

Learning Management Systems: Integrating Services & Content Transcript



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Hello, my name is Chad Mairn and I am an Information Services Librarian and adjunct instructor at the West Community Library at St. Petersburg College. I wish I was able to make the trip to be physically with all of you today, but thanks to modern Internet technology I will be there after this video presentation to answer any questions that you may have. Also, the screenshots and my references will be available at www.slideshare.net/chadmairn.

Before discussing how I integrate services and content into Learning Management Systems, oftentimes referred to as Course Management Systems, I'd like to speak just a little about where I work. The West St. Petersburg Community Library is a joint-use library. This partnership is between [St. Petersburg College](#), which has grown from a two-year junior college to a four-year state college, and the [City of St. Petersburg Florida](#). We provide users with a great range of library materials and services in one library with the help of public funds and by sharing operating and staffing costs. So, we serve public library users, students and faculty.

Today, I plan to talk about how one can incorporate a variety of, for the most part, freely available technologies to help make library resources more visible and usable within Course Management Systems, which I will now refer to as CMSs for the remainder of this talk. One thing to keep in mind, however, is that even though I am focusing this talk more towards academic libraries that a public and/or a special library could incorporate everything that I discuss today! And you don't really need to spend a ridiculous amount of money because there are open-source CMSs that can provide distance learning opportunities for your users.

Although there are many ways to seamlessly incorporate library resources into CMSs, I plan to discuss how I've included and shown faculty how to include mashups, RSS feeds, desktop sharing, Jing, Twitter, and embedded librarians into our CMS – ANGEL -- to help make our courses more dynamic and meaningful to students. By the way, everything I mention today will work in any

CMS because the technologies used are common technologies like HTML, JavaScript and others.

Perhaps the easiest and most used method for integrating content into a CMS is to create persistent links. Many professors are now starting to include persistent links to eBooks and other electronic content within their course syllabi and within their online courses. Face-to-face courses also have access to our CMS so these resources are available to those students as well.

In addition to using persistent links, I create course accounts in NetLibrary, EBSCO and other online services so that students can have more quality time to digest and reflect on course-related content because there are pre-defined searches, journal alerts, eBooks, notes and more that are easily accessible. It is great because students don't have to jump through several hoops to find the content. The content you want them to have is already there! Of course, I do provide my students and other users that visit the library (and those who don't) ample opportunities to discover information on their own.

Meebo, Skype, Yahoo, Facebook, Google Talk, and many other chat/Voice Over IP applications are easy to incorporate into CMSs. That way you can be where your users are at their point of need. I login to Meebo, Google Talk, and an SPC-developed application every morning and the widgets are available in my online courses as well as on my web pages. These synchronous communication tools are used equally, if not more, than email. I am also available to answer student questions via Facebook, Twitter, text messaging, and most recently, via Google Voice. Of course, I provide parameters in the course syllabi that state when I am available because I would not be very happy to get a phone call at 2am.

Mashups are an excellent way to modify existing applications or freely available content into something more meaningful and useful that you can easily incorporate into CMSs or library websites. For example, Yahoo Pipes has a

visual interface that allows you to move configurable modules to a canvas where you can then rewire them to other modules using your mouse. I very rarely create my own Pipe from scratch. Instead I browse existing Pipes, modify them, and then save them to suite my needs. For my basic computer and information literacy classes, I modified an existing Pipe that fetches technology news feeds from multiple sources using RSS, truncates each feed to only 5 items, uses the Union Module to merge up to 5 separate sources into a single list of items, sorts them by title, and uses the Unique Module to remove duplicate items. After I run the pipe and confirm that it works, I integrate it into my online course. I then ask students to visit the pipe weekly, which to them appears automatically as an updated web page in the CMS, and to pick an interesting article to read and then present to their classmates via the discussion board or through their Twitter accounts. I'll discuss Twitter in more detail later.

According to Wikipedia, RSS (or "Really Simple Syndication") is "a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated works" like blog postings, news headlines, audio, video -- pretty much anything electronic into "a standardized format." The mashup that I just described works primarily because of RSS. So, if you don't feel inclined to tackle the slight learning curve involved with creating or modifying mashups, you can almost effortlessly add RSS feeds into your CMS.

