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Geoffrey Little

Concordia University

[Geoffrey.little@concordia.ca](mailto:Geoffrey.little@concordia.ca)

**The Revolution Will Be Streamed Online: Academic Libraries and Video**

The pace of technological change over the past 20 years has been nothing short of astounding and libraries are now using a multitude of web based tools beyond OPACs and electronic databases to help them engage with their user communities. The last five to six years in particular have seen the emergence of a suite of concepts, resources, and online services that operate under the umbrella of “Web 2.0.” First coined in 1999 and embraced as the theme of the O’Reilly Media conference in 2004, Web 2.0 denotes a paradigm shift in the ways that users and online content creators interact with an increasingly dynamic and decentralized Internet.[[1]](#footnote-1) It also encompasses resources that operate in an Internet-based cloud rather than on a single computer or platform including blogs, wikis, user created applications (i.e., iPhone apps), file sharing sites, web-based word processors, spreadsheets, and presentation tools (i.e., Google Docs), and social networking (i.e., Twitter and Facebook) and streaming video web sites, many of which are being utilized by academic libraries relating to their core mission to support research and teaching and to share their collections. Critics are also now writing about “Web 3.0,” a totally wireless semantic web, the first signs of which they see emerging from the rapid and cheap distribution and consumption of television, videos, and movies on mobile telephones, handheld devices, and tablets like Apple’s iPad.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Streaming video is a technology that allows users to watch, share, and often download online videos on their personal computers and mobile devices. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, 52% of American adults have watched or downloaded an online video,[[3]](#footnote-3) and almost 20% of all Internet users watch online video on a typical day.[[4]](#footnote-4) Moreover, in 2009 the Project reported that 89% of Internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 watch videos online via computers or mobile devices.[[5]](#footnote-5) Given the ways in which academic library users experience and encounter the Internet, especially undergraduates (sometimes termed “digital natives” or “Net Gen” users) and increasing numbers of graduate students and faculty, many of whom see their use of video in education increasing over the next five years,[[6]](#footnote-6) more and more academic libraries have been creating videos for promotion and marketing, instruction, and the dissemination of digital projects and special collections. This essay gives some background on YouTube, currently the most popular and comprehensive streaming video web site, and offers examples of the ways that libraries are using video to connect with users. It also gives librarians advice on how to start thinking about opportunities for their own videos and where to look for ideas and support.

## YouTube

Founded in 2005 and purchased by Google for $1.65 billion in 2006, YouTube allows users to upload, view, and share online videos for free.[[7]](#footnote-7) Users can also create their own personal or corporate channels and the White House, PBS, the UN, National Geographic, the Rolling Stones, Paul McCartney, and the Library of Congress among others have established robust presences on YouTube. The site claims that users are watching 2 billion videos a day, with 24 hours worth of content uploaded to the site every minute.[[8]](#footnote-8) Users can share videos via e-mail or embed them in Facebook accounts, blogs, or other sites; subscribe to new videos as they are uploaded; rate and comment on videos or flag them as inappropriate; and create individualized playlists. The site’s content is available 24 hours a day and does not require the installation of any software, it offers some technical support, and videos are keyword searchable through YouTube’s Google-powered search engine, as well as through Google itself. Users can also take advantage of “YouTube Insights,” a free analytics tool that enables them to view detailed statistics about videos they upload. Mick O’Leary, writing in *Information Today* in 2008, argues that YouTube is more than just a video sharing web site, but rather “a real database with a complex record structure, organized content, and good search features.”[[9]](#footnote-9) The site is also one of the largest online video repositories of higher education and library content. In 2009 YouTube launched YouTube EDU to host videos of university courses and lectures from over 300 colleges and universities including Yale, Stanford, UC Berkeley, Cambridge, Penn State, Harvard, and Notre Dame.[[10]](#footnote-10) While less than 6% of college and university libraries surveyed by the Primary Research Group had YouTube accounts in 2008 (compared to 24% of public libraries), over 16% indicated that they were planning on setting one up in the next year.[[11]](#footnote-11) At the same time, many libraries may not have their own YouTube account or channel, but participate in their university’s or college’s broader YouTube initiative instead.

