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Specialized Tutorials for Specialized Resources: Using Interactive Guide on the Side Tutorials for Special Libraries Reference and Instruction

Ilana Stonebraker
Purdue University, stonebraker@purdue.edu

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Special Libraries, Special Challenges Column

Special Libraries, Special Challenges is a column dedicated to exploring the unique public services challenges that arise in libraries that specialize in a particular subject, such as law, medicine, business, and so forth. In each column, the author will discuss public service dilemmas and solutions that arise specifically in given subject libraries while drawing links to how such issues affect librarianship in general. Special or subject-matter librarians interested in authoring a piece for this column are invited to contact Ilana Stonebraker at stonebraker@purdue.edu.

This column is written by column editor Ilana Stonebraker. Ilana Stonebraker is Assistant Professor at Purdue University Libraries and Business Information Specialist based at Parrish Library of Management and Economics.

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Comments and suggestions should be sent to the Column Editor: Ilana Stonebraker, Business Information Specialist, Purdue University Libraries-MGMT, 504 W. State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907. E-mail: stonebraker@purdue.edu

Specialized Tutorials for Specialized Resources: Using Interactive Guide on the Side Tutorials for Special Libraries Reference and Instruction

What is Guide on the Side?

Guide on the Side is an interactive tutorial software created and realized openly by the University of Arizona. It was developed when library reference desk staff discovered that they were answering the same question from a large group of students in a general education class at the University of Arizona. In-class instruction was not possible, but the librarians investigated ways to accomplish hands-on instruction online (Sult, Mery, Blakiston, & Kline, 2013). Guide on the Side differs from non-interactive online tutorials like screencasting in that students actively navigate the database in one side of the split screen while the other screen offers step-by-step directions from the librarian or other expert. The system also allows for quizzes and reflection questions (e.g. how many results did you find?). An example of Guide on the Side (GotS) tutorial is viewable on the University of Arizona website:

http://code.library.arizona.edu/gots-sample/tutorial/google-scholar---popup-demo . An example of how a tutorial might look at our library is viewable in video form here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT0P_yaht3Y.

Our library first became interested in GotS tutorials when we were working on redesigning a for-credit information literacy course for the business students. We were moving the class from a computer lab classroom to a larger team-based classroom and working for ways to move our specialized instruction on library databases out of the classroom and into online tutorials. We had not been very impressed by how students performed after short video tutorials and were looking for methods to deliver our specialized instruction in other methods. Our use of

GotS quickly spread to our popular Database of the Week email service and into our reference and user instruction workflows.

Possible uses of Guide on the Side for specialized librarians and libraries

Guide on the Side was created specifically as a reference triage, allowing librarians to walk a large number of students through the databases without overwhelming the references desk. Special librarians also often staff reference desks in limited hours, but more generalized reference librarians staff desks at others times. Tools such as Guide on the Side are very useful tools for aiding non-specialized library staff in providing more contextual answers for questions. As often special libraries have reference desks with smaller hours, this is also very attractive.

As well as aiding librarians at the reference, Guide on the Side can also assist in the training in new staff or librarians. Guide on the Side was designed for undergraduate students using library database tutorials but could also be used for other more complicated web-based platforms developed by other departments such as human resources, travel, procurement or acquisitions. I have had faculty at Purdue interested in using the system for teaching graduate assistant online research systems. A benefit of the Guide on the Side system is that the tutorials don't have to be made by high level administrators but could be created by a wide variety of staff for other staff.

In addition to reference triage and staff training, Guide on the Side can also be used information literacy tutorials. The quiz and open questions functionality can be used for formative or summative assessment. The tutorials are scaled to a wide variety of classrooms.

Benefits of Guide on the Side for special librarians

One of the largest benefits that interactive tutorials have is that they allow specialized librarians to provide specialized reference and instruction fast and professionally. A professional

screencast that meets accessibility standards takes several hours to make, but a script to put into

Guide on the Side onto takes approximately 30 minutes. Currently at our library, we do both

Youtube screencasts and Guide on the Side tutorials. We currently do this because on a script has

been made for one it is relatively small time to do both, less than an hour added. There is often a

pressure with tutorials to make them very general so that they can appear to the large audience.

In GotS, the emphasis is on showing something specific that a user can click in the system, so the

emphasis is on walking the user through something that they can use. For example, our library

recently made a tutorial called "Using Mergers and Acquisitions Data in Thomson One" which

focused on g some very specific information out of a database. A task like this one is one in

which librarians may do rarely. A GotS on this topic is very useful for librarians who may have

never had to do this specific task.

