EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF WEB 2.0 INTO STREAMING MEDIA COURSES

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INTRODUCTION

As traditional media outlets converge towards a fully integrated digital platform on the Internet, the need to address these changes in an audio production curriculum becomes essential. Capitalizing on the myriad of web-based portals to simulate broadcast environments is both cost effective and an excellent tool for building a comprehensive portfolio as students near graduation. By creating class projects that teach the essential aspects of simple web design, video blogging, podcasting and audio production, students are exposed to a well-rounded set of course competencies that foster creative thinking, entrepreneurship, and effective promotion. These media competencies are reinforced with general education courses so as to maximize the cross pollination between departments in a university. By incorporating this comprehensive approach, students are better served in keeping up with the demands of a changing media landscape.

The Art Institute of Tennessee-Nashville is a branch campus of The Art Institute of Atlanta. The school has been open since October of 2006 and features a Bachelor of Arts degree in Audio Production. Students are exposed to all facets of broadcast production throughout their matriculation. Two important courses focus exclusively on audio and simple multimedia production for the broadcast and web environments. These courses are Broadcast Audio (AU310) and Streaming Media and Webcasting (AU440).

The audio production program has grown considerably over the past several years, possessing more than one hundred majors and five full time faculty members. Students are exposed to many facets of the audio production field including sound for picture, MIDI production, electronics, video editing, mixing, music production, live sound, sound for animation, and multi-tracking. As is the case with many small universities, Ai Tennessee-Nashville doesn't have a dedicated radio broadcasting facility. Realizing the issues

at hand, our department had to carefully consider how we'd effectively teach multimedia production with limited space and resources.

THE COURSE

The audio department at AI Tennessee-Nashville has close relationships with a number of working professionals in the broadcast, video and music industries. Each year we host biannual meetings with our Professional Advisory Committee. These meetings allow us to review curriculum, receive input on technology and facilities, and get a sense of what our industry friends are looking for in our students after they graduate. These meetings have provided outstanding feedback as to how we can shape all aspects of our broadcast audio courses.

After reviewing the course syllabus for Streaming Media and Webcasting, it was apparent that we simply didn't have the server space to host a dedicated webcast each week for ten or more students at a time. Additionally while our students had a great deal of knowledge of various digital audio workstations, they had very little experience in building websites that integrated multimedia presentations.

The Streaming Media and Webcasting course fulfills two important roles. The first is that it is designed to teach students how to integrate audio and video into a website and take advantage of web-based delivery formats. The second, and perhaps most important role, is that this course is specifically designed to help students build a web portfolio to attract potential employers and internship coordinators. Essentially, each student's final project serves as their web-based demo reel.

The Streaming Media and Webcasting course is set up in two distinct ways. The first is a two-hour lecture in which students are exposed to the basic theoretical principles of the course. During this portion of the class, students learn about web- delivery formats, audio and video-

specific codecs, Web 2.0 principles, and the general history of media production for the web. Students learn about the aspects of effective web promotion through the analysis of metadata, search engine optimization, and effective keywords. Additionally students learn about the evolution of social networks and their role in the media marketplace, and a history of media players as well.

The second half of each week is dedicated specifically to lab work. During this time students are expected to work on their projects and refine the assignments they're given throughout the eleven week quarter. In considering the space and web design limitations, a decision was made to integrate two web-based portals with which students could host their projects.

After reviewing the course objectives with our Academic Director, we decided to use Weebly as a web host. Weebly is a website with dedicated web templates that allow students to customize the layout of their site with a number of multimedia options. Some of these options include embedded video, music players, and slide shows. The students were given short weekly video assignments in which they had to review a product, provide instruction about some facet of audio production, or present a video diary. The students had the choice of using their built in web cameras at home, or a simple camcorder like a Flip Mino. Additional cameras were available to check out on an as needed basis. Once the students produced a simple two-minute video, they transferred the raw footage into Final Cut Pro and proceeded to edit the projects as assigned.

These web videos were then exported using Quick Time conversion into a streaming format that was small enough to fit on a website quite easily. Over the course of the term, each student produced six finished videos, complete with edits, fades, and the appropriate slate. Each student was also required to tape a "video

Streaming Media and Webcasting

Home   Syllabus   Media Elements   Photos   Contact Info   Links

AU440 Streaming Media and Webcasting.

Welcome to the Streaming Media and Webcasting Homepage. The purpose of this page is for you to get some experience designing a basic web site using some tools that are at your disposal. It's my hope that you'll be able to incorporate the key elements of your portfolio and put them up on the web for others to see. I think you'll find that uploading content is both practical and easy to navigate. Having a decent website will attract employers and potential clients alike. Have a great quarter and let me know if you have questions.

