LITE Bites: broadcasting bite-sized library instruction

Diane Mizrachi

College Library, University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles USA, and

Jaclyn Bedoya

Edinburgh, UK

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper sets out to describe a successful collaboration between the UCLA Library and a campus-based student television production team to create and broadcast a series of short library commercials. Librarians provide content ideas and editorial oversight; the students write, act, produce and broadcast these "Bites" on the Office of Residential Life cable television station. They are also converted to streaming video for access from the Library web page. Reactions and feedback on the clips from student focus groups provide valuable insight into the preferences and attitudes of the undergraduate population. This article also seeks to discuss library partnerships to produce videos and the use of visual media for marketing and instruction by public and academic libraries.

Design/methodology/approach – An extensive literature review of previous academic and public library video and television projects discusses the benefits of collaboration, costs, and lessons learned. The case study of LITE Bites details its genesis, production procedure, feedback from student focus groups, and future directions.

Findings – Library collaboration with the student production team is the key to the success of this project. The production team relishes the creative opportunity it presents them, and they learn about the library, its resources and services. Student viewers report that LITE Bites make the library seem friendlier and less intimidating. And the library is delighted by the successful cross-campus collaborations and positive publicity and marketing.

Originality/value – This paper provides ideas and examples from this and other successful projects for other institutions considering ways of using television and other multi-media venues for library outreach and instruction.

Keywords Information literacy, Library instruction, Multimedia systems, Academic libraries, Students

Paper type Case study

Introduction

Today's college students are accustomed to an abundance of information and entertainment competing for their attention in a myriad of formats, including screen based media via personal computers, television, cell-phones, and video iPods. Academic librarians are well aware of the need to employ multiple approaches to library instruction in order to reach out to students in all their technological environments as well as address different learning styles (Dalrymple, 2002). College Library at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) recently launched a collaborative project with the campus Office of Residential Life (ORL) and the resident halls' cable television station (resTV) to meet this reality by producing a series of short instructional videos known as LITE Bites.

The College Library, located within the Powell Library Building, is the most heavily used of all UCLA's 13 campus library units. Annual turnstile counts are approximately

1.5 million. Reference services, information literacy instruction, outreach activities, and collection development are all tailored to meet the College Library mission of serving the diverse information needs of UCLA's 25,000 undergraduates. There are seven full-time reference/instruction librarians and two full-time reference assistants.

LITE Bites (Library Instruction To Everyone – bite sized) are a series of video clips lasting one to five minutes each, whose purpose is to raise students' awareness of the array of library services and resources, and how the library can assist them in their academic tasks.

LITE Bites (Library Instruction To Everyone) – episodes 2005-2006 include:

- "How to Find Your Course Reserve Materials".
- "The 411 on Campus Libraries" (introductory information to UCLA libraries).
- "What you can do in the middle of the night at Powell" (all-night study hall).
- "CLICC" (College Library Instructional Computing Commons).
- "SiB - Students in Black" (plagiarism and Bruin Success tutorial).
- "The Librarian of Oz" (Road to Research IL tutorial).
- "Dude, Where's My Book?! Using the Online Catalog".
- "Survivor" (using article databases).
- "Term Paper Eve Massacre" (tips for keeping information organized).
- "I read it on the web, it must be true! Evaluating web sites with Elvis".
- "Chalk Talk" (Research paper strategies).
- "Indiana Bruins" (Finding resources at SRLF, the Southern Regional Library Facility).

Librarians present content ideas and have editorial overview while a student production team from resTV, the Office of Residential Life (ORL) cable television station, writes, directs, acts and produces them. Each segment focuses on a single aspect of library instruction, services, or resources using a popular theme. Similar to public service announcements, the "Bites" are broadcast regularly on ORL's cable channel to the student resident halls and UCLA's Guest House. In addition, LITE Bites are also converted to streaming video for access and download from the College Library web page. Although academic libraries have used video and other visual formats for instruction in the past, student produced library instruction appears to be unique.

