Camtasia Alternative Working Group: Final Report

December 13, 2012

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CAWG Final Report

Background

The Camtasia Alternative Working Group was formed to determine whether the current license for Camtasia Studio is the best choice in terms of cost and product capabilities. This report will provide recommendations on whether the Dalhousie University's Libraries should continue to purchase Camtasia or go with an alternative product.

In the beginning stages, the group discussed how each library uses Camtasia and what options we all need to continue to produce videos. This discussion helped set the evaluation criteria when looking at alternatives to Camtasia. This open discussion also brought awareness to the members as to how each library is using these tools, and helped to make additional recommendations.

Use of Camtasia at the Libraries

Dunn: Two types of tutorials have been created: live action demonstrations of print tools (used primarily for classroom instruction) and screen capture database tutorials; these videos are hosted on Youtube and linked in BBLearn. David uses Camtasia for editing; however, the license was purchased through external grants.

Kellogg: As Melissa and Robin have wrapped up their orientation initiatives for first year students, they plan to turn their attention to Camtasia tutorials in the near future. Lindsay will also be joining the team at Kellogg and will be working on developing and updating tutorials.

Killam: Michelle Paon and Linda Bedwell are both interested in the continued development and maintenance of tutorials, and have in the past created tutorials with the help of interns. Lindsay is in the process of standardizing and updating all online tutorials.

MacRae: Camtasia was recently installed at MacRae and has not been put to use yet. MacRae foresees creating projects for Erin and likely student assistants surrounding virtual tours and agriculture database tutorials. Erin has stressed the importance of a quizzing feature to MacRae's goals with online tutorials.

Sexton: In the past, summer interns developed online tutorials. Currently, Camtasia is installed on one laptop, known as the teaching laptop. Sarah Jane has decided that Sexton will stop creating new tutorials (linking to vendor tutorials for databases whenever possible) with the exception of the Sexton Tour, which will be updated as need arises.

Methods

CAWG members arrived at their recommendation through collaborative discussion combined with independent reflection on possible Camtasia alternatives.

Longlist of software alternatives

Prior to the first meeting, members were instructed to research and brainstorm possible alternatives (both free and licensed) to Camtasia and to arrive with a list of realistic suggestions. Members were not instructed to extensively vet the software for quality at this early stage, but rather to use their judgment to determine whether each piece of software warranted further investigation. All suggestions put forth by members were compiled into a longlist and distributed by the chairs after the first meeting. The software longlist is as follows:

Licensed Software	Free Software
Demo Builder	Wink
BBFlashback	CamStudio
Madcap Mimic	Webinaria
DemoWorks	Jing
Scate Ignite	Debut Video Capture
ActivePresenter	Screencast-O-Matic
Wildform Flair	Xvidcap
ProfCast	Krut
AllCapture	Microsoft Expression Encoder 4
Adobe Captivate[1]	Capture Firefox
	BBFlashback Free Player

Table 1: Longlist of software alternatives

Shortlist of software alternatives

Members were asked to sign up for between three and five pieces of software on the longlist and perform a preliminary evaluation of each. The goal of this cursory evaluation was to eliminate any software that fell below our immediate expectations for screencasting software, and to then create a shortlist of software to be examined in more depth. Members evaluated the software through consultation with user reviews, online tutorials demonstrating the program's functionality, and the product website.

At the second meeting, members offered their thoughts on the software for which they were responsible and proposed which, if any, should be shortlisted. The following programs were eliminated from the list for not meeting our basic expectations, appearing out of date and/or unstable, or for their prohibitive cost:

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[1] Adobe Captivate was not part of the initial longlist due to its prohibitive price; however, the group decided after some discussion to investigate pricing alternatives for Captivate. As Captivate and Camtasia are generally considered to be the two flagship screencasting programs, the group felt we would be remiss in not examining Captivate.

Licensed Software	Free Software
Demo Builder	Wink
Madcap Mimic[2]	CamStudio
DemoWorks	Webinaria
Scate Ignite	Jing
ActivePresenter[3]	Debut Video Capture
Wildform Flair	Xvidcap
ProfCast	Krut
AllCapture	

Table 2: Eliminated software programs

Based on these preliminary recommendations, the group agreed to investigate the following software according to formalized evaluation criteria:

BBFlashback (free and pro versions)
Microsoft Expression Encoder
Capture Firefox
Adobe Captivate
Screencast-O-Matic

Table 3: Top 5 software

Formal Evaluations

At least two members were assigned to evaluate each program. Using the evaluation criteria outlined below, group members performed thorough evaluations of each of their assigned software programs. For the formal evaluation, group members not only scrutinized online reviews and information sources on the products: they also installed the software (trial versions in the case of licensed software) on their computers and spent time using and exploring it.

A compilation of the CAWG's formal evaluations can be found in Appendix A.