For RSS, I conduct searches in popular databases, like Academic Search Complete, and find the RSS button for a particular search, or a journal alert, or whatever. Then all I do is copy the URL and build the feed using Feed2js.org. It takes a few minutes to change some of the feed's display characteristics, like 'number of items to display' or 'to show or hide the item descriptions.' Once you've made your changes you can preview the feed to see if Feed2JS can find your RSS feed and displays it properly. If it works, then all you need to do is select the 'Generate JavaScript' button, copy the code, and paste it into a web page inside your CMS. It is really that easy! Now, your students have content automatically coming to them within the CMS. Keep in mind that if you don't have

seamless authentication within your CMS that your students or faculty members will need to login at some point. Regardless, they will see the titles and description or whatever else you decide you want them to see.

There are plenty of desktop sharing applications available online, but my institution created their own. Our application, called Desktop Presenter works very well and it allows me to share in real-time my computer desktop to multiple participants. I can share an application such as Excel to explain difficult concepts or to narrate a PowerPoint presentation. Anything on my computer can be displayed to the participants. Everyone involved in a session can interact with each other either through chat or by using a microphone on their machines. I've been wanting to do more of this type of work with faculty members.

The free version of Jing is a powerful way to casually talk to your students, library users, or faculty instead of trying to explain something in text. Or, of course, you could use Jing or some other screencasting application to enhance your textual explanations. So, I use Jing to create quick visual feedback on submitted assignments or to answer difficult questions. I've also used Jing to demonstrate how to conduct searches via our LibX and our LINCCWeb browser toolbars, how to use Zotero citations, and much more. Here is an example of a Jing demonstrating how to use our new LINCCWeb toolbar.

Twitter is an exciting social networking and microblogging service that utilizes instant messaging, SMS, the web interface, or a multitude of third-party applications. I've been using Twitter since early 2007 and really love it, so I decided to introduce it to my students too. For me, Twitter is a discovery tool as well as a sharing tool.

For now, this assignment is not mandatory, but I do offer the Twitter experience as extra credit. I ask students to fix up our class Twitter page by adding a profile picture or a cool background, or to follow other interesting Twitterers, or to

"tweet" with a class #hashtag with the hopes of starting class conversations outside the classroom, or to track certain words, and that sort of thing. I want my students to explore Twitter by actually using Twitter. You really can't read about Twitter to truly understand its power. I do emphasize that once you click on the "Update" button that whatever you tweet becomes public and they understand how this could possibly impact them in the future. The last 2 semesters I've seen more than 40 of my students go beyond the class Twitter page and create their own Twitter accounts. They love it! In fact, I haven't heard a negative response, comment, tweet, reTweet, or @reply yet! I also ask students to send me direct messages via Twitter so that I can reply with a quick answer. There are quite a few students who use this!

The embedded librarian concept is great because it allows for librarians to be integrated in online courses and to be able to provide, in many cases, real-time guidance to library services and resources. I've created a simple web page that includes an application for instant messaging and video conferencing, links to basic library resources and research tools, my contact information, and an Ask-a-Librarian widget just in case I am not logged in so that students can have a personal research assistant when they need it.

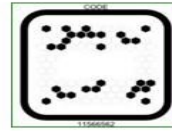
Faculty members only need to link to my embedded librarian web page that is located within our CMS's institutional repository and they do not need to be concerned with updating the web page or re-linking to it each semester because I do that behind the scenes. So, once it is updated in one place it is updated everywhere! I do provide an embedded librarian flyer to faculty members who teach face-to-face so that they can integrate my resources and services into their courses since all our face-to-face classes have an online presence too.

As we all know, the web, and more recently, mobile environments provide more visibility to our amazing collection of library resources. For me, it is all about the discovery process! I get energized when I follow technology trends and see

disruptive technologies that are positively impacting the way we do things. However, I become more passionate and philosophically charged when a technology is supposed to make libraries irrelevant. Clay Shirky said that "Revolution doesn't happen when society adopts new technologies - it happens when society adopts new behaviors" and we can see this more so today because every second of everyday technology allows for more and more great content to be discovered, shared, reflected upon ... and people are getting used to this. It is such a wonderful time to be a library professional!

I've just scratched the surface here today. There are so many other innovative and practical ways to integrate services and content into CMSs and way beyond. Some haven't even been thought of yet and that is why this conference is so important! My contact information including the link to my SlideShare page will be displayed. I want to thank you for listening and please do not hesitate to contact me to share your ideas, provide feedback, and/or to ask questions.

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