Literature review: partnerships and videos in academic and public libraries
Public libraries began partnering with local cable television networks on television and video projects in the 1970s, and the literature on these partnerships is extensive. The cable stations use library programming to fulfill the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) mandate for public access television, while libraries can "reach residents of the community who were not library users and who, perhaps, had no idea of the library's wide variety of materials and programs" (Wendling, 1983). Brigitte L. Kenney (1984) argues that libraries can act as "facilitator" between communities and cable operators, as "both benefit when the community perceives the cable system as a true communications medium". Some libraries have created cooperative networks with

other libraries as well. For example, several public libraries and library systems in Illinois joined to form the Library Cable Network (LCN) in Illinois, which produced up to 50 hours of programming a week in the early 1990s (Ward, 1992). Creating commercials that specifically target Generation X and Y to effectively market the library's resources is another way for libraries and local stations to collaborate (Sass, 2002). Creating commercials that specifically target Generations X and Y, the post-baby boomers born after 1970, to effectively market the library's resources is another way for libraries and local stations to collaborate (Sass, 2002). The McCracken County Public Library in Paducah, Kentucky, has enjoyed a successful collaboration with their local cable network since 1992. Library programs, public announcements, and short "@ your library" commercials are all broadcast on their MCLIB-TV. Several of the commercials can be viewed on youtube.com (Iris Garrott, telephone interview, 2/13/2007; McCracken County Public Library, 2007).

Among academic librarians, John L. Lolley (1980) of Central State University in Oklahoma notes that videos and television offer the ability to reach large numbers of students and to influence students' affective learning. By changing student attitudes towards the library, librarians can improve the student learning process. He urges librarians to take advantage of "the unique characteristics of videotape [that] allow the librarian to account for the . . . types of objectives considered necessary to educate a library user in a manner that perhaps no other media can". A study by Wakiji and Thomas (1997) found that attitudes towards the libraries and self-projected future use of libraries improved among 61.8 percent of their student subjects after watching an eight minute library video. The University of Cape Town project, titled "Finding information in the library", was produced in the late 1980s. Essential elements for this success were "articulated need; faculty support; technical know-how; enthusiasm; money; energy; and patience" (Dupper, 1988/1989).

The cost of producing a video is often prohibitively expensive, however. At one extreme, Brigham Young University spent over $40,000 on their elaborate video, which was used in conjunction with librarian-led discussions (Tidwell, 1994). Less expensive was the University of California, San Diego's Undergraduate Library's Searching Safari video, which nearly 20 years ago cost about $350 per minute (Smith, 1988). Michael L. Gold (1990) worked with Purdue University's Center for Instructional Services to produce a seven minute video for just the cost of videotape and music. The half-day shoot featured only the author demonstrating use of a CD-ROM product, thus minimizing the need for actors, scriptwriters, and other production crew. Colleen Boff and Catherine Cardwell produced (Boff and Cardwell, 2002) several streaming video modules for their instruction program in conjunction with the Bowling Green State University Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology (CTLT). The libraries contributed only staff time and money for two new instructors, while the technical know-how and production were financed by the CTLT. This and other examples in the literature stress the importance of working in partnership with a campus department skilled in video production as the most cost-effective way to produce library videos.

Other problems and challenges with creating videos are also evident in the literature. Necia Parker-Gibson (1999) questions the value of tours that are not directly relevant to students' needs and therefore may not address their low motivation to learn. For broadcasting, the lack of an identified audience can be a hindrance. Many videos offer too much information which can overwhelm the students and actually lower their

retention rates (Smith, 1988). For a comprehensive article on librarians' first uses of films, videos, and other media, see Parker-Gibson (1999).

