

InfoTech Column

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Islands in the Stream

*Islands in the stream
That is what we are
No one in-between
How can we be wrong
Sail away with me to another world
And we rely on each other, ah-ah
From one lover to another, ah-ah*

Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers and the Bee Gees.

Streaming Media is breaking out. Are we ready for it to really hit the big time? Or will libraries be an island in the stream? Are we immersed in a text dominated ocean while hot media expands everywhere? I've talked about podcasts in a previous column, and now it's time for everyone to play assertively with the new media formats that gather loosely under the 'streaming' banner. iPods (and other MP3-oriented devices) can now play music, radio and lectures. They also play TV shows and movies as downloads and some phones in Korea play free TV while phones in the U.S., within territories that have EVDO, can do too. If my YouTube addiction continues, I can imagine a bunch of new portable devices in my future.

Librarians know all about player piano rolls, wax records, vinyl LP's, 8 tracks, cassettes, Beta and VHS tapes, etc. and we've stored them all well in our cultural archives. We keep them safe for posterity and that's great. However, we do need to be up-to-date with the latest stuff too, and our users and clients look to us to know a lot about how to use the new formats coming down the pipe. Information skills are one thing, container skills are quite another. When information was just printed text and pictures on a page, reading was just about enough. Now we are also necessarily container experts – podcasts, MP3's, eBooks, audiobooks, DVD's, etc. Many of these formats found their initial footing in the consumer marketplace, and now they're finding currency in the academic, education, corporate, government and institutional marketplaces. But they're moving along fast as the worlds of entertainment and sports and far stronger drivers of technology adoption!

Indeed, SLA uses many of these technologies in our CLICK University efforts. My employer also uses webcasting and collaboration technologies for both internal and external training as well as for our SirsiDynix Institute for both

synchronous and asynchronous events as well as podcasts on our own and through iTunes. Customer uptake is growing very fast.

If it doesn't already, your employer will be creating, licensing, storing and offering education, training, meeting, and communication events to its employees, partners and clients and maybe even the general public. Whether these are called streaming media, webcasts, e-learning, webinars, podcasts, Video On Demand, VODcasts, or whatever, we, as information professionals, should be ready. How do you use them? How are they acquired and what rights are licensed? How are they indexed, archived and made accessible? Can they be put into the OPAC and/or intranet? How are they preserved and stored? Can their contents be searched? Are there better formats and what are the trends? What recommendations should we be making for our companies intranet, Blackberries, browser plug-ins, etc.? There are plenty of questions!

Anyway, I thought this month that I would point you to a couple of places to play this summer. Playing is the best way to learn anyway, and some of us are lucky to have a few extra minutes in the summertime that can be invested in learning a few new skills. Unfortunately, if you don't have any extra time, you don't get a mulligan.

For Starters

We're librarians so we like to read first. OK, in the sidebar to this article there are a few simple readings. Start with the Wikipedia entries on Video and Streaming Media. These are always simple enough and provide plenty of links to the arcane world of the new language of streaming media and in wiki-style they are often updated as new improvements and inventions occur. Next up, dive a few times into the StreamingMedia.com and Streaming Media World websites, you'll find a wealth of articles and resources. Indeed the StreamingMedia.com site offers two excellent white papers that address the basics of webcasting events as well as the issues involved in enterprise webcasting. Not a bad start.

Next make sure you have downloaded the major video viewers. This will let you avoid all sorts of messy learning. The major viewers are Microsoft Windows Media Player, Real, Adobe Macromedia Flash and QuickTime. They're easy to learn and not difficult download. You'll learn which ones you like but don't fall in love with any one viewer. Love the one you're with but things are changing too fast in this space to make a long term commitment.

Getting the Streaming Video Bug

You just can't speak with authority about this stuff until you've played with it. Now I'm not advocating that you spend your summer downloading your favourite videos for your home collection on the bosses clock and dime. I am advocating

that you spend a little time understanding a few key things. Learning should be fun so pick your favourite topic, hobby, career goal and start surfing!

