

Web 2.0

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Video hints and tips

One of the things that I'm increasingly spending my time doing is working with video in one form or another. It's now so easy to create video, and so cheap, that it's worthwhile really considering it as a way of producing content. In this column I'll look at some of the things that you might want to take into account, the tools that you'll need and the things that you can do.

Equipment

At the simplest level you don't actually need any equipment at all in order to produce a video - certainly not if that video is a screencast. A screencast, if you're not familiar with the term is a digital recording of a computer screen output, often containing a video or audio narration. When you look at demo videos of different products, that's usually what you'll be looking at. There are lots of software packages that you can use for this purpose, and I'll look at a few of them later.

However, if you want something that's a little more sophisticated you may decide that you want to include that all important video or audio. If you're using a recent laptop, you should have an integrated camera and microphone already

available. However, if not, you'll need to purchase some kit, although it doesn't need to be expensive. A cheap pair of headphones and microphone can be picked up in your local supermarket for about a fiver. Webcams are a little more expensive, but even so, I've seen them on sale at Amazon for ten pounds or less. I've tried a variety of webcams over the years, and would advise you to get the very best that you can afford. The one that I'm currently using is a Logitech C920, which costs less than sixty pounds. It works well under a variety of lighting conditions and the microphone is a good quality.

If you've got a smartphone, you probably already have all that you need to record a video, and you can then upload it via the associated software. Alternatively, try something like AudioBoo (<http://audioboo.fm/>) which lets you take a photograph, add a voice over and then upload to their site.

If you just want to record your voice I would suggest a digital voice recorder, and these can be picked up for less than thirty pounds, a little more if you also want to have a microphone that you can clip onto your clothing if recording a talk.

Software

There is a wide variety of different tools available to you once you've decided to explore multimedia. There are the obvious applications such as Skype (<http://beta.skype.com/en/>), Google+ Hangouts and Facebook Chat. If you want to create a screencast you could try CamStudio (<http://camstudio.org/>) which is entirely free, Jing (<http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>), Screencast-o-matic, (<http://www.screencast-o-matic.com/>) or Wink (<http://www.debugmode.com/wink/>) These are all designed to be very easy to use - in many cases all that you do is simply click on the big red button and start to record your screen, pause as necessary and click the button again to stop recording. You can then - depending on the software - add in start and end titles, add in subtitles and add in balloons to pop in your own comments. There are plenty of commercial products available if you really want to go down the professional route. One of the best known is Adobe Captivate (<http://www.adobe.com/products/captivate.html>) but it can cost up to an eye-watering £878, though educational pricing is slightly more reasonable at £285. If that's still got you wincing ALLCapture is at £129, or ScreenRecord at \$15.

I've been trying out a few different tools, and was particularly taken with a couple. Knovio at <http://www.knovio.com/> is a free tool that is designed to allow you to share your PowerPoint presentations along with a webcam video capture of you giving the presentation. It's a simple, easy and friendly tool. You can see my own test at <http://bit.ly/TODaX1> which is only a few seconds long. I wasn't very taken with the sound on the test, but I did try it a few times and it didn't get

any better. I'm not sure if it was because the settings weren't correct, but it's a bit painful, so I apologise in advance! My preferred software however is called BB Flashback Express and it's available at http://www.bbsoftware.co.uk/BBFlashBack_FreePlayer.aspx. There is a commercial version as well for about £150 (+VAT) but unless you're going to be doing a lot of video, you really don't need to use it. The reason that I like this software is that it's very easy to use (I should point out also that it's a downloadable product, rather than running from the browser), and you can include a webcam of you talking at the same time as demonstrating the screen. The professional version gives you the opportunity of doing rather more flash things, such as blurring parts of the screen or zooming in for example. If you want to see an example of it in action, take a look at my brief demonstration of a really nice little tool, Quoquio at <http://youtu.be/dPAaW6cTwPs> (and no, I'm not going to tell you what Quoquio is, I'd like the hits on the video!)

Alternatively, you could host a live event, with live streaming using a tool such as Vokle (<http://www.vokle.com/>), Ustream (<http://www.ustream.tv>) or Justin.tv (<http://www.justin.tv/>) Finally there is the aforementioned Google+ Hangout option, which interacts with YouTube for that live experience.

Creating the finished product

Once the recording has been created, the software is extremely easy to use. Most products will allow you to add opening and closing titles and 'streams' will be added to the recording, so that sound files can be added, and faded in or out as

necessary. Some tools will allow the addition of images or subtitles, while others are more basic. However, one thing that's worth stressing is that it's very easy to create video, upload to YouTube

and then share via social media. If you haven't given it a try yet, do! It's lots of fun and a really interesting way to provide access to information.