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Guide on the Side

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Guide on the Side. University of Arizona Libraries, 1510 East University Boulevard, Tucson, AZ, 85721-0055; http://code.library.arizona.edu/GotS (technical requirements and additional information available at https://github.com/ualibraries/Guide-on-the-Side); free and open source.

Guide on the Side (GotS) is an award-winning application that makes developing interactive, online tutorials simple [1–3]. As the ''Guide on the Side'' name suggests, each GotS tutorial has an instruction panel—which may contain text, pictures, links, and/or interactive questions—on one side of the browser window and displays the online resource that is the focus of the tutorial on the other side. GotS is open source software that is available without charge from the University of Arizona. Even if you are not sure that your information technology (IT) department will be willing to install GotS, you may want to request a free demo account on the University of Arizona server and give GotS a try [3]. As the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) 2013 Instructional Services Innovation Award committee cochairs have said, the software ''allows librarians to easily create tutorials that are both engaging to students and pedagogically sound. GotS serves as a model of the future of library instruction'' [1].

The reviewers have been creating online tutorials with GotS in an academic medical library for two years [4]. During that time, we have received many positive comments from students on tutorials created with the product. Students find the navigation tools easy to use, enjoy being able to move through the tutorials at their own pace, and find the interactive questions engaging. One student even described our library's ''PubMed for Clinical Laboratory Science (CLS)'' GotS tutorial [5] as, ''mind blowingly awesome'' and said ''[I] never knew how easy searching for research could be.'' We used to develop side-guided tutorials using Dreamweaver, but GotS makes this process much easier.

Installation and setup

GotS is an open source PHP and MySQL program that must be installed on a web server before tutorials can be created. If your library does not maintain a web server, you will need to work with your organization's or consortium's server professionals [6]. If your library is located in Arizona, and you cannot host the application at your institution, the GotS team at University of Arizona may be able to help. Platform and support dependencies are fully described in the README file that accompanies the software. We have occasionally run into librarians who could not use GotS because their IT department would not install or support open source software or freeware. Perhaps a quote from our contact at the University of Nebraska Medical Center's Information Technology Services Department will help those encountering such obstacles. He said that GotS is ''the simplest application we have ever installed. The instructions are very clear—just follow the directions as they are given in the README file'' [7].

We have found GotS to be easier to use than a word processing program, but resources are available to assist if needed. The GotS website connects users to many support resources, including a Creator Guide and a Style Guide; an active GotS Google Group; and a Github issue queue where you can report bugs, request features, or contribute development work.

Creating content

The tutorial editing interface will feel familiar to anyone who has used a word processing program. Tabs, bullets, italics, boldface, undo, redo, picture insertion, link insertion, question insertion, and page breaks are all represented by familiar symbols. Text from existing resources can be added easily and broken into sections with minimal effort. If you have a handout containing most of the content needed in your tutorial, you can copy and paste all the text into the GotS editing box and then add either chapter or page breaks. You do not have to hand-code links to the previous and subsequent pages of the tutorial. It is also easy to add links and pictures. Links in the instruction panel can be directed to the right frame or a new window, or they can be directed to replace the content in the current window. The picture insertion tool makes it easy to select and upload images currently stored on your computer or network and provides a box for the image description that is necessary to comply with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. The pictures can be resized in the editing screen by clicking and dragging the image corner. In our hands, the resizing feature works well in Firefox, less well in Internet Explorer, and not at all in Safari or Chrome.

GotS provides several features that make it easy to design effective tutorials. You can include interactive, multiple-choice questions, which our students love. Students receive immediate feedback on their answers, which provides a knowledge check and/or course correction. The questions also serve to emphasize important points in the tutorial. The most recent version of GotS also supports free response questions, but these do not include an instructor feedback option. In addition to questions in the tutorial, the instructor can create a posttest with responses sent to the instructor. Students can also receive a copy of their responses as well as the automated instructor feedback via email.

The student experience

Students clicking a link to a GotS tutorial are presented with familiar icons and navigation tools. A print button allows tutorial users to print or save a transcript of the entire tutorial with illustrations. A contents button allows students to jump between the tutorial's chapters. Forward and back arrows and a progress bar facilitate navigation

and overall orientation to one's location within the tutorial. The title of the tutorial is always present in the upper border of the instruction panel. The chapter title appears below the tutorial title, along with the position in the chapter (e.g., page 2 of 2). If the instructor connects chapter titles to tutorial objectives, the presence of these titles can reinforce the objectives throughout the tutorial. As mentioned earlier, students love the immediate feedback that they receive when they answer interactive multiple-choice questions embedded in the tutorial and seem to appreciate the posttests. When we have used GotS tutorials as part of a librarian-facilitated lab, we have found that students often stay to review the emailed posttest feedback before leaving the lab.

Cautions and recommendations

All tools, no matter how beloved, have their limitations. GotS has enhanced teaching and learning on our campus, but there have been a few bumps in the road.

Frames: GotS uses frames. Certain websites do not work, or do not work well, in certain browsers when enclosed in frames, so you should test the websites you plan to use. For example, we have encountered some difficulties with PubMed and RefWorks in frames.

Pictures: We recommend creating a naming convention for uploaded pictures, preferably a convention that will make it impossible to give a picture in one tutorial the same name as a picture in a different tutorial. Without such a naming convention, you could end up replacing the ''1.jpg'' in your PubMed tutorial that you previously created with the ''1.jpg'' uploaded for your new CINAHL tutorial.

Graded activities: We have rarely had trouble with the email feature. On one or two occasions, a few students did not receive the requested emails despite multiple submission attempts. Therefore, we recommend conducting any graded posttests in an official grading environment (e.g., Blackboard).

Features: There are a few things that we wish GotS could do. GotS already facilitates use of bulleted lists, tabs, boldface, and italics, but sometimes numbered lists and colored fonts would be useful. The narrow navigation panel means that any included images are small, so it would be helpful to be able to click on an image to enlarge it. Finally, it would be helpful to copy and paste images from one part of a tutorial to another part of the same tutorial along with their descriptions. We would like to emphasize, however, that a simple program that always works is more useful to us than a program with extra bells and whistles that requires a lot of troubleshooting.

Conclusion

GotS is a useful product that has facilitated teaching and learning on our campus. We give it our highest recommendation.

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Universities across the United States are competing for a shrinking pool of research funding. This bleak prospect has turned their attention to finding new ways to compete, for example, using their unique strengths and resources to make decisions about how to organize themselves, whom to recruit, and in what to invest. Such positioning, however, requires a rich understanding of the institution, based on actual data. If an institution wishes to glean funding from the Department of Defense for traumatic brain injury research, for example, then it must understand its real strengths and gaps in this area to be a credible candidate for funding.

SciVal, by Elsevier Research Intelligence, is designed to meet this need. It delivers research performance metrics, based on the Scopus database, for 4,600 research universities and other institutions in more than 200 countries. It incorporates and builds on some of Elsevier's previous products, such as Spotlight and Strata, to deliver a module-based reporting tool that allows institutions to understand the position and productivity of various groups of