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Ideas, Hints, and Tips

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Ideas, Hints & **TIPS**

by Sandra Riggs, UGA and Reference Services Interest Group

All libraries organize or create online tools to help patrons find answers. These tools can be as simple as the hours page on a library website or as complex as a highly-developed suite of subject guides. Resources can include Intranets to host library staff wiki pages, and Delicious accounts to organize websites. For in-person reference, these tools are great time savers and allow librarians to show resources that a patron can refer back to on his or her own time. In chat or e-mail reference, an online source of information that can be sent as a URL is vital for delivering data to users quickly, clearly and concisely. Lengthy text explanations in a small chat window seem cluttered and confusing.

One type of linked resource that I've begun to use more, both in person and online, is video. Many reference questions in both academic and public settings are not directly research or database navigation issues, but relate instead to technology, software and other "how-to" questions. Public librarians may receive questions about how to design and format a resume in Microsoft Word, while academic librarians may encounter students formatting Word documents for papers. These patrons usually want a quick answer, and they aren't inclined to search through a typical training book for one formatting question. These questions are perfectly suited to be answered with a video.

I recently was asked in an e-mail, "How do I save my Final Cut video for the web?" With most types of video editing software, "save" is an option for your working files, and getting the file to the web is an "export" function, often requiring several steps for choices about file size, aspect ratio and audio settings along the way, varying according to the software program. Not every librarian happens to know this, and even if they do, it's not so easy to go through the series of steps, particularly if there is no immediate access to the software the patron is using.

I began the search, and a quick search of Google provided several videos. One from an Ask.Com site even included a transcript of the video instructions -- a bonus that confirmed the video link that I sent to the patron would answer her question. This brings up a potential barrier for using videos to answer in-person questions at a public service desk. Librarians can't always listen to a video, even if they can view the video. Transcripts or captions are the exception, and many public service desk computers are in quiet areas without speakers. Also, a librarian may be concerned that taking out a pair of headphones to listen to a video might be perceived by patrons as tuning them out. Similarly, while many patrons have headphones, there will always be some that don't -- so there will be a few patrons who won't be able to view videos without some accommodation from

the library.

Another approach would be to prepare in advance for all these kinds of questions by creating a YouTube account, subscribing to channels (content providers/authors), marking potential videos as favorites or grouping related videos into a playlist. Videos can be shared with patrons using any of those tools, or by sending URLs, allowing them to view at a later time if they prefer.

Many librarians have created video database tutorials with screen capture software, such as Captivate or Camtasia, for user-directed database instruction, or online subject research guides. However, librarians may not have the time or opportunity to create non-research related videos. YouTube and Vimeo or training sites such as CBT Cafe are great sources.

Traditional library and database instruction videos still abound on YouTube. Many database and citation management resource vendors, such as EBSCO Publishing and Thomas Reuter's EndNote, have their own YouTube channels. I find the EndNote videos helpful, and have embedded them in some of the user guides that

I've made with our institution's Library a la Carte system. There will always be a part of my brain that will associate YouTube with dance variations to "Single Ladies," but YouTube shines as a great place to find clear directions for technology tasks. Yes, there are even YouTube videos on how to create a YouTube account.

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