1. Start with a few easy videos. I've provided a few interesting or funny one in the sidebar.
2. Now head off to the major consumer sites like Google Video, Yahoo! Video, YouTube, MSN Video, CNN Video, etc. and just try viewing a few. Determine if the experience is comfortable and that you have the internet speed, browser settings, viewers, and plug-ins you need.
3. Learn how to search for video – consumer, educational, professional or business training. Try sites like the YouTube, NICEM Film and Video Finder Online, Media Sleuth, International Tele-Film, Singingfish, Blinkx, Blinkx TV, or the popular Rocketboom. Search for fun stuff, library stuff, or things that matter to your organization's strategies.
4. Sign up for the sample sessions for the major web-based professional events and collaboration software. These include Microsoft Live Meeting, Saba Centra and Webex. You may have already used these from vendors in training sessions but they have many more features that need to be understood and explored.
5. Sign up for some SLA CLICK U events so that you use your newly acquired skills in your own cause.
6. If you really get into this, there are a number of specialized conferences specializing including Streaming Media East, Streaming Media West, eStream, Streaming and Digital Media Conference, and more.
7. License a few appropriate videos and load them on to your intranet, catalogue them in your OPAC and market them, possibly in partnership with systems or HR. Trial them, pilot, evaluate and adjust. Position yourself as *the* source for any kind of information, regardless of container.

Hey, now you're well on your way to being a video demon. Before you know it you'll be producing your own YouTube library viral marketing events, training videos for CLIC U and editing documentaries on the weekend. Be that island in the stream. See you at the Oscars! Have a playful summer.

Stephen Abram, MLS is Vice President, Innovation, for SirsiDynix and the President-elect of SLA. He is an SLA Fellow and the past president of the Ontario Library Association and the immediate past president of the Canadian Library Association. In June 2003 he was awarded SLA's John Cotton Dana Award. This column contains Stephen's personal perspectives and does not necessarily represent the opinions or positions of SirsiDynix. Stephen would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.

SIDEBAR

Useful Streaming Media Links

General Resources:

StreamingMedia.com

<http://www.streamingmedia.com/>

Streaming Media World

<http://www.streamingmediaworld.com/>

Wikipedia Entry on "Video"

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Video>

Wikipedia Entry on "Streaming Media"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Streaming_media

EV-DO

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EVDO>

Free PDF White Papers

Webcast Essentials: Presenting Successful Events Online

http://www.streamingmedia.com/whitepapers/SM_InnovationSeries_2005.pdf

Solutions for Enterprise Streaming & Digital Media

<http://www.streamingmedia.com/downloads/Enterprise-White-Paper.pdf>

Sample Videos

YouTube

<http://www.youtube.com>

Yahoo! Video

<http://video.yahoo.com>

Google Video

<http://video.google.com/>

CNN Video

<http://www.cnn.com/video/>

MovieFlix

<http://www.movieflix.com/>

United Streaming

<http://www.unitedstreaming.com/>

MSN Video

<http://video.msn.com/v/us/v.htm>

NICEM Film and Video Finder Online

<http://www.nicem.com/>

Media Sleuth

<http://www.mediasleuth.com/>

International Tele-Film

<http://www.itf.ca/>

Singingfish

<http://search.singingfish.com/sfw/home.jsp>

Blinkx

<http://www.blinkx.com/>

Blinkx TV

<http://tv.blinkx.com/>

Rocketboom

<http://www.rocketboom.com/vlog/search.html>

CLICK University

<http://sla.learn.com/learncenter.asp?id=178409>

Webinar Technology

Microsoft Live Meeting

<http://www.microsoft.com/office/uc/livemeeting/default.msp>

Saba Centra

<http://www.saba.com/centra-saba/>

Webex

<http://www.webex.com>

Players:

Microsoft Windows Media Player

<http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/default.msp>

Real – RealPlayer, Rhapsody

<http://www.real.com/>

QuickTime

<http://www.apple.com/quicktime/download/win.html>

Adobe Macromedia Flash

http://www.adobe.com/shockwave/download/index.cgi?P1_Prod_Version=ShockwaveFlash

Must watch streaming Video (just for fun)

(OK, so it's my quirky sense of humor.)

Real Life Simpsons Intro

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49IDp76kjPw>

How to get kicked out of the library

http://www.youtube.com/results?search=library+dominoes&search_type=search_videos

Mothers' Day

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GKXFqGUGdTk&search=mothers%20day>

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

http://www.comedycentral.com/shows/the_daily_show/index.ihtml

Late Night with Conan O'Brien

http://www.nbc.com/Late_Night_with_Conan_O'Brien/index.shtml

The Late Show with David Letterman

<http://www.cbs.com/latenight/lateshow/>

EPIC 2014

<http://www.robinsloan.com/epic/>

EPIC 2015

<http://www.albinoblacksheep.com/flash/epic>