Another benefit of using GotS for specialized library resources is that the update time.

GotS have a much longer shelve life with other types of tutorials. With even the smallest

interface change on resources, screencasts need to be redone. GotS tutorials, since they walk

individuals though a group of procedural steps do not need to be changed out unless the steps a

user would have to use have changed. For smaller libraries with less staff, the update burden is

much less.

A final and critical benefit for using GotS for special libraries is that of pedagogy. Rather

than libraries showing users how to find things in specific resources, users are exploring the

databases in the GotS setup. The tutorial interface puts users into the systems they want to learn

and allows them to explore at their own pace with a set of steps. From a theoretical perspective,

GotS supports active learning. Students may be more likely to construct real knowledge when

they use information they uncover to achieve a goal, rather than when they read pages of web

content or in this case watch videos (Dewald, Scholz-Crane, Booth, & Levine, 2000). In the two studies that were found comparing different types of supplemental online tutorials, the more interactive tutorials provided greater student gains versus the more static tutorials (Anderson & Wilson, 2009; Craig & Friehs, 2013). More than just a service, library tutorials are created to teach users to be independent learners who can use the resources for their own betterment as for the libraries.

Challenges of interactive tutorials

Guide on the Side uses iframes, which are not ideal in terms of accessibility for those patrons using screen readers. When a visually impaired patron goes to your normal database site, they get all sorts of information which is missing in an iframe. Screen-readers just see an iframe which they cannot interact with. One of the goals of tutorials is to increase access to the resources, which fails in terms of iframes. Special libraries should be aware of this issue as they often use imbed code to put Youtube videos or PDFs onto webpages. These resources may not be viewable to some users. University of Arizona is improving the code, so perhaps the iframe issues may be fixed in the future.

Interactive tutorials are also not very widely used outside of librarianship. The lack of use of interactive tutorials can be good or bad, but it may mean that a patron who comes across your tutorial might not know what to do next. While users are generally enthusiastic about the GotS service, marketing the tutorials is often a challenge as the idea of an interactive doesn't translate as easily as a Youtube tutorial. Often, users do not know that they can click on the page, or that what they are looking at isn't the "real version" of the website. Often I observed that whenever students would want to return to the resource covered in the website tutorial, they would often just return to the GotS tutorial even though they no longer needed the procedural help. This is a

problem as the tutorial itself shows them how to the resource from the library homepage. So if they had reached the learn objectives from the tutorial, they wouldn't make this error.

Assessment

Assessment is still underway and somewhat challenging at our library. A previous study found that users were slight more satisfied with screencasts than GotS (Mikkelsen & McMunn-Tetangco, 2014) when presented with both tutorials, but there are many problems with presenting a user with two redundant tutorials and asking them to choose one that they prefer. A better metric would be use of GotS tutorials versus screencasts, which is a mixed bag. As of this writing, Parrish Library has made 28 GotS tutorials. These tutorials are advertised through weekly Database of the Week emails that go out to our users. The use of these tutorials vary widely from 991 hits in 2014 (a tutorial on how to use Mergent Online) to 1 (a tutorial about how to MyWorldAbroad). As the library started making screencasts before they started making tutorials, the numbers are also slightly different as many of the videos have been in existence longer than you the GotS tutorials. Since the use of any particular tutorial is contingent on the context of its deployment, it hard to tell whether users truly prefer the tutorials. Research is being conducted by many in academia on users in undergraduate education (Mery, DeFrain, Kline, & Sult, 2014) which may be of use to practitioners in the future who are looking at possible return on investment for the community. These findings from undergraduate environments may be of use to those working with specialized resources such a health or law libraries.

Conclusion

As part of providing the best possible services for our users, libraries should continue to evaluate technologies for use in Special Libraries. GotS tutorials offer many benefits for special libraries. They offer special librarians the ability to scale our specialized instruction to large

populations in corporate and academic settings. As libraries continue to experiment with online instruction, they should continue to share the tutorials they make. A benefit of the Guide on the Side system is that the tutorials are standardized enough and easy enough to create that basic scripts can be shared across institutions, allowing us to scale our specialized instructions not just to our larger institutions but also across institutions to enhance library user experience and spread our reach deep into the disciplines and professions.

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