

Best Practices

ONLINE LEARNING

TEXTBOOK STRATEGIES FOR VIDEO EDUCATION



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Ten Tips for Selecting an Enterprise

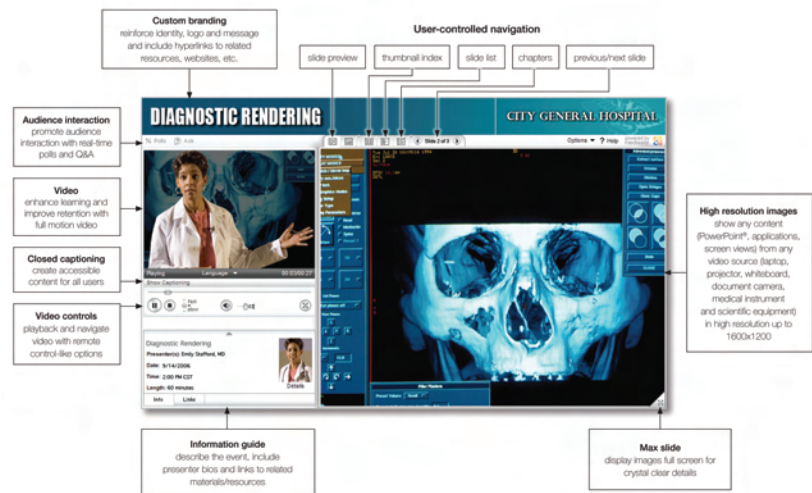
Webcasting Platform

from Ten Leaders in Online Education

Every day, we work with hundreds of customers who are just now dipping their proverbial toes in the webcasting water, trying to gauge if the hype is true: Will webcasting really enhance my instruction and conserve resources at the same time?

To you there on the edge, we boldly say, “Come on in; the water’s fine.” But don’t take our word for it.

We pulled insights from over three dozen corporate and education case studies to build this list of the top ten criteria you should cling to as you choose your enterprise webcasting platform. To learn more about these webcasting leaders, go to www.sonicfoundry.com/10by10.



1. Simplicity

By now, most organizations have created some kind of online multimedia content, but if it required significant work from highly skilled staff with production and authoring expertise, the chances that it will become a daily mode of communication are slim.

Webcasting must be simple. Your presenter needs to be able to walk into a room at 9:00 a.m., turn on a laptop to start teaching or training, know that the system is automatically recording everything, and then automatically shut itself off at 10:00 a.m. With that kind of automation, it’s now possible to envision capturing and webcasting every lecture on campus or every session in the training facility. Plus, the entire process is transparent to the presenter so there’s no onus for additional training.

“My gold standard for successful technology is a solution that faculty can quickly embrace. The return on investment comes not so much from the price point

as the time savings. The value is that we’re completely finished at the end of the lecture,” says Tim Pletcher, director of applied research at the Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow College of Health Professions at **Central Michigan University**. “With [Sonic Foundry’s] Mediasite, it’s instantaneous. As soon as the instructor stops speaking, that content is indexed, archived, and available. The future of distance education is the ability to quickly produce and disseminate high quality content, and that is exactly what Mediasite is all about.”

Today’s enterprise content producers are also looking to avoid time-consuming editing tools. Churning out the quantity of webcasts required by an enlightened enterprise necessitates automated capture and live or instantaneous playback, eliminating the need for post-production editing.

2. Quality Rich Media Experience

For the newly initiated, the term “webcast”

may throw up red flags because most folks have experienced watered-down presentation visuals that are hard to read. Both knowledge workers and students alike require high-resolution image (VGA) capture to get the most out of online instruction, yet enterprises need to capture efficiently to minimize bandwidth constraints.

Advances in both video and graphics capture now yield a multitude of viewing options, from the ability to focus entirely on the video or simply audio plus slide images, to larger frame sizes and quality of both video and graphics, to wide-screen and high-definition delivery.

“Our professors really love it,” says Seán O’Donnell, director of distance education at **Villanova University** College of Engineering. “To be honest, they were a little disheartened by our earlier distance education efforts because they couldn’t use their computer images. With Mediasite, that’s no longer an issue. Now they can

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Your checklist for choosing the right webcasting platform for your enterprise

1. Simplicity

- No presenter training required—plug in and present
- Scheduling and automated recording
- Integration with room control systems like Crestron® or AMX®
- Simple browser-based viewing—no plugins or downloads

2. Quality Rich Media Experience

- Automatic synchronization of audio, video, and graphics
- Capture and display of graphics at native resolution
- Flexible capture options (laptop, tablet, e-board, doc camera)
- Customizable viewing interface
- Efficient use of bandwidth

3. Interactivity

- Visual, auditory, and kinesthetic elements to aid knowledge transfer
- Moderated Q&A
- Polls with real-time results
- Custom links to web pages and reference material
- Accessibility for all users (closed captioning, screen readers)

4. Content Navigation

- Image thumbnails
- Chaptering
- Video timeline with adjustable playback speed
- Keyword search

5. Content Management

- Automatic publishing to customizable online catalogs
- Content indexing
- Multi-modal search—OCR, phonetic, and contextual
- Customizable playback experiences
- Content editing

teach the way they want, using all of the complex, high-resolution images that are so essential to engineering courses.”