With the rise of campus online networks and increasing broadband capacities allowing greater data transmission, many libraries have embraced online streaming videos for both tours and for point of need instruction. Streaming videos, which can be viewed from anywhere connected to the internet as many times as necessary and can be downloaded to other devices, may reach students when they need help the most, thus improving motivation and retention. Several universities have used streaming video "modules" which help students learn small, specific tasks, such as how to connect from off-campus, or how to find articles in a Wilson database (Cox and Pratt, 2002; Xiao *et al.*, 2002; Maxymuk, 2004). Students' attention can be held best with short, humorous, to-the-point videos (Tallent, 1997; Smith, 1988; Boff and Cardwell, 2002). By creating downloadable and portable video content, libraries can make instruction as easily accessible as possible, and look "hip" doing it.

LITE Bites production

One of six principles in the UCLA Library Strategic Plan for 2006-2009 states that the Library will engage in a "diverse mixture of instructional activities and beneficial partnerships" which will "measurably raise the level of UCLA undergraduate students' information competence . . . " (UCLA Library, 2006). In order to investigate more ways of facilitating such partnerships, UCLA librarians toured the Office of Residential Life (ORL) facilities and visited their cable television station. Immediately they perceived a unique opportunity to extend library instruction beyond the traditional formats and reach out to students in their own environments. The idea of using cable television for library instruction was exciting but challenging: librarians did not posses expertise in television production; they were unsure of their ability to make anything "cool" enough to attract the 18-22 year old target audience, and wondered how their product could possibly compete with all the MTV style attractions that permeate the students' worlds. Fortunately resTV, ORL's cable station, employs its own student production group to create programming for the station, and so a formula was developed in which the students are granted artistic freedom to write, act, and direct the videos while librarians provide content and editorial supervision. Students know what their peers like, what will catch their attention, and peer-to-peer instruction is recognized as a successful pedagogical method.

LITE Bites are purposely designed to be short and precise, and make the library look appealing. It is understood that students will not become information literate by viewing a "Bite" or two. This is a skill that develops through hands-on practice, experience, and the maturation of the critical thought process. But raising students' consciousness and positive attitudes toward the library and the research process can affect behaviors that help develop greater understanding of the information world around them.

The UCLA resTV production team consists of approximately 20-25 undergraduate students in different majors working under the supervision of two graduate students from the School of Film and Television. Though no course credit is awarded, these part-time paid positions are designed to give students broad and practical experience in film and television program production. An annual budget is provided by the Office of Residential Life for all programming, including LITE Bites.

The library team, consisting of a reference/instruction librarian and library assistant, decides on a library service or resource to be featured, creates an outline of important points and highlights, and suggests a possible theme for each "Bite". A sample instructional outline follows:

LITE Bites VII
"Dude! Where's my book?" – The UCLA Library Catalog
Surfer or Skateboard theme ("Dude, Where's My Car?" "Lords of Dogtown?")

(1) *Contents*
   - Catalog is the gateway to finding books here at UCLA.
   - Other sources such as journal titles, movies, and online resources can also be found.

(2) *Process*
   - From library homepage: www.library.ucla.edu
     – Click link "Search & find".
     – Click link "UCLA Catalog".
   - Public web site – can be accessed anywhere in the world.
   - Three types of searching possible – basic, advanced and course reserves (stuff your instructor has put on reserve).
   - One example of a Basic Search
     – Type in search terms as keyword search.
     – Click search.
   - Other types of information can be searched (i.e. book title, author, journal title).
   - Note the library location, call number of the book and checked out or not.
   - For more information on item, click the on the link.

(3) *Locate*
   - Go to correct library.
   - Use call number to locate book on shelf (like finding a street address).
   - Books containing similar subjects are located together so can browse shelf for more.

(4) *For more details on searching catalog and other library resources visit*:
   - www.sscnet.ucla.edu/library – The Road to Research Online Tutorial; or
   - ask a librarian: www2.library.ucla.edu/questions/index.cfm
     – in person at the library;
     – through online chat;
     – e-mail;
     – telephone.