This is a mock-up page for the course. From the top you can see a series of customized multimedia options that are easily accessible from the toolbar. Weebly allows you to link to YouTube and Flickr and incorporate an embedded document.
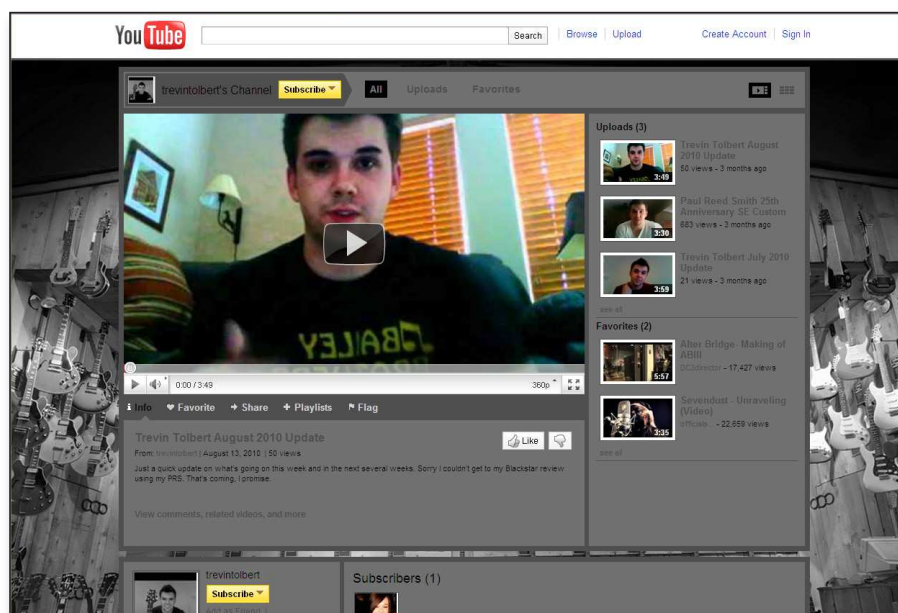
This is an example of a student's outside YouTube Web Channel. Most of these videos were used as class webisode assignments. This student also incorporated these videos into his personal website. He had a strong web presence in both places, thus maximizing his promotional efforts.

greeting" which would appear on the website once someone went to their page.

The audio production majors focused on topics that were of interest to them, but still related to music production as a whole. A few students chose to produce videos where they reviewed a piece of audio equipment, such as a pre-amplifier or microphone. Another student chose to focus on his favorite type of guitar. It was very important for each student to choose a topic that they were passionate about. That way they could produce a complete series of videos over the course of the quarter about that same subject matter.

As a part of each lab time, the students critiqued each video and were encouraged to develop a mini-series based on these short video exercises. The goal was to foster a creative mindset for producing short-form content. As a result of this, by the end of the quarter each student's web videos increased in depth, production value, and overall content. This portion of the project also familiarized them with multiple video compression formats and multiple delivery streams. Some students chose to create their own YouTube channel as well. By cross-promoting their YouTube channel, they drove traffic to their content in a quick fashion. This was a great benefit to our lab time, as Weebly also has a multimedia feature that allows web site builders to link to other media outlets.

After the students built some momentum in the video realm, they were encouraged to take pictures with a digital camera and create a Flickr

account as well. Since Weebly allows for a Flickr slide show, the students already had two or three significant elements for content on their website. A portion of each week was dedicated to exploring the Weebly templates and each student received instruction in how to drag and drop the elements into their website.

By the mid-term (week five) the students were expected to have their website template chosen and were then encouraged to think of a professional domain name for their site. Weebly provides a simple default name for each page, but the students were urged to purchase a domain name that would be more reflective of their professional interests.

Weebly has a feature that allows for configuration of a domain name from an external source. In this case, the students were presented with two options. Most of the students in the course upgraded to the Weebly Pro account for a nominal fee. This allowed them to further customize the html to their specific needs. By doing so, they were also able to embed their current resume, contact information, and additional portfolio pieces.

