PRODUCT REVIEW / ANALYSE DE PRODUITS

Jing and Screenr (Free Screencasting Software)

Products: Jing, produced by TechSmith Corporation, 2405 Woodlake Drive, Okemos, MI 48864-5910; and Screenr, produced by Articulate Global, Inc., 244 5th Avenue, Suite 2960, New York, NY 10001.

URLs: Jing, http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html; Screenr, http://www.screenr.com/.

Audience: Librarians, faculty, staff, students.

Purpose: To create and produce video recordings, with or without sound, of a computer screen that can be shared online.

Updates: Jing provides updates as needed. Screenr is web based, so updates are not required.

Compatibility: Jing (downloadable): Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7, or Windows 8, and Microsoft.NET Framework 4.0 Full, Mac OS X 10.6.8 or later, and QuickTime 7.5.5 or later (as stated on website). Screenr (web based): Mac (OSX 10.4 and up) or Windows (XP, Vista or Windows 7). Supported by common browsers including IE 6, 7, and 8; Firefox 3 + ; Safari 3 + ; and Google Chrome. Requires Java 1.5 runtime or later for recording and the Flash Player 9 (release 115 or later) or Flash Player 10 for playing screencasts (as stated on website).

Cost: Free. Both Jing and Screenr have upgraded account options, with added features such as increased storage space (with Screencast.com Pro, Jing's hosting platform) or privacy control features (Screenr Business), for a monthly fee.

Pros: Free. Jing has a screen capture function that allows screen captures to be annotated. Privacy control features can be enabled with screencasts uploaded and shared through Screencast.com. Screenr can be accessed from any computer, as it is web based.

Cons: Both Jing and Screenr limit recording time to five minutes per screencast. Neither software program will allow editing or adding special effects, such as callouts, zooms, and highlighting. There are no quizzing options. Jing's hosting platform (Screencast.com) has a limited storage space of 2 GB and monthly bandwidth of 2 GB. Screenr does not have a privacy control feature to allow screencasts to be hidden or password protected.

Introduction

Screencasting is an efficient and popular online instruction tool for libraries. Screencasts can be used to explain and illustrate how to search a catalogue or database, or to answer a quick reference question. Because the screencasts are available online, they can be accessed anytime. There are many screencast software programs currently available. In the December 2012 issue, Elizabeth Yates reviewed Camtasia Studio, a licensed screencast software program that allows for editing, special effects, and quizzing. For libraries with a budget, or just beginning to test out screencasting, there are free options such as Jing and Screenr that allow users to create short and simple screencasts without the bells and whistles. Table 1 presents an overview of each program.

Description

Jing can easily be downloaded from its website onto a computer. Once the installation is complete, the software is accessible via the Jing "Sun" icon located on the periphery of the computer monitor. Clicking on the "Capture" feature will open up the program and allow for resizing of the screen frame. The options appearing in the bottom left allow for either a screen capture (a still shot of the screen) or video recording up to five minutes in duration. Jing screencasts record at a rate of 10 frames per second, which is decent quality, but cannot be changed.

Screenr is web-based software, so there is no need to download anything onto a computer. After signing in using a Facebook, Gmail, LinkedIn, Twitter, Yahoo!, or Windows Live ID account, you are able to create new screencasts and access your account from any computer. Screenr screencasts also record at a rate of 10 frames per second and cannot be changed.

Publishing and sharing

Jing automatically saves as a ShockWave file (SWF), but this file type may not be easily played back by some computers and mobile devices. Uploading the screencast to Screencast.com, Jing's hosting platform, will provide you with more options on how to publish and share the screencast. Screencast.com is web based, and can be accessed from any computer with the account log-in information if screencasts need to be embedded or shared. A free Screencast.com account allows for a 2 GB storage space and 2 GB of transfer bandwidth.

Screencast.com creates a folder with privacy control settings to house all screencasts created via Jing. Screencasts can remain public or hidden allowing only users with the URL to view the screencast. There is also the option to password-protect screencasts.

Once uploaded to Screencast.com, an embed code and short URL will be created. The embed code can be placed on a web page or on YouTube.

Screenr screencasts will be saved in your Screenr account, which is publicly searchable. Screencasts can be shared via short URL, embed code, downloaded as MP4 files,

Table 1. Overview of details, features, and limitations of the software.

Screencast software	Details	Features	Limitations
Jing	Need to download software onto computer; saves screencast as SWF (shockwave file); upload screencast to Screencast.com, for sharing and publishing options, to obtain a short URL, or embed code to use in webpages, YouTube, etc.	Records up to five minutes of video; can resize screen frame; allows pausing during recording; has screen capture, with simple editing functions (adding textboxes, highlighting); Screencast.com (hosting platform) allows for 2 GB of free storage space; control privacy settings when uploaded to Screencast.com; monitor page activity via Google Analytics (enter tracking code in Screencast.com account options)	Limited to five minutes of recording; cannot edit screencasts; cannot add special features (callouts, zooming, quizzes); cannot create MP4 files; 2 GB storage space limit and monthly 2 GB transfer bandwidth via Screencast.com may limit the number of times a screencast can be viewed
Screenr	Web based, can record on any computer; save screencast as an MP4 file, publish directly to YouTube or Screenr, which creates an embed code and short URL to share screencast, or share via Facebook or Twitter; requires Java (free download)	Record up to 5 minutes of video; can resize screen frame; allows pausing during recording; unlimited number of screencasts and storage limits	Limited to five minutes of recording; cannot edit screencasts; cannot add special features (callouts, zooming, quizzes); no privacy control features

published directly to YouTube, or shared via Facebook or Twitter. Screenr screencasts cannot be made private; however this is currently under consideration as noted in Screenr's Community blog.

Accessibility

There is no added feature to upload captions to a screencast directly through Jing or Screenr. However, you can upload screencasts to YouTube and attach a plain text file to caption the screencast. Refer to YouTube's site on captioning instructions for more information on the process and proper text formatting.

Conclusion

Both Jing and Screenr are decent screencasting solutions for budget-conscious libraries. The limited time length per screencast should not be a deterrent if creating quick and simple screencasts. There are active online community support sites for both TechSmith (creators of Jing) and Screenr, where users can share ideas or ask questions regarding the software. Employees respond to queries in a timely manner.

Other aspects such as how to publish and share the screencasts need to be considered. Do the screencasts need to remain private or can they be publicly available and searchable through a site such as YouTube? If it's the former, then Jing is the only option. But, there is a 2 GB storage limit and 2 GB monthly transfer bandwidth limit in place via Screencast.com, Jing's hosting platform. If your library will be creating a large number of screencasts for a wide audience, then web-based software Screenr may be the way to go, as it currently offers unlimited storage space for screencasts.

Both products offer upgraded versions allowing for larger storage space, as is the case with Screencast.com's Pro Account, or private screencasts with Screenr Business.

Consider how screencasts will be shared, how many screencasts will be created, and how many potential viewers there may be – this will allow you to select the best screencast software for your library.

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