

University of Wisconsin–Madison



“Articulate Presenter has reduced our development and production time by at least half while improving the quality of our online lectures.”

Les Howles

SENIOR LEARNING CONSULTANT
DEPARTMENT OF ACADEMIC TECHNOLOGY

CHALLENGE

The University of Wisconsin, located in Madison, serves 41,169 students. Since its establishment in 1848, the university has racked up an impressive list of firsts – from the first test for butterfat content in milk done in 1890 to the development of the first space-based weather camera in 1959 to the first cultivation of embryonic stem cells in 1998.

The university is also among the first to embrace distance learning and instructional technologies. To facilitate the use of technology and promote its adoption throughout all university departments, the university established a specialized group about 17 years ago. Since then, the group’s name has changed several times and its mission has continually expanded. Today, the Department of Academic Technology, which is part of the university’s Division of Information Technology, works with faculty members to create online learning resources used as part of academic course offerings. The university views online learning as a critical component of distance learning initiatives; it also is used to support many traditional, campus-based courses.

In 2003, academic technology consultants set out to evaluate a variety of technology tools that could be used to improve the efficiency of producing and delivering online lectures. The challenge was to find tools that were very easy to use, cost efficient, and flexible enough to accommodate a wide variety of uses. The group was also looking for tools that would expedite the production and delivery of online lectures so consultants could speed time to delivery while increasing productivity. The group conducted an extensive evaluation that included in-depth research, product testing, and the development of prototype courses.

SOLUTION

“One project that drove our search was a course in French and Italian Renaissance literature. We evaluated a number of tools and found that Articulate Presenter was easy to use and also offered very sophisticated capabilities,” said Les Howles, senior e-learning consultant. “The product is simple enough to use right out of the box. The fact that it is PowerPoint-based is a big plus.”

Articulate Presenter has been used to create a wide variety of courses across campus. Most courses include 15 or more online lectures, each between 15- to 25-minutes long. In many cases, a media specialist captures audio from a live classroom lecture, which is then edited to eliminate dead time and speech fillers (such as “ums” and “you knows”). Course developers then use Articulate Presenter to combine the audio narration with the faculty member’s PowerPoint slides to create the on-line lecture.

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PowerPoint slide notes, used extensively by many faculty members, are easily transferred with Articulate to the online presentation, giving students the option to listen or to read. Each lecture includes an outline. Students can easily jump from slide to slide using the outline or a thumbnail view of the lecture. Articulate Presenter also gives students the ability to search the presentation for keywords.

The Academic Technology team cites several other features that make Articulate Presenter a favorite tool. Learning designers can easily match the color schemes of online lectures to the unique look and feel of each course web site. Articulate Presenter's handling of exporting and editing of XML makes it easy to make small changes, create shortcuts, or do other "under-the-hood" work. The integration of Articulate Presenter with Articulate Quizmaker, which the academic technology team is just beginning to use, is simple and straightforward. Quizmaker, now being used for several courses in development, provides for comprehensive, yet easy-to-implement assessments for online lectures and other activities.

The academic technology group has almost doubled its production of online lectures since using Articulate Presenter. Presenter is also being used by faculty members throughout the university for their own presentations, as well as the university's Professional Technology Education group, which is responsible for developing and implementing web-based training for the university's workforce.

"We used to do all of the development work in Flash and SMIL, which was very laborious," said Howles. "Now we spend about 25% of the time or less on production and turn out much more sophisticated course lectures." According to Howles, faculty members like the look and feel, the navigation, and the user interface of those courses developed with Articulate Presenter.

RESULTS

- Online lectures are more sophisticated and useful to students, while production time has been cut by 50%.
- Courses are easier to maintain. Changes and updates can be made in minutes.
- Consultant productivity has increased. Since using Articulate Presenter, consultants have approximately doubled their online lecture completion rate.
- Time to develop e-lectures has been cut in half, while overall quality has improved.

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