Today, it is widely accepted that instructional videos provide many benefits over live instruction, including allowing people to learn at their own pace, on their own schedule, and from wherever they choose. A common technique for producing instructional videos is screencasting, a process that allows people to record what is happening on their computer screens and turn it into videos. Screencasting presents law librarians with a valuable opportunity to provide direct instruction to users that they can access freely and flexibly. That said, many law librarians may find that developing a screencast series for the first time is a daunting task. We at the Tarlton Law Library should know: we recently completed our first screencasting

A how-to guide for incorporating screencasting videos into your lessons.

BY ALISA HOLAHAN, JOE NOEL & LEI ZHANG
series. This article provides guidance to law librarians interested in incorporating the production of screencasts into their instructional activities.

Preparation
The first step in creating screencasting videos is making preliminary decisions, including choosing the right software, figuring out what equipment is necessary, developing the content of the videos, and determining the length.

Software
Numerous free and low-cost software options are available for creating screencast videos, including Screencast-O-Matic, TechSmith’s Snagit, and Apowersoft’s Screen Recorder. There are also a number of more expensive tools, such as Adobe Captivate, TechSmith’s Camtasia, and Telestream’s ScreenFlow (Macs only). At Tarlton, we use Camtasia, which is straightforward to learn and has extensive editing features. Tarlton librarians plan to continue creating screencast videos, making the additional cost worthwhile.

Equipment
A library can create a polished and engaging video with only a modest investment in recording equipment. One of the most important pieces of equipment is a good quality microphone. Fortunately, an affordable USB desktop microphone can vastly improve a video’s audio quality over that of a computer’s microphone. Tarlton purchased the Blue Snowball iCE condenser microphone, a popular USB desktop microphone available at a reasonable price, with a cardioid (heart-shaped) pickup pattern that works well for recording single-direction sound. Other hardware to consider includes headphones and a pop filter, which is a nylon or mesh filter that reduces the hissing noise associated with s’s and b’s.

Script and Storyboard
One of the most helpful tools in the video creation process is a script. Having a script facilitates a smooth, professional presentation and allows the narrator to focus on the nuances of presentation, such as pace and tone. Preparing a storyboard may also be helpful. A storyboard is a sequence of simple visual representations (e.g., drawings or sketches) of the video’s content, accompanied by other useful information, such as the text or dialogue that will accompany the video.

Length
Videos should be short to maintain viewers’ attention, with longer presentations divided into segments. If videos are too long, you risk having the viewer tune out, or worse, not bothering to start the video in the first place. Tarlton librarians opted to break the content of a 30-minute in-person training into a series of modules, with each module running less than 10 minutes.

Recording
Video and audio may be recorded separately or simultaneously. It can be helpful to record images and audio separately and synch them during editing so you can focus on each aspect individually. While a soundproof recording space and room enhancements such as acoustic foam are ideal, a quality recording can be achieved in an imperfect environment by using a reliable microphone and recording when it is quiet. Perfecting an audio recording often requires multiple takes. Strive for clear audio, with varied pitch and a steady, moderate speed. Recording on-screen content also requires planning and rehearsal—mastering the choreography of your on-screen navigation and your text and voice instruction take time to perfect.

Editing
Editing will likely be the most time-consuming aspect of a screencasting project. Typical editing activities

Following are five resources for more in-depth reading on the topic:

- TechSmith website, TechSmith Blog. bit.ly/MA20TechSmith
include removing mistakes, eliminating background noise, synching audio and video, and adding enhancements. If audio and video are recorded separately, one of the biggest editing challenges is synching them. A program such as Camtasia that has advanced editing features will make this process easier. For example, Camtasia allows the editor to speed up or slow down visual recordings and extend single frames.

Video creators can enhance screencasts in a number of ways. Thoughtfully placed transitions allow for smooth movement from one screen to another, and including simple animation and text at key points adds interest and polish. Screencasting programs may offer users unique enhancement options. For example, Camtasia provides free access to some special features such as intros, outros, and music.

Finally, most instructional videos are enhanced by “callouts,” which draw the viewer’s attention to particular sections of the screen. Callouts include zooming, text, highlighting, spotlighting, and shapes. It is important to use callouts judiciously: aim to create videos that are as simple as possible, yet informative, engaging, and attractive.

**Resources**

It is essential to research and incorporate accessibility best practices. Universities will likely have web accessibility requirements that comply with applicable laws. Additionally, academic and online articles provide information about accessibility in online videos. For example, in order to be accessible, videos must include accurate captions and present all important visual content in the main audio track or through audio description. Some screencasting software (e.g., Camtasia), allows users to create captions. Additionally, hosting websites and video players often support the upload of a caption file, and YouTube produces automatic captions, which must be edited for accuracy.

Video creators can also hire a captioning service. At some universities, video captioning may be available at reduced or no cost.

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**Posting**

There are a number of posting options, including on your library’s website, or using an online video platform such as YouTube, Vimeo, or Screencast.com. Each option has advantages and disadvantages. YouTube is perhaps the most popular option: it is free, supports captioning, and provides sophisticated analytics.

**Applications of Screencasting in Law Libraries**

At the Tarlton Law Library, we have always focused on high-quality in-person trainings. A program on video outreach from the 2018 Southwestern Association of Law Libraries Annual Meeting, though, inspired us to take a fresh look at video instruction and see if we could leverage screencasting technology in a productive way for some of our more standard trainings. We converted our traditionally in-person research assistant trainings to pre-recorded screencasts. Using the tools and strategies described above, we turned a 30-minute presentation into four separate 7 to 10-minute video modules that our students could view at their leisure.

Obviously, our application is not the only possible one. If you are at a firm library, you can use screencasting to create different, just-in-time training videos to help your attorneys figure out processes or learn how to use your firm’s resources. If you are at a county or public law library, these videos could show patrons how to use your library’s catalog or access your databases. Anything that you would otherwise give live instruction for is a potential opportunity for screencasting.

Taking on the challenge of creating screencast videos is an exciting and fulfilling experience. By adopting video creation as part of a law library’s instructional activities, a library can significantly expand its ability to connect with and educate its patrons.