You’ll want the flexibility to produce fully synchronized content in all sorts of layouts and dimensions based on your audience and the information you need to communicate, so don’t compromise. Even a fully loaded spreadsheet in eight-point type should be readable with the right solution. Also, be sure to look for a solution that gives you tons of flexibility to customize the viewing interface with your logo, colors, and other branding elements.

3. Interactivity

Webcasting is a powerful learning medium because it engages the audience with both auditory and visual information through video and graphic aids and kinesthetically by typing a question, using navigation, or taking a poll. To make the biggest impact, people require instruction that incorporates all three of these forms of communication.

“I love Mediasite,” says John Heinrichs, assistant professor in library and information science at **Wayne State University**. “It’s a whole new way of teaching. Now I can stop and run polls to see if students understand the content. I can see if there are any questions being keyed into the moderator function and answer those right away.”

To create webcasts that emulate in-person communication, ensure your platform offers polling, Q&A, ways to link to related reference materials, and accessibility through closed captioning and screen readers. However, be careful not to get hung up on live chat. Experienced presenters avoid chat functionality because they want their viewers focused on the instruction,

not chatting fanatically with other online participants—the equivalent of passing notes in class.

4. Content Navigation

From VCRs to TiVo®, the days of watching video from start to finish are long gone. Online, as in our living rooms, we yearn to click, to fast forward, to replay that five-second section of the program one more time.

This need to navigate is also driven by the true value of webcasting in the enterprise—on-demand delivery. The majority of our customers report an increase in on-demand over live viewing. Their audiences eschew being forced to sit through the entire presentation just to find that one piece of information they require. Moreover, enterprises that webcast their one-to-many messages, briefings, and trainings are realizing significant productivity and cost savings by moving to an on-demand communication model.

“The navigation feature allows our teachers to get what they want and then move on,” says Valerie Biggs, staff development coordinator for **Richmond Community Schools**. “Even when they watch the event live, often they’ll want to go back and review a specific portion, so it’s great for that as well. We call it just-in-time professional development.”

To support a non-linear mode of viewing, look for a system that automatically generates navigation controls such as image thumbnails and indexes, and provides for chaptering and other customizable navigation elements. You should be able to click on a specific session and see the audio, video, and graphics automatically synchronize to that precise moment in the webcast.

5. Content Management

It may be hard to imagine having thousands of hours of webcast content when you are just getting started. Many selection committees operate under the belief that they will only webcast a couple of live, high-profile events. But rest assured, once you have a couple successful events safely under your belt, it will only be a matter of time before other departments start coming out of the woodwork wanting to do more.

“We knew from the onset that we wanted to create and distribute an enormous amount of content and did not want to depend on a provider who forced us to work through them, thus creating another step in the process,” says Cary Bergman, associate technical analyst for **EMC Insurance Companies**. “Mediasite allows us to create and control the delivery of our content in one seamless solution and also allows us to view content as many times as we would like—similar solutions we looked at did not allow for this all-important feature.”

More businesses and universities are looking to bring all of their multimedia assets under a unified content or learning-management umbrella. Through proper server and system configuration, you can plan to automatically publish and categorize thousands of hours of webcasts into custom catalogs, and have them commingle with those dusty VHS tapes you finally got around to digitizing.

Yet the question remains: Now that you have those thousands of hours of video, audio, graphics, and text, how do you and your users automatically find the one shred of information you need when you know nothing about the content? Our customers are looking to the next wave of search for the answer, where we can apply optical

character recognition of presentation images, phonetic processing of the audio stream, language models, and contextual filters to search rich media content (see **www.mediasite.com** for a demonstration).

6. Security

For organizations facing intellectual property issues, or anyone who doesn't want their corporate video to wind up on YouTube, there is a serious need to control access to both live and on-demand webcasts. However, finding a way to communicate restricted information in both a secure and convenient format can be a challenge.

“As we transition from a nuclear weapons stockpile-maintenance focus to a wider variety of research and development, we are constantly exploring ways we can continue to share the information we are discovering,” says Rogulja Wolf, streaming system and content manager at **Sandia National Laboratories**. “We kept looking for a complete solution that would allow us to purchase, use, and maintain only one system, not several. It was not acceptable to adopt a solution that just worked okay.”

Streaming offers an effective way to create, manage, and distribute content within strict security settings. Look for a webcasting platform that allows system administrators to assign role-based access and permissions using Microsoft® Active Directory or LDAP. Take into account your needs for single-point authentication and secure transfer of images and video on your network as well.

