

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT... ONLINE MEDIA EDITING

Scenario

When Dr. Osborne tells her upper-division sociology class that student teams this year will be making video documentaries in lieu of a term paper, the announcement is met with gratifying student enthusiasm. A lively class discussion ensues about what kinds of social and cultural meeting places the students might visit to see evidence of economic change, whom they might interview, and what kinds of themes would suit such a project.

Dr. Osborne mentions a list she posted on the course web page of online media editing tools. All of the tools on her list are free to use, and most offer tutorials on how to use the various functions offered. Still, Dr. Osborne expects that some of the students will be completely unfamiliar with video editing and so makes arrangements for a series of sessions—taught by the university media support group—to go over the basics. Several students later tell her that the media sessions were extremely valuable, but she also learns that in many cases, students worked across project teams to help one another understand how to get the kinds of effects they wanted. Students discovered—and showed each other—how to blur faces, lay down music tracks, add voice-overs, insert subtitles, and roll the credits that show what each student on the team contributed.

When the documentaries are complete, Dr. Osborne has each team present their work to the class. The first video, called “Follow the Money,” begins with an outside shot of a payday loan storefront. Inside, the camera focuses only on two sets of hands as signed papers are passed one way and cash the other. Then the camera follows the hands—to the grocery store, to the car repair shop, to the babysitter. Each time a sum is paid out, a caption with the amount paid and the remaining balance is shown. Dr. Osborne is surprised at how much is said with not a single word spoken. The subsequent class discussion shows she’s not alone in her appreciation. By the time all the videos are viewed, she wonders if she should make the exercise a regular part of the course.

1 What is it?

Cloud-based media editing applications allow anyone with web access and a suitable computing device to touch up photographs, mix music, and edit video. These web-based services may offer a more limited tool set than full-scale software editing suites, but they are generally cross-platform, device-independent, and less expensive, particularly as most offer at least some of their services at no cost. As a result, unlike the alternatives—often costly software installed on individual computers—which are frequently available to students only in computer labs, online media editing services are ready for use at any location that offers a web connection and suitable hardware, making it far more feasible to view and make quick changes to just-captured media. They offer a solution for many common student projects like editing digital video, as they provide a platform for adding titles, making transitions, laying down alternate audio tracks, and sharing the finished product with others.

2 How does it work?

To use most of these online editing applications, students must register with the service to establish an account. Users upload media, perform editing as needed, and either download the new file or send it to a site such as Flickr, YouTube, or Facebook for sharing. Some of the tools offer storage for files that have been edited or created with the product, while others furnish their own display and sharing services. Some editing services provide creative functions that go beyond the strict definition of editing, enabling users to create their own songs with electronic instruments, to build their own ring tones, or to add animation using drawing tools built into the application. Cost for use can vary, but one typical price model allows free access to a suite of basic services and limited media storage, while making more sophisticated editing options and additional storage available for a fee.

3 Who’s doing it?

Among the firms offering these services are a number of start-ups, including companies such as JayCut and Indaba Music that were developed by students who saw the need for these tools. Several big players have entered the market, including YouTube, with its video editing and music swap services. Google, too, has entered the field, offering Picasa for image editing and Picnik for video, while Adobe provides free pared-down versions of its well-known desktop editing suites in web-based Photoshop Express and Premiere Express. Many of these cloud-based digital editing services are listed on portal sites of colleges and universities that recommend a selection of Web 2.0 services to their students.

[more >>](#)

© 2010 EDUCAUSE

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 License.
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

edUCAUSE.edu/eli

EDUCAUSE | LEARNING INITIATIVE

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT... ONLINE MEDIA EDITING

Some, like Purdue University and Elon University, offer wikis that explain how to use photo and video editing applications. Because web-based editing services can be of great use to the digital storyteller, the Art Institute of Chicago, which provides workshops in digital storytelling, lists media editing applications for images, video, and sound on its “Wiki Site for Digital Stories.”

4 Why is it significant?

Inexpensive cloud-based editing tools may encourage more students to undertake media-based assignments by offering just enough editing capability to enable work to go forward without incurring the cost of a traditional editing application. Even where professional-grade tools are available in computer labs, students may not have equal access if they commute long distances or take their courses remotely, and they would almost never use the vast array of features these editors offer. Traditional software-based media editing suites are expensive in computing terms, typically requiring additional storage space, more memory, and advanced processing capability. They are complex to use and may demand a learning curve too steep to be practical for many course projects. By contrast, a cloud-based application can be accessed from any suitable device that runs a web client. And because online media editors do their processing in the cloud, they won't burden local RAM or, if storage is provided, tax hard-drive space. Finally, while traditional media editors were originally developed with media professionals in mind, web services have tried to meet the needs of the more casual user. As a result, many of these cloud applications are easier to use, making it possible for more people to edit their music, movies, and image presentations.

5 What are the downsides?

While web-based editing suites are nearly always easier to use than their full-featured software counterparts, they are not necessarily plug-and-play. Frequently, students will need some introduction or guidance in tool use and in the principles of editing whichever media they are manipulating. Similarly, while web tools are not device-dependent, they can be difficult to use on a small screen. The lab assistants who provide help in computing labs on professional media suites may not be familiar with whichever web tool a student is currently using, and central IT support will probably not be available for troubleshooting if issues arise. In an arena like online digital editing, where competitors come and go, applications disappear when a company goes out of business. This can happen at any time, even in the middle of a semester, which could result in the loss of student work and compromise student projects. The capabilities of the web-based applications are only a subset of the desktop versions, so depending on the parameters of the project, students might not be able to find a free tool that will be adequate for their work.

6 Where is it going?

Digital editing has moved onto mobile devices with applications like Adobe's Photoshop Express for the iPhone or Android. Such applications may offer functionality that for many users is just what they need to perform basic media editing from virtually anywhere and post media files to blogs, social networking sites, or other online locations. Meanwhile, cloud-based editing tools, available inexpensively or at no cost to the user, promise to open new territory in teaching and learning, allowing students to join the ranks of audio/video remix artists with their coursework. The impact of remix in recent years has shown how editing can be used not just to trim, collate, and sequence bits of media but also to create new media productions via editing, a process that blurs previous definitions of the term.

7 What are the implications for teaching and learning?

Web-based editors reduce logistical challenges for instructors by providing all students with access to media editing tools. The free or low-cost nature of these editors allows students to use them to build complex and collaborative learning projects involving rich media, something that should be inviting to faculty members who take the approach that students learn best when they are engaged in projects that result in creative output. Because these tools are inexpensive or free and do not require sophisticated user skills, they offer faculty new avenues to devise new kinds of activities that go beyond the standard term paper and, in many cases, might be more representative of authentic assessment. Moreover, because the threshold is so low to use online media services, the opportunities they present to work in new media are open to students in virtually any discipline.

EDUCAUSE

EDUCAUSE is a nonprofit membership association created to support those who lead, manage, and use information technology to benefit higher education. A comprehensive range of resources and activities is available to all EDUCAUSE members. The association's strategic directions include focus in four areas: Teaching and Learning; Managing the Enterprise; E-Research and E-Scholarship; and the Evolving Role of IT and Leadership. For more information, visit educause.edu.