Web 2.0: Video Chat

by Roy "Todd" Vandenbark, Part-time Temporary Special Project Developer, Library Information Technology Services

Ball State University's Bracken Library is a popular place for conducting research, working on assignments and papers, or finding a good place to study. Groups of students work collaboratively on class projects at the Libraries' public access computers or large tables.

In the event that teammates cannot be physically present to participate, the University Libraries offer videoconferencing (or video chat) so that the absent member can stay involved. There are also a number of free services available to assist the team in reaching their assignment objective.

Historically, videoconferencing was first introduced to the public in 1968. It was not until the 1990s, however, that the ability to compress effectively video data for transmission over the Internet in ways that could be handled by personal computers was developed.

Today there are a number of services that offer point-to-point video chat for free, including Yahoo Messenger, SightSpeed, NetMeeting, MSN Messenger, and Skype. "Point-to-point" is a single videoconference connecting two computers. The equipment required is minimal, consisting of:

- Personal computer
- Video input source, such as a video camera or Web cam
- Video output source, such as a computer monitor, projector, or television screen
- Audio input through a microphone
- Audio output, usually through speakers built-in or attached to the computer
- Data transfer method usually via the Internet or other network

Many desktop and laptop computers come with video and audio input/output capability already installed, such as the iMac and the MacBook. The service you select (Skype, etc.) provides the software connection. All you need is a friend or colleague on the same service with whom to connect.

What if you want to collaborate with more than one other person? A new service, called "ooVoo" (**http://oovoo.com/**) offers the ability to video chat with up to three people at the same time — for free. For an additional fee ($10/month), you can video chat with up to six people at a time. Simply download the free software and install it on your Macintosh or Windows computer. Set-up is easy, taking just a few minutes.

Create an account with ooVoo, providing an e-mail address and other basic information, then search the ooVoo network for people to connect with. The software is intuitive, and helps with set up and testing of your camera and microphone.

The quality of the video and audio chat can be jerky and delayed at times since it is dependent on the connection speed of each participant. Effective use of the video conference can be assured by participants agreeing on a method for turn-taking at the beginning of the call. The ooVoo service also allows others without ooVoo accounts to call you from their web browser just by sending them a link. You can also send video messages via email, and make computer-to-telephone calls (for a fee).

Software such as **ooVoo, Evernote** (see *The Library Insider*, February 2009), **Wikispaces** (*The Library Insider*, November 2008), and **Gliffy** (*The Library Insider*, September 2008) are examples of Web 2.0 tools that students, faculty, and staff have at their finger tips when conducting online research and learning at the Ball State University Libraries or when using their computer elsewhere.

For more information, contact Roy "Todd" Vandenbark, University Libraries' Part-time Temporary Special Project Developer, **RTVandenbark@bsu.edu**, 765-285-8032. ◎

Phi Mu Alpha and Others Perform on Bracken's Plaza to Raise Funds for Cancer Research

On a beautiful spring day in late March 2009, several members from Phi Mu Alpha, ΦΜΑ, and their friends performed music in an effort to raise money for a Relay for Life® benefit.

Many students and faculty on their way to Bracken Library stopped to listen to the music and dug into their pockets to help students achieve their goal to raise funds for cancer research. The large plaza area south of Bracken's doors is a popular meeting place. ◎