

DELIVERING EFFECTIVE WEB-BASED EDUCATION: STREAMED AUDIO ON THE WEB AT SIGGRAPH

Providing effective education outside the traditional classroom is a challenge more education professionals will face in the near future. While many approaches exist for solving this problem, one expedient solution is videotaping traditional stand-and-deliver classes, compressing the video to stream off the Web, synchronizing important visual material to key points in the video, and placing everything in a well-designed and easy-to-use Web site.

Our team created a Web site for educating 5,000 IBM field service personnel worldwide. Traditional classroom instruction could not reach that many students. The instructors were, in real life, product development programmers, who barely had time to organize and present the material once. The expected "shelf life" for the information was three years, and every six months there would be significant updates to the material. Running the presentations as satellite classes was not an option because of the lack of universal access to the necessary facilities. The depth and breadth of the material, along with its volatility, squashed any realistic notion of crafting computer based instruction modules. Those who could not attend the live presentations were stuck with downloading the reading handouts from the presentations, muddling along as best they could.

Delivering education and training on the Web is becoming increasingly popular. It is more cost-efficient to run a class on the Web than it is to run it several times in multiple classrooms and require travel to the class. One class can reach a larger audience, including students who may never have had the opportunity to receive the education in person before. Students can also pace themselves, viewing the instruction they require as often as they like, whenever they can fit it in their schedules. And students who are able to attend a face-to-face class can use a corresponding Web-based class to review material they may have forgotten. In our experience, user acceptance of Web-based education has been good.

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This workshop, demonstrates how to produce streaming audio with synchronized slides. It reviews the planning issues, discusses strategies for capturing the information, and asks participants to create the audio and graphic files for the Web. Finally, we knit the files together on a Web page that we can view and play from our workstations.

Hardware and software are used to illustrate the process and make it real for the participants. We hope the hands-on experience is compelling, and that it demystifies the process by providing experience with real audio production tools, making them less intimidating.