# Promotion and Marketing

How exactly are academic libraries using streaming video and sites like YouTube? One of the most popular and obvious kind of video is a promtional or marketing video. For many libraries, this a way to experiment and to advertise services, resources, and locations, which can be especially useful for incoming students or new faculty who can watch such videos weeks before they arrive on campus. The University of Florida’s library system offers an impressive collection of short orientation videos for their education, health sciences, law, music, art and architecture, and journalism libraries on its YouTube channel,[[12]](#footnote-12) while “Discover the Dartmouth Library” gives an overview of the Dartmouth College Library narrated by students, faculty, and librarians.[[13]](#footnote-13) It emphazises the library’s role as a space for interaction, intellectual exploration, and socialization, as well as a place where students can access exhaustive print and online collections and take advantage of librarians’ expertize and knowledge. Library videos can also go “viral” or attain a staggering level of online popularity. Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library promotes itself in “New Spice: Study Like a Scholar, Scholar,”[[14]](#footnote-14) a send-up of the Old Spice “Smell Like a Man, Man” commercials that aired on US television over the spring and summer. Profiled in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the online *Huffington Post*, and on CNN and CBS, “Study Like a Scholar, Scholar” has been viewed over 2.2 million times on YouTube as of September 2010. The library’s multimedia unit has also spoofed the UPS whiteboard series of ads to advertise BYU’s interlibrary loan service.

# Instruction

Jack Maness of the Gemmill Engineering Library at University of Colorado at Boulder describes the potential of streaming video to “provide instruction to both distance and traditional students at their points-of-need” and many libraries are using targeted “how-to” videos to teach viewers about specific resources and tools.[[15]](#footnote-15) From the end user perspective, instructional videos can be watched or re-watched regardless of the time of day or night, and they can also be embedded on course web sites or online subject guides. At the same time, librarians can use streaming videos to supplement in-class instruction sessions or reference transactions and, depending on the topic or resource, they can have long and useful online life spans. Arizona State University’s “Library Minute” series[[16]](#footnote-16) is an excellent example of a collection of short, focused, and engaging videos that help viewers navigate ASU resources ranging from LibGuides to citing journal articles to how to use library printing stations, and the libraries at Brown, Columbia, Cornell, UCLA, Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Dalhousie, and Missouri-Kansas City also offer short instructional videos on a variety of topics and services through their own YouTube channels or those belonging to their parent institution. Robert Monge of the University of South Dakota Library wisely encourages librarians to link instructional video content with the Association of College and Research Libraries’ Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education in order to provide “a platform to discuss larger issues regarding information literacy while at the same time providing step-by-step tutorials for those that need them.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

## Sharing Digital and Special Collections

Special collections departments and college and university archives, many of which already have collections of digitized audio-visual materials, are also using YouTube to share their collections. Iowa State University’s special collections department has uploaded more than 140 videos to its YouTube channel since January 2008, including a series of black-and-white films documenting Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s visit to Iowa in 1959 and *The Home Economics Story*, a 1953 color promotional film produced by ISU’s home economics division.[[18]](#footnote-18) Going beyond promotion and building awareness, Tanya Zanish-Belcher, head of ISU’s special collections, notes that “we also receive many research and reference requests for this material, and YouTube is an easy way to provide access to our collection of 10,000 motion picture films. It especially resonates with our alumni and central Iowa residents to see some of these films.”[[19]](#footnote-19) The department only uploads films for which they own copyright or where they can provide a link to a company that handles rights and reproduction. The majority of the already digitized materials are 16-millimeter films, so Zanish-Belcher also sees making the videos available online as part of a wider preservation and dissemination effort. ISU is not alone and the special collections departments and libraries at William and Mary, Toronto, Abilene Christian, Manitoba, and the University Texas at Austin are also using YouTube to help them share and promote their unique collections and increase access for offsite researchers.

