz. According to **Anthony Holderied**, Instructional Services/Reference Librarian, "Instructional tutorials have become a valuable asset in working with freshmen students. We've discovered that they are instrumental in providing a solid foundation for acquiring information literacy skills."

Guided tours of the library facilities are provided upon request. Currently are we creating an online, self-paced version of this tour using videos and student-actors. Students will be able to view the tour wherever they are or download it to a portable device, such as a video iPod. The online tour will also be linked to the interactive library map.

The creation of these resources involved collaboration between library personnel and members of the faculty. In order to create these rich resources, the Library made use of the talents and experience of its staff combined with new technologies. It is also important to note that the Library offers alternative format resources for students with disabilities.

Dr. Elinor Foster, Dean of Library Services, noted, "The Library will continue to create and refine its online presence in the hopes of reaching and engaging all of our students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the community."