Videoblogging

Scenario

Evan is a student in an inaugural agro-ecology course that is distributed across two campuses in very different locations: Vancouver, British Columbia, and the decidedly less-urban Murfreesboro, Tennessee. In an effort to provide a similar experience to students on the different campuses, the professors spend half of their time in each location. Remote lectures use video-conferencing, phone bridges, and instant messaging to enhance the experience, and the students "meet" weekly on the phone to work on group assignments. Although the students did meet in person at the beginning of the term, Evan wonders if he is building the same types of academic and social relationships as he would in a more traditional class. He wonders how much he understands about his colleagues from the rural campus—and how much they understand him.

As an experiment, Evan starts to share stories about himself, his community, and his reflections on the assignments using a videoblog on his Web site, hoping to build strong working relationships with his remote study buddies. The ease of creating videoblog entries—and the impact the clips make—prove irresistible, and others start replying to Evan's short videos using digital cameras—even cell phones—and video-editing software. The students love the medium because it allows them to capture both the relevant conversation and much of the background detail that isn't conveyed in the weekly phone calls. As the term progresses, the video "conversations" become increasingly sophisticated, quickly progressing beyond the "talking head" and incorporating many cinematic techniques in an effort to be more compelling. As an added bonus, many of the video clips find their way into Evan's e-portfolio, adding a richness not provided by some of his earlier, written reflections.

What is it?

A videoblog, or vlog, is a Web log (blog) that uses video rather than text or audio as its primary media source. Cell phones equipped with cameras, digital cameras that can record short video sequences, or inexpensive video cameras equipped with microphones make it easy to acquire the raw material of a videoblog. Videoblogs are usually accompanied by text or still images, and some vlogs include metadata (data that describe the content of a file, such as keywords) to further annotate the site. Digital video-editing software allows videobloggers to cut and paste sequences and integrate audio (background music, special effects, and so forth). Like a text blog, a videoblog is updated regularly, typically includes personal reflections, often contains comments on other sites, and offers a simple mechanism for subscription and delivery through RSS feeds.

Videoblogging offers a richer Web experience than text blogging because it combines movies, sound, still images, and text, increasing the information—and potentially emotions—shared with users. Rich media allow authors to explore new ways of communicating—many videobloggers believe that video allows more natural expression than writing.

Who's doing it?

Videobloggers have followed in the footsteps of bloggers and podcasters, extending their posts to include video segments rather than just text. Because new technologies make images and video easy to produce, anyone with a digital camera or camera-equipped cell phone and an Internet service provider (ISP) can create a videoblog. Videoblogging is attracting people who want to share commentary, stories, and opinions in video format. Some videobloggers maintain blogs; others reject blogging because it limits their expression but are captivated by the richness and capabilities of vlogging.

Videoblogs represent a new, relatively untested instructional technology tool. Faculty and students are beginning to include videoblogs in collaborative class and research activities, and some academic disciplines see videoblogs as a natural fit for their needs. For example, anthropologists and ethnographers are using rich-media blogging to try to capture the essence of their subjects.

more ⇨

Videoblogging

Find more titles in this series
on the ELI Web site
www.educause.edu/eli/

How does it work?

Video is captured using digital cameras, Webcams, or digital video cameras. While it is acceptable to simply post raw video footage, many videoblog sites are starting to incorporate titles, edited clips, sound, music, and other film effects to enhance their message. Such editing is done with inexpensive (or free) video-editing software. Due to storage and bandwidth limitations, an ideal clip is 1–3 minutes in length. The resulting video clip is compressed and placed on a Web server. The content is also placed in an RSS feed and the URL shared with the videoblogging community. Videoblog aggregators (FireAnt, for example) automate the downloading and display of videoblogs through easy point-and-click interfaces.

Why is it significant?

Adding video capabilities to Web sites exemplifies the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words. The ability of videoblogs to deliver richer content than sites using just text and still images positions vlogs in a unique video-graphic Web niche. Media-centric individuals are finding that video allows them to express themselves more naturally and with greater facility than static, text-based sites. As video software and hardware capabilities advance, and as the medium matures, video enthusiasts could have significant influence on Web site design and development for instructional purposes.

Videoblogging is an extension of the self-publishing phenomenon exemplified by blogging. Thanks to reduced barriers to entry for content creation, bloggers, podcasters, and now videobloggers are able to publicly express themselves using their media of choice. Videoblogging has the potential to expand communication options and individual expression with personal video posts. Videoblog content bypasses traditional media distributors (major broadcast or cable outlets), delivering video to aggregation clients and Web sites. While still in its infancy, videoblog content is increasingly sophisticated and may someday rival commercial offerings by appealing to the interests of niche groups. Videoblogging may also gain significance because of the media literacy of today's students. Their facility with complex media has already influenced many classroom projects and informal activities, such as digital stories and reporting.

What are the downsides?

The greatest downsides to videoblogging are the bandwidth requirements and the resources required to capture, store, and distribute video. Although the barriers to creating video content have come down, a significant investment of time and money may still be required. Internet-based video distribution has extensive space and bandwidth requirements: the larger the video files, the greater the network demand and download time. As a result, widespread distribution and use of videoblogs will depend on the availability and affordability of broadband connections.

Because videoblogs are new, it is unclear what impact storing, cataloging, and retrieving them will have on ISPs—a popular videoblog, accessed simultaneously by thousands of users, could overwhelm servers. Some videobloggers are starting to use P2P technologies such as BitTorrent to distribute their content, potentially complicating distribution on campus because of the legal and bandwidth concerns of network administrators, many of whom are increasingly reluctant to allow P2P applications on their networks. Videoblogging must eventually address issues of indexing, storage, and retrieval. Video files need metadata for users to be able to access archival material, and the consistency with which metadata are applied will affect how useful a videoblog will be to audiences. And, as the sophistication of videoblogs improves over time—in terms of content, videography, and the demands of the viewers—a cataloging mechanism at the aggregator level will become crucial.

Where is it going?

The tools to create videoblogs are becoming more common, less expensive, and better known to students. Camera-capable cell phones and digital cameras that can record short video sequences make it relatively easy to acquire and post video to the Internet. As content capture and editing tools become more prevalent and easier to use, digital video might become a significant communications channel. Just as consumers are using phones for sound recordings and submitting them to Web sites that dynamically turn their files into a podcasts, the same could happen for video and associated videoblogs.

What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Based on the popularity of blogs and podcasts, as well as the growth in video tools, videoblogging is likely to grow in popularity, among both faculty and students. The ability to easily create video segments and quickly post them to a Web site makes videoblogs a likely tool for recording lectures, special events, and so forth. Subscription is enabled by RSS and couples creation and distribution. The ease and speed of authoring promotes a community that is willing and capable of critiquing the work of peers, which often results in asynchronous communication between videoblog authors. Because videoblogs enable communication without words, they may promote communication with individuals from other countries.

Videoblogs can also be used for personal expression and reflection. As a result, videoblogs are being incorporated into e-portfolios and presentations. The use of videoblogs for digital storytelling may be one way to encourage strong student participation in e-portfolio projects.