**Other Options**

While YouTube has cornered the market on streaming video and built a great deal of brand loyalty, as well as a series of strategic partnerships in higher education, entertainment, and media, academic libraries and their parent institutions are making streaming video available via other web sites like Vimeo ([www.vimeo.com](http://www.vimeo.com)), Academic Earth (<http://academicearth.org/>), and Apple’s iTunes U (<http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/>). The Massachusetts Institute of Technology library and Yale’s medical library offer streaming video tutorials via their web sites as well as through iTunes (which requires the iTunes software and, in many cases, downloading rather than streaming the videos) or YouTube, and the University of Toronto and the University of Alabama libraries host student-produced videos from recent promotional contents on their web sites. Some libraries, especially those that have been creating instructional videos since the pre-YouTube era, may be reluctant to migrate their materials to YouTube or another streaming video site, or they may prefer to mediate access to them via their own library’s web pages or online subject guides. Given that students and an increasing number of faculty have adopted YouTube as their streaming video web site of choice, libraries may wish to consider also uploading their materials to YouTube, thereby creating additional access points for their videos while adding another facet to their online presence and pushing their content out to library users in a familiar and popular virtual environment.

**Getting Started**

Academic libraries interested in exploring streaming video options should first find out if their college, university, or a campus partner like a museum, art gallery, or media services unit have already partnered with YouTube or another video sharing site. Participating in an institutional video initiative usually means that librarians can rely on technical and production support from campus media, information technology, or public affairs departments and colleagues in planning, producing, and promoting videos. If starting from scratch, creating a YouTube account is free and easy and software like Camtasia (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp>) lets would-be filmmakers create audio and visual files on their desktop computers. YouTube has a very useful production handbook (<http://www.youtube.com/t/yt_handbook_produce>) and help web page (<http://help.youtube.com/support/youtube/>) and the American Library Association hosts examples of diverse kinds of library-produced YouTube videos on its “I Love Libraries” web site.[[20]](#footnote-20) Conceptualizing and planning a video, regardless of topic, through a complete cycle is essential and Matt Harp and Mimmo Bonanni outline a 5 step process for videos produced by Arizona State’s library: ideas, talking points, recording/production, editing, and distribution.[[21]](#footnote-21) And, as Iowa State has demonstrated, existing digitized archival audio-visual materials can provide a wealth of almost ready-made online content. Practice and experience also seem to have taught libraries that their YouTube videos should be upbeat, informal, and relatively short. This is an opportunity—and a challenge—for librarians to deliver focused instruction about specific resources or to quickly tell viewers something new or important about the library and its services. Establishing an online video presence also requires a not insignificant long-term commitment to producing new videos on a regular basis in order to attract and maintain a user-viewer community and to ensure that videos promoting a service, feature, or resource are up-to-date and relatively current. Copyright and privacy rights also need to be considered and respected when producing videos or when using archival footage. Finally, librarians should spend some time surfing YouTube or other sites to find videos they find engaging and appealing. Colleagues at other institutions are usually more than happy to share information and advice, and good examples of promotional, instructional, and outreach videos are plentiful.

Streaming video is one of the most dynamic aspects of Internet development and use to emerge within the last decade and libraries are seeing increasing benefits from producing diverse kinds of video content. More and more colleges and universities are partnering with sites like YouTube and iTunes at the same time that faculty expect to see their use of video to grow, and there is now a body of literature on the future of online video distribution, consumption, and use. With some planning, forethought, and an investment of time, talent, and energy, libraries can use streaming video to create and sustain an innovative and multifaceted outreach program to users in real time and beyond the boundaries of the physical library. To rework the poem-song by Gil Scott-Heron, the revolution will not be televised, but it will be streamed online.

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10. YouTube, “More Courses, Colleges,” <http://youtube-global.blogspot.com/2010/03/more-courses-and-more-colleges-youtube.html>, accessed September 2, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
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12. <http://www.youtube.com/user/UFlibraries>, accessed September 10, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBDc3B1P4Ow>, accessed September 8, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
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