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Creating ePub eBooks to Enhance Student Learning

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Case Study - Creating ePub eBooks to Enhance Student Learning

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Abstract/Executive Summary

For the past decade or so, I have created primary document readers for my class using copyright-permitted documents or documents where the author has granted permission for educational purposes. These would usually be about 200-300 pages. I would send them to the copy center for binding and then these would be sold in the bookstore to the students. The cost to the student was about $15-20.

There were three issues that were of concern. First, these books were not too expensive, but I was exploring ways to move the sourcebooks online so the students did not have this cost. Also, there were always problems determining how many sourcebooks to order since some students would share. Unsold books were charged to my department. Second, I wanted the students to be able to have the documents in class during discussion. This would necessitate having the documents in a format where they would be available on multiple devices - phones, laptops, tablets, iPads, Nooks, etc. Third, I did not want to simply link to the documents due to the fact that online links sometimes disappear. I also wanted the students to be able to work offline in case they did not have access to the Internet.

Estimated timeline to develop: If all content is already written or identified and cleared for copyright, we currently estimate 10-15 .doc/PDF pages converted per hour.

Procedures

Using an ebook program seemed like a good idea. I consulted with IT and decided to use epubbud. This program has some advantages. First, it can work on any reader except for a Kindle. Second, it is pretty easy to learn. Third, it is free. Fourth, the books produced can be kept private. This was an important consideration because many of the documents and articles I wanted to use granted permission only for educational use and I felt that having these publicly on the web would be violating this. I also learned that articles from the Ebesco databases could be included in the ebook free of charge since the book was not public.

I began to download all of the document files and to copy these into the epubbud site. The actual process of copying the documents into the program is very easy though somewhat time consuming. As we were testing the book on different devices, it became clear that the formatting (paragraph breaks, title headings, bold/italic) was lost when the file was downloaded onto some devices, especially Android, iPhones and iPads. In order to make sure the documents

were easier to read, I went back into the documents and added the html code to ensure the formatting remained in

place. This was quite time consuming, though not complex.

Another issue to consider is that all of the different devices will display the documents in different fonts. Therefore, there are no universal page numbers. Since I require the students to write papers using these documents, I needed to figure out how they would cite the material. Also, in discussion, I would need to figure out a way to keep everyone on the same page, so to speak. Therefore, I went into the documents and added paragraph numbers to the start of each paragraph. Again, this was not difficult to do, but did take some time.

Results

Student response was overall very positive. They definitely liked the fact that it was free. In addition, because pages could be printed, those who preferred to have a hard copy simply printed the book and brought it to class. Since a lot of students have smart phones, an ebook also avoided the problem of students forgetting to bring their books to class. Even on days when I was not planning on using the book, if something came up in class discussion, we could easily reference multiple copies of the documents. Since the book was online, I also had the ability to add to it during the semester. In the case of Modern Russia, I knew that the Russian presidential elections were going to be in March. Using an epub, instead of a printed book, I was able to include a section of articles in early April discussing different reactions to Putin being elected president again. This allowed for much more flexibility and the opportunity for me to have a central place to add documents as the semester continued. I would tell the students if the book had been updated so they could download the new version.

Lessons Learned

For the students, the main negative was highlighting and annotating the text. Depending upon the device they were using, it either was not possible to highlight material or it was a multi-part process that took significantly longer than a physical highlighter on paper. Annotation was even more complex. Most students, however, agreed that they still preferred to have the ebook because of the price and the easy accessibility.

Resources

eBook authoring tools

Epub Bud epubbud.com (web-based)
Supports hyperlinking, will embed media (supported by iOS readers) Formats in ePub and usable in multiple readers and the web.

Pages (Apple program)
Supports hyperlinking, embedded media Formats to ePub fluidly

iBooks Author (Apple programRequires Mac Lion platform)
Supports hyperlinking Works only on iPad iBooks

Distribution

FoxTALE
Resource link in a course site can be opened by devices

Dropbox
Ubiquitous file transfer for computers and mobile devices

Foxfiles

Upload to Foxfiles, by creating a public eBooks folder in Foxfiles, copying the Full URL or Intellilink. Share the link in FoxTALE, email, etc.

iGFU

Link to epub file displays within student's view of course

Do not use iTunesU since this is Open Textbook only.

Readers

iBooks

Use iTunes to load ePub file into iBooks library (synch operation)

Use Dropbox

Plays embedded media offline

Operates with all of iBook's functionality (i.e. highlighting, notes, dictionary, search, copy)

Adobe Editions

Adobe Editions is a free reader that can be used on computer and Android mobile devices.

Use Dropbox to transfer epub file onto computer

Supports graphics and active hyperlinks, but does not support embedded video.

Includes bookmarking and annotation. *Firefox ePub Reader*

Use Dropbox to move ePub file onto computer

ePub Reader add-on launches when opening the ePub file using the browser (File>Open file)

Hyperlinks are functional; embedded media not supported

Supports bookmarking

No annotation

Aldiko

Google Android app (not yet tested)

Go to fbreader.org