Go Daddy is one of the most visible domain hosts on the internet. Students in the class researched the available domain names and were then encouraged to purchase their domain name through this site. By doing so, they could register the name and then reconfigure it with Weebly's site. In total, the cost was under thirty dollars for the Weebly

The Flickr page is an effective tool for setting up a slide show. Our students took pictures of clients in the school recording studio and posted them online for others to see in a very simple fashion. Weebly allows you to link simultaneously to your webpage and to the Flickr site.
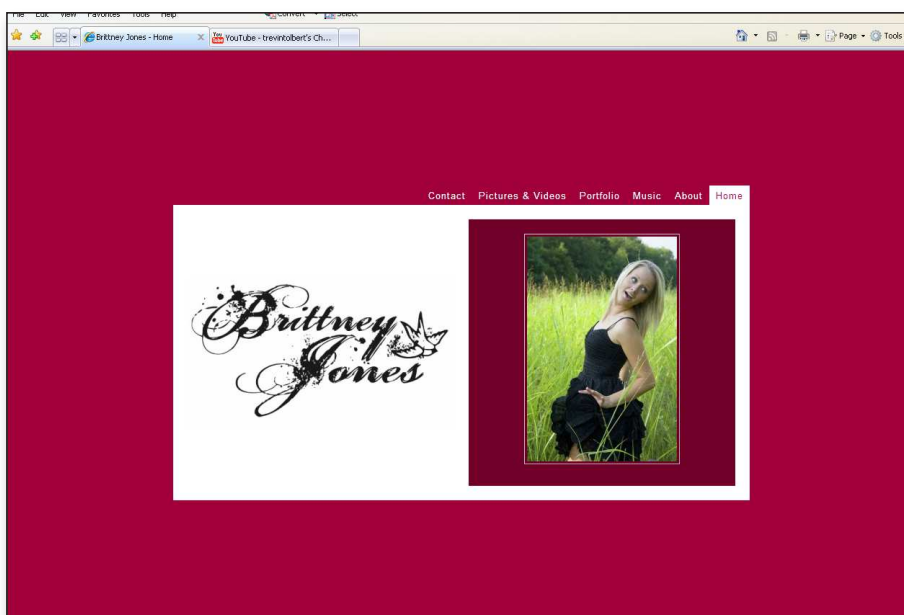

After researching several options, it made sense for the students to purchase their customized domain names from Go Daddy. While Weebly does offer domain name registration, it's significantly more expensive. For those departments that want to save their students some money, this is a cost-effective way of doing so.

This is the home page of Brittney Jones. She is a country singer and wanted to feature a website that was more indicative of her multiple creative interests. She customized the page to suit her individual needs and shows the potential of what Weebly has to offer. Her page is different from some of the other students, but effective in promoting her skills as an engineer, musician, and songwriter.

Pro and Go Daddy registration.

Once the students purchased their domain name, the final step of the process involved redirecting their Go Daddy domain name with Weebly's site. In the FAQ section of Weebly, there is an entire tutorial in how to configure a customized domain name with their server. The students were able to redirect their Weebly default address to the customized domain name. Within a few minutes their individual domain names appeared with the Weebly website they had just built from scratch.

With a week left in the quarter, the students started including additional audio and post-production projects that would serve as appropriate demonstration recordings. Some chose to link these videos to their YouTube channels, and others took advantage of the Weebly music and video players. In all, the students were required to submit three finished web videos, three finished audio mixes, an updated resume and contact information, and their other multimedia projects on the Weebly site. The final element included their personalized video greeting which was meant to serve as a sort of cover letter. This video greeting helps personalize the site and is a memorable alternative to a standardized cut-and-paste cover letter. Additionally these elements take advantage of the simple multimedia tools that are at the consumer's disposal. Students can download Audacity and produce audio podcasts for free and Garageband comes preinstalled in most Macintosh computers. Lastly, videos can be produced with

a simple web camera, and edited using iMovie and/or Final Cut Express.

By the end of the quarter each student had an individually designed web page that was truly reflective of his or her personality and interests. In the beginning of the term, the students often express apprehension in trying to build a website without much experience. This alternative has been most effective in showing them how to be empowered in the Web 2.0 era. The project gives them a tangible item they can continue to revise after the course is finished. With a simple click of a mouse, potential employers can peruse the student's demo reel and portfolio, thus increasing their chances of standing out in the job market.

As the students produced their final portfolios, one of the most important aspects of the class included a discussion of copyright protection. Each student was required to put a disclaimer on his or her page disclosing that each of their projects was being used for promotional purposes only. In all cases, the students got permission to use the music on their pages. We felt it was very important during class discussions to address issues relating to piracy and file sharing.

