

An Introduction To Screencasting

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By Beth Kantor

* Editor's Note: This is the first of two parts on the subject of screencasting. Part two is slated for the October 23, 2007 issue of TechnoBuzz.

If you provide end-user technical support, people likely ask you about the same software tasks over and over again. What's more, you've probably discovered that not everyone responds well to text or verbal instructions. What if you could send those people a brief video showing the procedure, accompanied by your voice walking through the important concepts?

Or, what if you need to provide some quick training on a new software package to a bunch of folks around the country, or you want to demonstrate a new concept -- perhaps how to collaborate using social bookmarking software? A video that combines demos of some of the key tasks with an overview of the concepts around the software could provide a compelling introduction.

These kinds of videos, called screencasts, can be powerful tools to demonstrate technical tasks, or to illustrate technical concepts that are hard to explain in words. The video and audio components can make a topic more engaging than written instructions or static images, while also appealing to different learning styles.

You don't have to be a Hollywood filmmaker -- or have a Hollywood style budget -- to create a decent screencast. There are a number of different software packages that make it easy to capture what is taking place on the screen. You simply click a record button and show the exact mouse clicks needed to do a task. Software also allows you to add audio narration to a Microsoft PowerPoint presentation, integrate real-life video, photos, and music.

Once completed, screencasts can be easily distributed via blog posts, RSS feeds, tags, and social media video hosts like OurMedia or blip.tv. These channels allow you to share training screencasts with a distributed audience, or put your ideas out onto the social Web to open the door to collaboration.

Although having some video editing skills and knowing how to clearly communicate your ideas will vastly improve the quality of your work, almost anyone can get started fairly quickly, particularly if you intend to use the screencasts for in-house training, software beta testing, or rapid knowledge capture.

A screencast is a movie that captures the display from a computer screen along with someone talking about what's being shown. This might take the form of a formal narrated PowerPoint presentation, a software demo, or an informal walkthrough of a particular concept. Some of the best screencasts are folksy, intimate experiences that feel as if you were sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with a friend.

As screencasts often contain impromptu discoveries by the narrator, or even small mistakes, they can be more approachable -- and thus more effective -- than glitzy packaged instructional videos. A good screencast projects an image of transparency, trust, and authenticity. There's no one right way to use a screencast. Organizations are using them for a number of compelling purposes: Software Tips, Tricks, and Tutorials Web or Project Orientations and Software Demonstrations PowerPoint Presentations as Multi-Media Concept Screencast Knowledge Capture Web Site or Software Interface Beta Testing

Begin your screencast with an understanding of your audience. What do they already know about the topic? What are you trying to teach them? Decide what you should cover, what you don't have to say, and how specific you need to be. Keep in mind some basic best practices of educational multimedia -- people learn better when information is presented: In small chunks Using clear outlines and headings Using a conversational style rather than a formal one

Even though you are making a movie of your computer screen, remember that you're still telling a story. Screencasts that focus solely on step-by-step procedures or PowerPoint bullet points can be deadly boring. Google and then read Andy Goodman's *When Bad Presentations Happen To Good People*. While he is talking about PowerPoint presentations in particular, most of his storytelling advice can be applied to screencasting.

As you think through your topic, it can be useful to create storyboards, rough sketches of what you will present and in what order. Storyboarding helps you organize the source material and ensures that you cover what you need to cover. For an example of storyboards in action, Google and then read

TechSmith's article *Why storyboard your screencasts?* Some people find that writing a script, or at least a bullet point outline, helps them focus the video and organize what they'll need. If you're able to narrate your screencast in a clear and concise way based only on bullet points, then you may not need to write out exactly what you plan to say. Others find that having a word-for-word script keeps them on track. It also makes synchronizing the video with the narration much easier down the road.

Having a script and storyboard could be important if you are preparing a screencast for a third party or you'll need others to sign off on the content. Your screencast will likely include a number of different source materials such as video screen captures, real life video, photos, music, titles, and the recorded narrative. Think carefully about what you need, and be organized: a five minute screencast can add up to a lot of individual pieces.

One simple organization method is to think like a filmmaker and plot out your screencast in acts and scenes. For each scene, note what narrative, images, video, or titles will be needed. It also makes a lot of sense to organize your digital materials on your computer in folders and file names that correspond with each act/scene.

Finally, if you are using creative commons licensed materials, make sure you note the correct attribution so you can add this information to the credits. Based on my storyboard, I usually create a production checklist organized by scene.

At this point, you are ready to start filming. I generally use a two-step process. First, with my script in hand, I capture only the video sections while practicing my narration. Next, I record the voice narration while carefully synching it with the video.

It takes a little practice, but I made fewer mistakes when I wasn't trying to capture and narrate at the same time. For more informal screencasts, such as beta testing for example, I just hit the record button and do both the video and audio simultaneously, narrating off bullet points. Note, however, that editing is more difficult if you record both video and audio at once. If you find that the Internet applications you are recording are taking a lot of time to load, be sure not to narrate over those sections so you can easily cut out the wait time in the editing process.

While it's possible to capture your entire screen, you shouldn't. Even with the best compression, extra screen real estate translates to wasted space and costly file size. You might want but not need the title bar, toolbars, status bar or scroll bars in your browser, for example. In general, anything that doesn't help to tell the story should be cut. I generally capture a window at 800x600 with the same playback size or 640x480 depending on my file size and time limitations (larger files take longer to render).

Screencasts are literal copies of your screen activity, so make sure you are capturing the action on screen. You may also need to use zoom or pan functions to maintain focus or so menu details do not get lost. Take care to only move your mouse around when you're doing it to make a point.

We'll talk about the tools you'll need in the next installment.

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I Niangshui wall to pink, yellow daughter-in-law said, burying tiles, daughter-in-law said flooring, fluorescent mother, daughter-in-law said that soft lights, serve less money, your daughter-in-law said her husband did not buy this 5,000 bed, you do not love me. . . I relied on. . . . God why tease us men. . Oh really difficult people. . . You are dealing with the night? ?n

Northwest 07/09/03 22:24 (43 hits) Re: your favorite is a woman, a woman is your favorite! Two men caught in the middle really tired woman! In fact you is the most critical! Let two women have access to your program! Look at my generation of men has died out openings that I really want to hold your hands, saying: your brothers suffering!n

The basic principle in the Constitution, jeopardize national security, unity and stability of the regime; Incitement to ethnic hatred or ethnic discrimination; 2. To promote the cult and feudal superstition; Spreading rumors, or undermines social stability; Insult slandering others, against other people's legitimate rights and interests; 3.

About the Author

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