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Session 6: Improving Your Image: Marketing Visual Resource Collections
Jessica Bozeman

(Play Introductory Video)

Just like adventures on the beach, designing and implementing a specific marketing campaign for the Visual Resources Center at DePauw was a first time effort for us, an exploration into uncharted waters. The concepts were new and the technology was very new, but with the excellent support of campus instructional technology, talented students and enthusiasm for the project we were able to put together a commercial product that helped us communicate our resources to students in a fun and engaging manner.

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We had several motivations for this project when we first began toying with the idea of producing commercials advertising the space and services of the Visual Resources Center and other campus branch libraries.

The first reason came from the long term changing mission of the visual resources center within the campus at large. Six years prior the VRC had switched from being under the management of the art department alone to being adopted by the library as one of three branch libraries on campus. Also at that time Brooke's position changed from being staff in the art department to that of a faculty librarian. This evolution came along with some major steps towards digitization, through the purchase of Luna Insight and participation in ARTstor's hosting pilot program. Now that the VRC was a part of the library system, our potential user base expanded much more explicitly beyond art and art history to image users in all disciplines. Yet, our physical location within the campus art center still placed us outside of the radar of most faculty and students. Over the years, Brooke had developed some nice working relationships with faculty in other disciplines, but there was little indication that non-art students knew much about us.

Evidence suggests that even art and art history students were not always aware of our resources.

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In Spring of 2007 as a part of a seminar paper for a class on art librarianship, I conducted a survey at DePauw and Indiana University of studio art majors, in

order to gain a better understanding of the resources they used and valued in the art creation process. Some of the qualitative data surprised me, showing both a lack of awareness and usage of the services that we offered and a voiced desire to know more about us. As you can see from the example quotes student requested things that actually already existed, or were encouraging us to make people more aware of what we do.

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To help make our space more noticeable and appealing to students, we rearranged the layout of the Visual Resource Center to make it less slide focused and better able to highlight the wide variety of resources we provide. But we also recognized that we would need to make more tangible efforts to spread the word about our existence.

There were practical reasons for our choice of this specific medium. As image specialists, we thought that it would be helpful for us to have some exposure to digital video technology and transmission. Working on a specific video based project would give us ample opportunity to develop these skills.

Besides wanting to gain this ability, a video marketing scheme seemed a potentially effective way of reaching students. In the past, we have used more traditional forms of library marketing tools, such as posters and orientation events and various giveaways, like pencils, magnets and bookmarks. We realized, however, that in today's students' technology-rich environment, such physical forms of outreach might not be as effective. For example, even when the library has large, well-publicized orientation events, it is difficult to get students to include the branch libraries in these visits. As we considered where we might intersect with students' lives, particularly looking at Web 2.0 tools, we concluded that some form of video commercial might be an effective way to go.

Working with Caroline Gilson, the science librarian at DePauw, we decided to create a batch of commercials advertising the branch libraries as a whole and each individual library specifically. Because of our inexperience creating this kind of product, we did a lot of online research trying to see what kinds of work other libraries had been doing. Ultimately, we decided to model our commercials on things that had seemed to work well for others… the Common Craft educational videos, St. Joseph County Public Library, "Ray of Light" video, and the Mac PC Commercials. Doing this would also allow us to create videos in a style that would be quickly recognizable and hopefully hold attention.

Here is an example of one of our commercials in the series:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gu8eypvMRN8

In designing the VRC commercials in the style of the Mac PC ads, we had some particular goals and messages in mind. First, we wanted to get our name out there and make students and faculty aware of our existence and basic services. These commercials were not meant to be educational tutorials on specific image skills, but rather an awareness campaign. Beyond that, we wanted to address a specific assumption commonly held by students and faculty, namely, that users can find everything they need on the web through search engines like Google Image search. By creating the characters of VRC and Google Image Search we wanted to highlight the weaknesses of pulling things off the web and the advantages of the specialized and personalized services that we offer as visual resources professionals. This was not intended as a smear campaign against Google, for we certainly do use it as a reference tool in our library, but rather as a means of increasing student awareness of the other resources available to them on campus.

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As mentioned earlier, we were novices when it came to the technology required to complete this project and we quickly recognized our need for campus technology support to gain the necessary skills. At Depauw, Faculty Instructional Technology Support, or FITS offers consultations, dedicated workspace, and workshops that support faculty in their technology based projects. What particularly appealed to us was their Annual FITS Summer Workshop, a weeklong clinic in May where FITS staff helps campus faculty jump-start technology projects. After submitting a proposal with our ideas, our project was assigned a dedicated instructional technologist who guided us through the process from planning to completion. This provided us with pre-workshop assistance in preparing our storyboards, identifying needed technology and completing the initial filming. The workshop itself offered a week of structured project work time as well as mini-lectures and discussion sessions on a variety of technology topics. We received hands-on training in video editing and basic audio editing and were able to complete two of our branch commercials during that week. With the skills we learned during the workshop, we continued filming and editing and by the fall had finished all seven videos in the project. Our project would not have been completed as successfully without the help of FITS and I strongly encourage anyone wanting to explore this form of marketing to seek out similar resources at your institution.