Weebly also allows each user to customize the metadata in their pages. Since our class discussions included effective web promotion, each student was also required to write a paper on how they'd effectively utilize search engine optimization in order to "get ahead" in a Google search. A part of
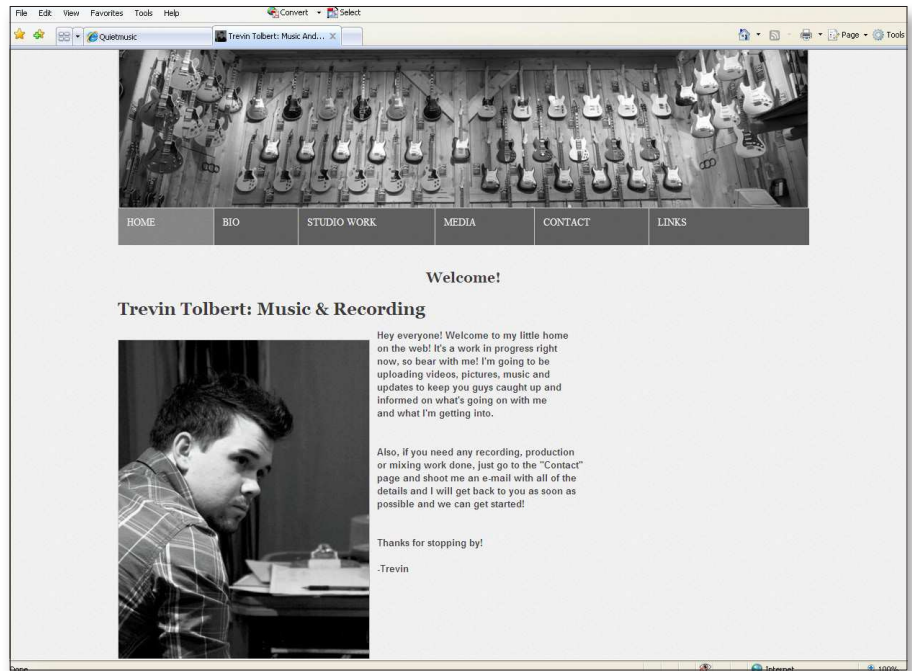
Trevin Tolbert is a senior audio production major. He constructed a website from the templates Weebly offered. He took the photograph of the guitars in the upper corner of the website, and utilized a black and white backdrop that allowed him to conceptualize a classy theme for the page. Being a guitar player and songwriter, he wanted to produce content that focused on his skills as an instrumentalist and recording engineer.
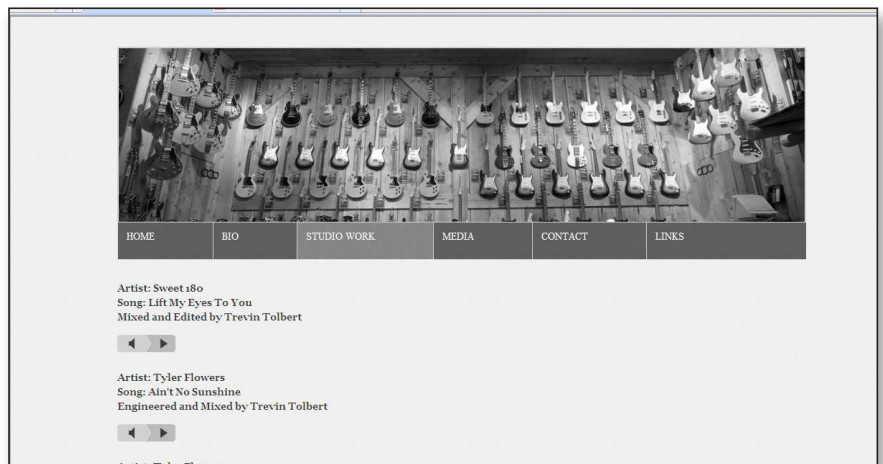
Trevin's finished mixes for the audio portion of his portfolio. Here you can find a bit of information about the artists he worked with and his role in the project. The students were required to get permission from the musicians whose work they featured on their page. They also posted a short disclaimer stating that the work was for promotional purposes only.

their final grade included being able to find their website with a simple search engine.

By configuring Weebly and Go Daddy into a comprehensive quarter-long project, our audio production students were able to test out the web domain without serious complications. Secondly they added some essential web design skills without having to outsource their project to someone else. We consistently emphasize how important it is to be entrepreneurial as a potential creative freelancer. These types of projects reinforce that principle in a very real and tangible way.

Since this project has been introduced into the curriculum, word has spread throughout our campus. Our faculty members have utilized this Weebly project to build their own teaching portfolios for an annual review. Several of the students who have taken the course have remarked at how easy it was to build a site and a few have even been hired as a result.

In this digital era, broadcasting and mass communication students need every advantage they can in order to foster a creative multimedia presence on the web. As the paradigm changes with media convergence, this project has created a synergy between technology, entrepreneurship and the stated learning objectives of the course. This project has also been a cost-effective solution to limited server space. And most importantly, it has reinforced the importance of being well-rounded as our audio production graduates enter the job market after graduation. ▟

Brittney included a short snippet of a recording session for her video portfolio.