7. Reporting

In corporate and investor communications, the presenting executive will undoubtedly ask, “Who's watching?” while universities will want to know if there are spikes in

6. Security

- Presentation and catalog viewing permissions
- System access security
- Active Directory and LDAP integration
- Single-point authentication
- Secure FTP transfer of images and video

7. Reporting

- Playback stats for live and on-demand content
- Viewer stats of who watched what, when, for how long
- Server usage statistics
- Export of reports

8. Scalability

- Quantifiable return on investment
- Flexible content distribution options
- Load balancing for high availability and redundancy
- Web services API for integration into other enterprise applications
- Enterprise database support

9. Flexible Distribution Options

- Live webcasts
- On-demand archives
- Portable content publishing (podcast, CD, DVD, USB)
- Multicast support
- CDN support
- Integration with videoconferencing, content and learning management systems

10. Service and Support

- Accessible technical support team
- Quality staff who listen
- Clear feedback loop and consistent follow up
- Online knowledge base and support tools
- Established user group

on-demand viewing just before exams. Reporting is an important data source to better understand who your audience is and whether or not they've absorbed the material you are producing.

“Students are taking advantage of the Mediasite offering at a level we did not

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anticipate. Our advanced students in the new Scholars Program are using Mediasite when they cannot attend portions of the lecture series,” says Tom Gardner, vice president and chief information officer of the IT Department at **Ross University**. “They are viewing classroom content at a time that is convenient for them. Other students are using Mediasite to review lecture material before exams.”

Choose a system that provides viewing statistics for all of your live and on-demand presentations. If tracking individual viewing patterns is important, ensure that your platform will provide playback stats, durations, and viewing activity for all registered users. You should be able to dive in and see specifically when a user entered and exited the presentation and how many times he or she accessed it. These reports are valuable not only for reporting on viewership, but also planning for the network requirements of your deployment.

8. Scalability

Presenters and viewers may consider any online solution an improvement over coordinating more labor-intensive, on-site meetings, yet many technologies have limitations that keep them from being stable and cost-effective in large group settings.

While you want a webcasting platform that allows content specialists to share information quickly, you also want to avoid a pay-as-you-go solution that leads to high costs to produce your own content. Similarly, you shouldn't be locked into a platform that requires highly specialized or technical operators and editors.

“Not only did we want a recording and archiving system, but also a product that

would allow us to expand its use as we become more proficient at implementing it throughout our organization,” explains Peter Gorton, presentation services coordinator at **Faegre & Benson**.

IT leadership is increasingly sourcing enterprise applications that are built for long-term flexibility. Your webcasting platform should be designed to integrate into the larger infrastructure of the organization. In this setting, content is usable over time across departments, and centralized IT services can plan for network issues like load balancing and incorporating webcast content within custom applications, as well as database integration and support.

9. Distribution

Be sure you have multiple options when it comes to getting the content out, whether it is through traditional unicast streaming, multicasting, or a centralized or third-party content distribution network (CDN).

Meanwhile on the viewing end, the preference is for browseragnostic web-based playback that doesn't require proprietary downloads. Students and workers don't want to waste time downloading yet another plugin, sometimes failing to get past company firewalls, to watch your streamed content.

“Mediasite enabled us to rapidly develop and deploy rich media presentations across a broad range of applications, networks, and devices in a way we never knew possible,” says Oliver Tsai, director of information technology for **Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre**. “During regional pandemic planning, Mediasite was invaluable. Mediasite became an essential tool that allowed us to communicate with as many people as possible in a short amount of time.”

You'll want to be able to webcast live and archive a presentation at the same time, or publish it as a podcast or on CD, DVD, or USB. Consider exploring integration with other presentation technologies too, like videoconferencing solutions and content or learning management systems.

10. Service and Support

Ultimately, choosing the right enterprise webcasting solution is always about people—the people who will use the system day-to-day to create, watch, and manage content, and the people behind the product. While your selection should still be highly automated and easy to use (never compromise on tip #1), it should also be backed with quality service and support, which will be reassuring for self-admitted non-technical people who may be the system owners or primary users.

“The implementation process was very easy,” says Thomas Overby, vice president of technical services for **Virtual-OR**. “The Sonic Foundry staff answered all of our questions and assisted our team.”

We also recommend working with a provider who actively seeks out your input on applications and enhancements, and then incorporates that feedback into their product road map. Ask to talk with their technical support team, product managers and, if they have one, members of their user group. In the end, a willingness to listen will yield the best results to guarantee your enterprise webcasting implementation runs smoothly for years to come.

ABOUT SONIC FOUNDRY

Sonic Foundry (www.sonicfoundry.com) is a technology leader in the emerging rich media communications marketplace, providing enterprise webcasting solutions and services that link an information driven world.