

# **FORDING A ROCKY STREAM: CONNECTING SILOS TO SUPPORT E-LEARNING THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Ryerson University Library in Toronto, Canada, has a strong history of supporting e-learning. Our latest venture is to offer videos from the Library's Audio-Visual collection streamed, through the Blackboard course management system, in order to enhance and expand our users' access to audio-visual e-resources. The lessons learned from implementing our earlier E-Reserve (on-line course readings) project taught us that library teamwork, combined with collaboration with other e-learning stakeholders at the university, are key factors in the success of launching such distributed learning projects.

## **KEYWORDS**

E-Learning; Video Streaming; Collaboration; Academic Libraries

## **1. INTRODUCTION: THE UNIVERSITY, THE LIBRARY AND THE BORROWER SERVICES TEAM**

Libraries are an integral part of a university education, and, in the current digital age, university libraries must be active participants in the e-learning experience in order to remain relevant. At Ryerson University Library, we have a strong history of supporting e-learning through our heavy investment in Web-based full-text electronic databases and e-books, through our early adoption of "chat" e-reference in 2001, and through the implementation of Electronic Reserve (on-line course readings) in 2004. Our latest venture to enhance e-learning is the incorporation of streamed videos, accessible remotely, 24/7, through the university Blackboard portal.

Ryerson University, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, offers more than 80 undergraduate and graduate programs, with an enrollment of over 20,000 full-time students, and a burgeoning Distance Education department. The Ryerson Library collection consists of over 500,000 print books, 3,700 print journal titles, 20,000 e-journals, 7,000 e-books, and 5,000 videos.

In 2002, the Ryerson Library moved to a team-based management structure of three teams: the Borrower Services Team, the Reference, Research and Instruction Team, and the Collections Team (Cheung *et al.* 2003). The newly constituted Borrower Services Team was comprised of Access Services (Circulation and Reserve) and Audio-Visual / Interlibrary Loan. Due to increased funding in 2004, two new librarian positions for this team were created to share the workload, enabling us to embark on new e-learning projects such as E-Reserve and video streaming.

## **2. VIDEO COLLECTION AND ACCESS**

The Library's collection of 5,000 videos is an important teaching resource for our faculty, and is heavily used, both for class presentations and individual review. With the increase in distance education courses, in particular, access to videos was becoming a problem. The Library was anxious to go ahead with video streaming. Its merits for supporting distributed learning are obvious – simultaneous remote access 24/7. Nursing students, in particular, are a large community of off-campus users in a department which relies heavily on instructional videos. In the past, we had purchased videos for one remote location and, in another case, had sent out a set of library videos by mail to another, but these were not satisfactory long-term solutions. In addition, nursing videos, being heavily used, are often physically damaged, and are expensive to replace. There was a different problem with the Business School, which often wanted multiple copies of expensive videos. (Ryerson's Business School, being the largest in Canada, has high enrolments for courses, and divides them into smaller sections with a number of different instructors, many of whom want to have class screenings of the same videos on the same days.) In February 2004, after discussions between the Audio-Visual Librarian and a major Canadian educational video distributor which had a streamed component to their inventory, several scenarios were developed, with reasonable pricing, for offering streamed videos accessible through the Ryerson Library OPAC (on-line public access catalogue). A major attraction of this service was that the Library would not have to do the streaming, find server space at the university, or request copyright permission to stream. We were very excited about this potential development, but, as is the case at most universities, we had a silo to break through. Our hopes for offering streamed video were dashed when we were told unceremoniously by the university's Computing and Communications Services (CCS) that there was not enough bandwidth for the library to proceed with this venture.

## **3. COLLABORATION: LIBRARY, DISTANCE EDUCATION, DIGITAL MEDIA PROJECTS OFFICE**

Meanwhile, in January 2004, the Library had formally started E-Reserve, which provides online access to electronic course readings, linking to articles in licensed databases, or to scanned documents. The close working relationship and cooperation between Borrower Services team members, and the development of useful working partnerships with other stakeholder groups for e-learning within the university made the implementation of the E-Reserve pilot project a significant learning experience for the library (Cheung and Patrick 2004).

Meetings between the BST Librarians, DE, CCS, Digital Media Projects Office (DMP, the department which provides assistance to faculty in the use and production of multimedia technologies for e-teaching and e-learning) to exchange information and ideas played a significant role in raising the library's profile with IT groups at the university. Library was invited by the DMP to enter a test phase of the newly acquired Blackboard Content module, to link to E-Reserve. The university had decided to use Blackboard as the "portal" for all communication with students, and being a member of this project enabled the Library to be seen as a partner in the University's mainstream computing services.

In November 2004, the Library was approached by DE about digitizing and streaming a Library. When we mentioned the bandwidth issue, and were told that this was not a problem for them, we realized that the timing was auspicious to re-look at streaming through the library. The E-Reserve Librarian had now developed a good working relationship with the Coordinator of DMP, and initiated discussions between the Audio-Visual Librarian and DMP on some of the streaming scenarios which had previously been proposed. The DMP consulted with CCS about the possibilities, and in January 2005, the Library given the go-ahead. The Library's raised profile within the IT community at the university had given us the credibility necessary to proceed.

## 4. VIDEO STREAMING

In February 2005, the Audio-Visual Librarian organized a meeting with the streamed video company representative, librarians, DE and DMP. We were given an impressive demonstration of the streamed video system, and we hoped to progress quickly with this project, but then disaster struck. The company went into receivership. With that project on hold indefinitely, we had to change directions. As well as technical considerations like bandwidth, there were copyright implications with video streaming. To comply with Canadian Copyright Laws, the Library must purchase public performance rights for any video to be screened in the classroom, but these rights do not cover permission for digitization, which must be requested in addition to PPR. During the Spring/Summer 2005, we began to request permission from distributors to digitize and stream Library-held videos in-house through DMP, linking them through Blackboard for courses in a range of subject areas. Streaming was new territory for our video distributors, most of whom did not yet have a pricing structure for digitization rights, and were operating on a case-by-case basis. We began discussions on pricing for various models of access. The restricted (course-specific, password-protected) Blackboard model has been preferred by most distributors so far, and for this reason, streamed videos have been integrated with E-Reserve.

Requests for streamed videos were added to the on-line E-Reserve Request form, and these digitization and streaming requests are processed through the Audio-Visual acquisitions staff member to the video distributors. A form was developed for library staff to use for requesting digitization permission for both audio-visuals to be streamed, as well as for text-based material to be scanned. This form has been made available on the Library Web page so that faculty can also use it to request permission to digitize non-library materials. We also had to consider the cost factor, and costs are monitored and approved by the Audio-Visual Librarian, so far on a case-by-case basis.

Now that processes have begun to be clarified, the Library is highlighting the streaming feature within E-Reserve and DE are promoting streamed videos to their instructors for the Fall term. The Library has produced an on-line tutorial, using the Camtasia software, for DE instructors on how to request streamed library videos and this will be accessible through the Library Web page, as well as the DE Web page. Although the water has been rocky, the Audio-Visual, E-Reserve and PR departments of the Borrower Services Team, following past experiences, are continuing to collaborate with other stakeholder groups on campus, working course-by-course, to build up our collection of streamed videos, with the ultimate goal of expanding our users' remote access to audio-visual resources to enhance the e-learning experience.

## REFERENCES

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