Evaluation Criteria

The chairs included a working list of evaluation criteria as part of the original CAWG documentation and invited feedback and additions from members. This initial list was adapted from Indoition's checklist of criteria: http://www.indoition.com/screencasting-tool-choosing.htm, which the chairs felt captured most of the key considerations. After tailoring this list where necessary, the chairs circulated the list to group members following the second meeting. Members were asked to review the criteria and bring forward any concerns or additional points at the next meeting. Following minimal updates to the list, the evaluation criteria were accepted by the group and then formalized into a spreadsheet to be used as a template for all official software evaluations.

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[2] Rejected due to cost
[3] Rejected due to cost

The final version of the CAWG evaluation criteria can be found in Appendix B.

Discussion Points

Capture Firefox, Explorer Encoder, and Screencast-O-Matic were rejected unanimously by their reviewers. The add-ons (Capture and Encoder) were found to be without adequate support, and once the reviewers used the programs themselves the limitations were quite obvious.

Screencast-O-Matic (at an annual fee of $15 for the professional version) was viewed as a better program overall but is still missing important features like interactive stop points, quizzing, and noise level variation. Reviewers were wary of adopting a Java-based program because the software will continue to be subject to bugs in Java, and viewers of the tutorials would have to ensure that their Java is up-to-date. While not without its merits, Screencast-O-Matic was not considered an adequate replacement for Camtasia in terms of functionality or ease of use.

The professional version of BBFlashback was a worthwhile program with a significant price difference from Camtasia should Dalhousie receive an educational discount. The price per unit for six to ten BBFlashback licenses (Dalhousie currently buys six Camtasia licenses) is $159 minus a possible 40% educational discount. Camtasia is priced at $269 minus a 40% educational discount; Dalhousie has paid $725 for six licenses. The reviewers liked the Pro version of BBFlashback but expressed concern over its incompatibility with Vimeo (which Dalhousie currently uses for many tutorials and other videos), lower-grade editing controls, and lack of quizzing capabilities. The group also questioned the real savings involved in adopting a new software program that offered rather limited training materials.

As expected, the reviewers were impressed with Captivate and investigated alternative pricing structures (the basic cost is prohibitive -- $299 per license after the education discount). Captivate does allow subscription licensing, which would be a cheaper option and would provide flexibility; however, even with subscription licensing Camtasia is more cost effective.

Recommendations

The Camtasia Alternative Working Group recommends the continued use of Camtasia Studio for Dalhousie University Libraries online tutorials.

Our evaluations confirm that Camtasia and Captivate are the two premier programs in the screencasting field. The group agrees that the need for screen capture in libraries for supporting information literacy instruction and distance education is not going to diminish in the near future. Since Dalhousie is already using one of the top screencasting software programs, the CAWG is hesitant to recommend moving backward in favour of an inferior program. As Dalhousie Libraries continue to meet the needs of distance students and other online users it is increasingly important to support this by creating professional, high-quality online materials.

Dalhousie Libraries currently holds six licenses for Camtasia Studio 8. Each library works with a single shared license, with the exception of the Law Library – where Camtasia is purchased through

external grants – and the Killam Library, which has two licenses (one for Lindsay and one for LITS). LITS keeps an unused copy as per their policy for all software purchased. The CAWG recommends delaying the purchase of additional licenses or new versions of Camtasia until expressed need arises. As the CAWG agrees on Camtasia Studio 8 as the best software program for the Dalhousie University Libraries, we do not anticipate the need for an upgrade in the near future.

Potential/Other Options

In considering the Dalhousie University Libraries Operational Review Final Report and Dalhousie/Education looking towards distance education and eLearning, future directions of the use of Camatasia could include only purchasing two to three licenses for use by a team of Library Technicians led by a Librarian/or Instructional Librarian committee to create videos for the library. Other university libraries have used models like this where the librarians provide the content and the Techs create the tutorials for them. This could be a potential future direction.

When considering future software upgrades, libraries should investigate opportunities for teaching and technology grants. While a high-quality screencasting program like Camtasia may not require every upgrade to meet our needs, discussion prior to upgrades may reveal other options to assist in covering the cost. Although it is always preferable to support technology through a budget line, rather than one-time grants, this is always an option.

Appendix A: Summary of Formal Evaluations

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Cost	$725/6 licenses (120 each)	$299 Student/Teacher edition; 1 year subscription $19/month	$159 per unit for 6 – 10 users minus possible 40% ed. discount	$15/year for Pro Version	Free or $179 for pro version	Free
Operating Systems						
Will the program run on both Microsoft and Apple?	Versions available for both	Yes	Windows only (7, Vista, XP, 2003, 2000)	Yes (is Java-based and runs in browser)	Windows XP SP3, Vista, 7	Yes, but must have Firefox 6 installed – users would have to downgrade browser to use. Firefox 16 current browser
Can the program produce videos that will play on mobile devices?	Yes	Yes	Yes (mpeg4)	When uploaded to Youtube, Vimeo (no set mobile formats)	iPhones, Android; in both cases an app is required	iPhones, Android
Editing						
What objects (such as texts or arrows) can be inserted?	Variety of callouts: arrows, icons, text boxes, highlights, etc	Shapes, including circles, rectangles, triangles, callouts, arrows, lines, banners, and flowchart symbols	Speech bubbles, arrows (from gallery; objects can also be added to gallery)	Callout boxes, highlight, blur, imported images	None	None