Input from colleagues is always welcomed and often incorporated. Writers at resTV use the outlines to develop preliminary scripts which are sent back to the library for accuracy checks and feedback. Once a script has been approved, casting, scheduling, location selection, and other logistics are finalized and actual production begins. Actors are cast from the resTV production team or their friends, theater and film school students, library workers, and even librarians. Post-production consists of editing, and adding music, text, and special effects. The first cuts are reviewed and approved by librarians, after which the videos are further refined into final products ready for broadcast. Process time for a single "Bite" can vary, but approximately three videos per quarter were completed throughout the 2005-2006 academic year.

Assessment: focus groups

After almost three academic quarters of producing and broadcasting LITE Bites, librarians held a series of five focus groups with students in the resident halls to record their feedback and reactions to the clips. The focus groups were held over a two-week period and averaged six students per group from a variety of majors. Of the students, 60 percent were female and all were undergraduates, primarily in their first or second year of study. Each group viewed two different LITE Bites, answered questions and provided feedback on the individual clips, using television broadcasts for library instruction, and their general feelings about the library and library research. Four "Bites" were reviewed once, and three were reviewed twice.

Attitudes and feedback varied from group to group and from "Bite" to "Bite" but overall were positive and encouraging. Suggestions were made to improve some of the earlier videos; to make them more consistent, shorter and precise. Students appreciated seeing a balance of story and information; for example they thought that information in one video was lost in the surrounding story, but they did like the idea of weaving instruction with contemporary themes and pop culture. Students felt most clips were informative and educational, and suggested showing them at freshmen orientations and similar events. They liked seeing UCLA's mascot, Joe Bruin, and suggested using more UCLA celebrities. Insightful comments were made by both groups that viewed the "Bite" explaining the UCLA Library catalog, which is based on the movie "Dude, Where's My Car?" "That's one of my favorite movies so I got all the jokes," one student said. Another stated "I'm not a computer person, but this made the catalog seem less intimidating . . . if those two (dumb) guys can learn to use it, anybody can!" Students felt the video made the library seem friendlier and less intimidating. One astute student opined that hearing the actors recite the search process while seeing their computer screen and reading highlighted points in a text bar was an especially effective reinforcement of the learning process.

Unfortunately, most students in the focus groups stated that they do not regularly watch resTV, and none of the 30 had previously seen or heard of LITE Bites. This important point underscores the necessity of finding additional outlets for access and viewing in order to ensure broader outreach and effectiveness. Efforts to address this issue include converting the "Bites" to streaming video, which can be viewed and downloaded online and makes it convenient to show them in instructional sessions (www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/college/help/lite/index.html). College Library is exploring the use of online social networking sites for student outreach and so has posted links to LITE Bites on its Facebook group site (Powell Library Info Exchange).

Mounting the videos on public web sites such as YouTube and Google Video is also being investigated. Over the summer and until this writing, two early LITE Bites were shortened and reworked according to suggestions made in the focus groups. In the fifth week of fall quarter 2006, resTV held a "LITE Bite marathon" showing forty minutes of library videos per hour for several hours a day. Follow-up studies of student feedback and viewing habits must be performed to ascertain again the breadth of effectiveness.

Conclusion

Discovering and utilizing local resources, talent and people have been instrumental in this collaborative project. Several library staff members were found to have experiences at both professional and amateur levels which the library team continues to cultivate and use. The Theater department has generously lent props and costumes for productions as needed. The Office of Residential Life is enthused with the educational aspect of the project which provides a service to the campus as a whole. And the library is delighted by the successful cross-campus collaborations and positive publicity and marketing. But the single most important lesson learned from LITE Bites is the necessity of getting students involved and allowing them artistic freedom; letting them "own" the project and have fun. Students on the production team relish the creative opportunity while they learn about the library, its resources and services. UCLA's athletic department has expressed interest in allowing student-athlete participation in some upcoming sports-themed segments, which would heighten their own awareness and knowledge of the library as well as display a positive image to the student body. Expanding the viewing audience and interest by maximizing all access and promotional possibilities is the most pressing challenge at the moment, but LITE Bites has now been advanced from conception to reality.

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Corresponding author
Diane Mizrachi can be contacted at: mizrachi@library.ucla.edu