Learning Services: iSpring Early Adopters Project Update (January 2015)

Introduction

Since January 2014, the Learning Technology Development Team (LTD) have been exploring the capabilities of the iSpring software as an e-learning development suite to add multimedia easily and include instructional functionality to new and existing academic resources. iSpring is a PowerPoint (add-on/plug in?) which enables users to create media-rich content, presentations and quizzes in HTML5 and Flash. This gives staff the ability to publish content in HTML5 which ensures accessibility for students using both traditional desktop and mobile learn environments of Learning Edge.

To ensure iSpring met the needs of academic staff and enhanced the online/mobile learning experience of students, Learning Services created the iSpring 'Early Adopters' project in May 2014 to invite participants from all faculties to become early adopters. To support the use of iSpring with participants, Learning Services purchased 25 iSpring licenses to be installed on institutional PCs or laptops. By July 2014, the project expanded to a total of 32 members of staff from all 3 faculties.

Key Objectives

The key goal of the project was to ensure participating staff had a user friendly experience which enabled them to enhance their resources to a level that would enrich the student experience. Further objectives that were of importance to Learning Services during the project are as follows:

- Provide access to software on their EHU PC/Laptop;
- Participating staff received online training workshops via Blackboard Collaborate;
- Participating staff receive 1-2-1 and/or bespoke consultation sessions where required;
- Provision of staff resource guides to support content development via eShare;
- Ensure students experience media rich and mobile friendly content within Learning Edge;
- Participating staff agree to exchange their experience and disseminate to the wider faculty.

Staff Training and Support

As part of the project all staff were offered a variety of online and offline training sessions. The sessions were delivered by LTD to ensure all staff engaged and fully understood how to use basic and intermediate features and tools in iSpring. All online and offline sessions provided staff with knowledge and guidance on the following areas:

- Insert audio narrations and video multimedia;
- Customising visual properties and behaviour;
- The creation and integration of quizzes;
- Creating non-linear presentations ('branching' presentations);

- Publishing HTML5 content and how to host online (using eShare)
- Embedding content into Learning Edge

Furthermore a collection of staff guides and screencasts were created to ensure staff could support themselves if needed. Alongside the training sessions and resources support and consultation was available from the LTD team.

Staff Responses

During the closing weeks of the project, LTD created a survey to capture the views and interests of all 32 staff involved and to confirm which users couldn't utilise the software due to other commitments.

Survey Location: Y:\Learning Services\LTD\Team_activity\Projects\2014_05_iSpring

- In total 16 of the 32 members of staff successfully engaged with the project from start to finish, with 14 of the 16 completing the end of project survey.

- Faculty representation for the 16 staff who engaged:
  - Faculty of Education: 7
  - Faculty of Health and Social Care: 6
  - Faculty of Arts & Science: 3

- Most used features of iSpring:
  - *Audio Narration: 9*
  - *Video Narration: 3*
  - *Quizzes: 3*
  - *Web Objects: 13*
  - *Resources: 5*
  - *Embedded YouTube Videos: 6*
  - *Content Navigation Menu (Player Skin): 15*

- Comments: Overall Staff Experience

  - *"I like the way there is a lot of help and support available to assist in setting up the new presentations."*

  - *"Good quality .html files produced. Good sound quality, easy for non-novice users but a little restricting for more advanced content delivery."*

  - *"Support from staff has been fantastic and enabled me to use it successfully. I would like more time to play with the software however so that I can see its full potential"*

  - *"Support is excellent - iSpring is user friendly and it has many potential applications Colleagues require considerable pedagogical support when it comes to eLearning packages. The notion of taking a PPT and converting straight to an eLearning package is a dangerous one."*

  - *"I found it very hard to use, whilst I can see the clear benefits once you have a grip of the basics, the frustration and the extra time spent trying to "crack it" annoyed me*

> *at time. I think it looks more professional and now I have a handle on it, I think I will find it more useful, really I need to use it more and practice."*

> o *"Hard to do in shared office space, and requires careful scheduling in order to borrow enabled laptops. I'd probably use it more if I had it on my own laptop. I have found it relatively easy to use, but using it more would probably mean I'd use it better - these things need time to play with."*

> o *"Brilliant resource that I will use more and more over the coming years."*

Challenges

1. During all iSpring group and 1-2-1 training sessions for staff, additional emphasis was required in the explanation of the upload and hosting process on eShare. With this common reoccurrence it was noted that staff had little knowledge of the eShare platform. This was an additional system they had to learn to fully use iSpring.

2. When facilitating staff with the creation of their iSpring resources, considerable technical support was needed. These issues usually occurred around customising (non-linear) navigation, branching and settings of playing multimedia, giving users some agency around interactivities. This would be something that could potentially be delivered by LTD as a Developing Digital Excellence (DDE) staff development session for the coming academic year 2015/16.

3. A total of 32 members of staff registered for the project with the aim of adopting iSpring into their content development. It was recorded that only 50% (16) actually engaged in the project and developed content for students. The other 16 members of staff were unfortunately unable to engage with the project due to other professional priorities.

4. Utilising the video and audio features of iSpring relied heavily on the hardware owned by individuals or the availability of kit to in each faculty or department. From the results given in the survey, staff favoured audio over video as the main medium for narration as 64% of users used the tool in their resources compared to 21% usage with video narration. Results also showed that 70% of user's rated audio narration as a very important feature to the development of engaging content compared to 21% for the importance of video narration. Standard PC workstation equipment within the University does not include hardware to record video which could be a resulting factor to the low uptake of video narration. Results did show that 93% of staff owned a mobile device (smartphone/tablet), but no training was delivered on how to record and import from external devices.

5. To install iSpring on an institutional PC, local administrator access is required to run the local .exe installation file which is then followed by an activation wizard as the licenses are managed online by iSpring servers. An issue encountered over the first few months of the project involved a number of machines being reimaged by IT Services and as such the software being removed. This resulted in LTD contacting iSpring to have the license numbers recalculated on their servers.

Next Steps

To improve iSpring software management, staff engagement and the future development of training the project has identified the following actions:

- Provide staff development for all Learning Technology Development team members. This will enable adequate support for current and future staff.

- Engage with all project participants to disseminate their experience exchange via presentations at faculty TEL Steering Groups, written articles for internal newsletters, case study or interview pieces published on the LE blog in the best of TEL Series.

- Production of a new high quality staff guide to facilitate the recording and importing of audio/video narrations from mobile devices.

- Create best practice guidance and advice for faculties around the future purchase of licenses centrally.

- Encourage attendance of an eShare staff development session delivered by Learning Services as a minimum requirement before attending future DDE iSpring sessions (by LTD).

- Identify and redeploy unused iSpring licenses from Early Adopters project.

- Complete license handover to IT Services, including ownership of future license activation and deactivation.