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Here is the timeline for our project. As you can see, most of the work was done over the summer months and Winter break. We purposefully planned it this way because we have a more flexible workload in the summers. We completed the commercials by the fall so that we could periodically release them throughout the school year.

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There are a range of different levels of equipment and software that can be used for projects such as these. We shot using a variety of different MiniDV cameras that we obtained through campus media services and augmented them with a boom mike borrowed from the Contemporary Media Center. We also had the good fortune of access to a horizenless room, which made it much easier to obtain the effect we needed for the Mac PC style commercial. I had experience working with the popular Mac video editing programs of iMovie and iDVD, but our FITS collaborators recommended that we work with the more professional level Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro after hearing about the kinds of things we wanted to do.

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We began releasing the commercials in our series starting in the Fall of 2007. We looked for as many venues as possible through which to share our videos. Our primary medium was YouTube. We hoped that students exploring on the site might stumble across them, possibly when they were looking for DePauw related shorts. Though we don't have a lot of evidence that many students have found them there, having them in YouTube allows us to easily link to them and pass them along to others who help spread the word. We also ran them throughout the year on campus television. Naturally, we also placed links to them on the library home page and on our branch library page, and some of the librarians used them in library instruction sessions as an easy way to introduce students to the branch libraries on campus.

Our initial assessments have shown that students are more aware of the VRC now than they were in the fall. We don't have evidence that the videos played a significant role in this, but we will continue to collect data on this over the next couple of years.

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In conclusion, for those of you who might be considering doing such a project in the future, I would like to share with you some of the things that we learned throughout this process.

The first has to do with the planning. The more planning you can do in advance of both the filming and the editing, the smoother the process will go. Though it is impossible to anticipate everything, try to figure out your staging and lighting needs before the day of shooting and arrange for the equipment to be there.

Become familiar with your equipment before you start shooting, figure out features and settings, especially if you are shooting on multiple days with different cameras. One example of a problem the we dealt with was that we realized after shooting that the camera we were using at that time was equipped with a stabilization feature that automatically followed and focused on moving objects. So there were shots where we needed the camera to be still in which instead it automatically followed the actors as they stepped off camera.

Investigate the equipment resources that you have access to given your budget. We were shooting on a shoestring, using primarily the resources already available to us on campus. The overall quality of our footage would most likely have been better had we used a higher quality camera than the older handheld ones available to use through media services.

Come to the filming with at least a rough idea of the shots you would like to do… this will speed up the process and give your actors a better idea of what to expect. Speaking of actors, allow adequate time to recruit actors in your production, should you need them. We were extremely fortunately to end up with such talented students willing to act in our commercials, but we located them very last minute, especially since we chose to shoot in the summer when most students were gone. This certainly caused us a bit of stress in the planning process. We recommend planning well in advance, shooting during the school year when there are more people around and possibly even auditioning students to find the best kind of faces for advertising your library.

Technology Support: We cannot emphasize enough the fact that our project would not have been a success without the assistance of several other departments on campus. The instructional technologists were instrumental in guiding us through the process and teaching us the necessary skills we needed to create our videos. We also benefited from the help of staff in Music Instructional Technology for help with our soundtracks. The Office of Institutional Research helped us with the design, creation and dissemination of a survey measuring student awareness of branch libraries. If you are going to embark on a project like this, do your research and find out what resources are available because there are opportunities for really fruitful collaborations here.

Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start for a project like this, particularly when figuring out what plots and themes to use for the commercials. We recommend borrowing liberally… don't be afraid to get ideas from others and use preexisting projects as a jumping off point.

Finally explore all possible venues for distribution – Youtube, campus TV, websites, library instruction, faculty word of mouth – as we learned, it is sometime difficult to anticipate exactly where the best location is, so don't be afraid to be a little pushy in getting your name and products out there… that's what marketing is for.

I hope that what I have shared today has been beneficial to the conversation about how Visual Resource Centers can use marketing to spread the word about the many different services we have to offer to an increasingly diverse user base. To wrap things I up am pleased to share with you the premier of our final commercial in the Google Image Search vs VRC series. Given that we are in San Diego, the spring break theme seemed like a good fit:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmK81rNxcQo