

The challenge of ebooks in academic institutions. (JISC) project

Creation of ebooks: Case study

University of Nottingham: Open Nottingham programme

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Background to ebooks at the organisation

Many related themes feed into the project. It's part of the Open Nottingham¹ agenda. 'Open' is strategic and part of the wider Open Educational Resources (OER) agenda. The ebooks themselves are based on existing OER materials. The ebook initiative stemmed out of JISC PARIs project². Re-purposing content plays well to sustainability. The initiative also aligns well with the 'social responsibility' theme which is part of University strategy.

Creating ebooks is a useful 'shop window' for the university. It's very practical too. Open resources, by simplifying licensing, increase the University's capabilities to deliver in terms international campuses

What is meant by ebooks?—what is the scope?

The ebook initiative is an extension of OER. The University's OER resources are already in iTunes U³ (one of the largest resources of online learning). It's about putting resources where the customers (students) are. The iBook format⁴ is inviting and attractive to students and has been positively received by staff involved.

Format has not influenced themes for current and future ebooks. The initial subject scope derives from PARIs project. That project mandated inclusion of third party CCO licensed⁵ content (e.g. from other institutions such as the Open University) and that has been carried across to the ebooks.

The project may extend to material from the university's manuscript & special collections. The constraint is the practical one of the time required to create the materials.

Why create ebooks?

A key driver is the theme of opening up access to all students at any (including international) campus. We already had substantial OER material and we wanted to push ahead and experiment with extending those resources. An important issue was to address the increasing uptake of mobile devices, which OER on a website only partially meets at present. Once again it's about getting material into the environment where students are. We also wanted to push ahead on *reusing* resources. Innovation is also a driver. We need to push boundaries and experiment

¹ Open Nottingham: 'The University of Nottingham has strategically embraced an agenda of open access to teaching'. <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/open/opennottingham.aspx>

² PARIs (Promoting Academic Resources in Society)
<http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/ukoer3/paris.aspx>

³ <http://www.apple.com/education/itunes-u/> 'You get to share your ideas in a powerful new way, and your students get a rich, immersive learning experience using the iTunes U app for iPad'

⁴ 'iBooks is an e-book application by Apple Inc. for their iOS operating system and devices'.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/iBooks>

⁵ 'A tool for freeing your own work of copyright restrictions around the world. You may use this tool even if your work is free of copyright in some jurisdictions, if you want to ensure it is free everywhere'.
<http://creativecommons.org/choose/zero/>

How ebooks are created

Publishing

The University of Nottingham is the publisher but the process itself was essentially a production role that followed on naturally from the previous OER experience. The primary difference between the iBooks and the OER content is that the ebooks are a more complete online course in a particular topic area. The ebook is a substantial piece of work of 180 pages or so. The project was not about commissioning *new* content. We already had (OER) content. It was about repurposing the content in a new (iBook) format to enable its wider consumption. Transforming OER content into an iBook meant we needed *design* lead skills—about layout and balance of content. It was not about new graphic design but rather desktop publishing skills. To expedite production, we chose to temporarily recruit one additional member of staff. It was important to involve the University's marketing team to ensure it fitted into institutional marketing strategy.

Technical platform

The iBook Author⁶ platform itself has had a number of advantages: it is free, relatively simple to use and has a global reach to ensure our material is as discoverable as possible. We worked directly with the iBook platform rather than through Apple's 'Pages' (which is possible and simple to do) in order to take fullest advantage of the iBook platform. The platform allows you to add metadata which gets passed onto the iBook store. The metadata is very basic (no place for ISBN for example). This is a limitation of the free (as opposed to paid) books account but we were prepared to accept this constraint as we are committed to offering free and open content, and wanted to work with a free books account.

Skills

In terms of skills required the main issues were resource and availability. Academics themselves were responsible for proof reading and editing. We employed two temporary proof readers who undertook basic proof reading and editing for the first two titles that were published. The text content was created (as OER) by the University's academics and has been supplemented by external content from, for example, the Open University's OpenLearn⁷ and MIT⁸. The third party text component was small. Most third party content has been images and videos which were suitably licensed under creative commons.

⁶ 'iBooks Author is an amazing app that allows anyone to create beautiful Multi-Touch textbooks — and just about any other kind of book — for iPad. With galleries, video, interactive diagrams, 3D objects, mathematical expressions, and more.' <http://www.apple.com/ibooks-author/>

⁷ 'In the spirit of sharing our open educational resources, we are keen to see OpenLearn materials re-used and remixed, and also to see our users contributing their own educational content'.
<http://openlearn.open.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=3416>

⁸ 'MIT OpenCourseWare (OCW) is a web-based publication of virtually all MIT course content. OCW is open and available to the world and is a permanent MIT activity.' <http://ocw.mit.edu/about/>

Copyright clearance had been done at OER stage. The main support for copyright for the e-book content was through WeB2rights⁹ (especially Naomi Korn). JISC legal¹⁰ (especially Jackie Milne) have also provided copyright support to Nottingham's OER programme over previous years.

Main issues in creating ebooks

Rights

Even though we are working with 'Open resources' there was still a significant degree of clarification required of what we could do with material. This is especially the case when material is *embedded* in the resources (the ebook) and not just *linked* to. For example we weren't initially sure if it was OK to embed a TED talk¹¹ that was available under a Creative Commons non derivative licence. The question also arose about the extent to which we are making derivative works. For example if we changed an image a little in terms of size or other minor aspects is it a derivative? Arising from this is a need for authors to be explicit perhaps about the kinds of re-use they *want*.

Ebook Platform

There are issues with how content may appear of different version of iPads.

An iBook has a very polished and tactile so authors found they wanted their content to look 'better' than the original OER, which to some extent benefits from being fairly rough and ready.

Lessons learnt

We haven't yet explored all the opportunities implicit in iBook format. Our sense is that consumers appreciate the high quality look and feel to iBooks and this is an important factor in their having confidence in the ebook. Authors certainly felt the demands of a 'quality' format so felt they needed to take more care with issues such as proof reading compared to OER.

The technical side of things is actually very easy. It wasn't hard to produce an ebook in two weeks. This reinforces that it's the content itself which is of primary importance

⁹ 'Web2Rights is a JISC project, funded from 1st November 2007 – 31st March 2009, whose purpose was initially to develop practical, pragmatic and relevant Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) and other legal issues toolkits to support the projects funded within the JISC Users and Innovation Programme' <http://www.web2rights.org.uk/>

¹⁰ JISC Legal offers sector specific guidance and detailed publications to assist .. in this [Copyright and Intellectual Property] area of law. <http://www.jisclegal.ac.uk/LegalAreas/CopyrightIPR.aspx>

¹¹ On TED.com, we make the best talks and performances from TED and partners available to the world, for free. More than 1400 TED Talks are now available, with more added each week. All of the talks are subtitled in English, and many are subtitled in various languages. These videos are released under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license, so they can be freely shared and reposted. <http://www.ted.com/pages/about>

Thoughts on the future...

The cost and technical barriers to self publishing have dropped enormously and this opens up huge opportunity.

In the university context we need to think more about marketing. We want to reach all our audiences so discovery is very important. The iTunes platform is a major positive factor in discovery and means for example that the ebooks we produce are immediately discoverable through Google too.

Appendix: Examples of Nottingham open ebooks-screen shots