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Can static screenshots be imported?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Screen caps not recorded in SOM cannot be imported	Yes, though very limited – no importing of PPT slides, jpegs, etc	No
Can the designs of objects (ie. arrows) be changed?	Colours/outlines can be changed; also has a variety of template designs	Yes	Yes (options for colour, transparency, size, duration; very easy to manipulate)	No – standard design. Text overlays can be adjusted for box colour and font	No	No
Are cursor highlighting functions available?	Yes – both audio and visual	No	Yes, plus highlight regions.	Yes	No	Yes
How extensive are the animation options?	Anything on the screen can be made to move, turn, grow in size, etc	Extensive	Start/end titles, cursor, zoom and pan. Transitions exist but are minimal.	Not extensive. Fade in/fade out overlaps	None	None
How precisely can timing of individual objects be controlled?	Very precise	Very precise	.25 seconds for callouts (not very precise) 100th of a second (precise)	Good control over timing of overlays, transitions and video	Videos can be spliced together very precisely	Videos are saved as recorded
How well and at what level can you insert, replace, and edit audio files?	Very well	Very well	Very well	Decent editing of audio files but no post-recording volume variation capabilities.	Audio can be spliced and organized independent of the video	Audio is recorded in real time

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
				In Pro wave files can be exported for editing externally (ie. Audacity).		
Output						
What output formats are supported?	Mp4, MPEG4, WMV, MOV, AVI, M4V, RM, CAMV, GIF; can also be uploaded to Youtube and Vimeo	*.swf, *.exe, *.avi, *doc, but also mp4, mp3, pdf, MOV, RM	Flash, QuickTime, AVI, GIF, WMV, MPEG4; upload to YouTube, Blip.tv, Viddler, or Revver (not Vimeo). Interactive elements will not work in all file formats	QuickTime, YouTube, MP4, AVI, FLV, GIF, Vimeo, Google Drive	Window media vile (.wmv) or stream directly to web (which is inconvenient)	MP4
Will videos work on mobile devices?	Yes; certain production settings allow this or uploading to external hosting site	Yes	Yes; ability to format to fit mobile but no explicit settings for mobile export	Yes	iPhones (not without a specialized app or the user encoding it to something different first); Androids with an app	iPhones and Androids
Can you customize the appearance of the viewer?	Yes – different controllers are optional	Yes	Yes; size and colour	Size only	Yes	Yes
Can video format be uploaded to Blackboard?	Yes	Yes	Yes	When uploaded from external site	Yes	Yes

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Can video format be uploaded to Moodle?	Yes	Yes	Yes	When uploaded from external site	Yes	Yes
Can created videos be saved to our server or only hosted?	Server	Server	Server	Both	Appears to require a Microsoft server	
Interactivity						
Does the software allow for quizzing?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Does the software allow for a searchable table of contents or navigation menu so viewers can jump to different sections?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Can interactive buttons and stop points be inserted?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
User-friendliness						
Can you delete or add individual sequences?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Is it possible to replace individual screenshots?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (from SOM only)	Yes	No

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Is it possible to edit mouse paths?	No	No – you typically only adjust the start and end points, which is derived from the previous slide.	Cursor path can be smoothed out, hidden, or rerecorded for the whole movie or selected frames	No, but mouse can be hidden during overlay segments	Yes	No
Is it possible to make changes later on to the design?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes; if the file is saved as a project and then opened in the same program	No
Usability						
Is there some good documentation?	Excellent visual tutorials and good support forums	Yes	Limited documentation; older style help files, searchable index. Online FAQs, support forums, and help email link	Many tutorials available on website; however, some of the videos lack clarity Good knowledge base. There is a link to email support though no chat help.	Limited: Quickstart guide for Pro version, YouTube videos, user forum. Documentation tries to push users to upgrade.	Poor; only one introductory page

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Do you need much training, or can you get started immediately	Requires hours of training – can be done independently using tutorials	Requires some training	A fair amount of training would be needed to create more advanced videos. Training videos will get you started; not as comprehensive as Camtasia	Minimal training to create basic screencasts	Very confusing interface; would require a lot of technical training. Frustrating to use.	Easily used; simple interface. Requires some knowledge of how codecs work.
What is your personal preference (ie. gut feeling)?	Continually impressed with this program	Great product, but given the cost, probably a bit more than what my library needs	Decent alternative. Editing not as fine-grained as Camtasia.	Potentially useful as a backup program but not a replacement for Camtasia	Good for encoding but not recording; frustrating setup and likely updates required by the end-user.	Was discontinued in Sept. 2011 and requires a downgrade to FF6 -- insecure and not recommended.
		Too expensive	Good price, most of the functionality of Camtasia. A lot to learn, though. It would need training.	Basic starter tool; not nearly as advanced as Camtasia or Captivate. I would like to see a quizzing feature		
Strategic Questions						
How likely is the tool to be discontinued?	Not likely	Not likely	Not likely	Has existed since 2008, but no guarantee with web-based programs; seems underpriced	Not likely; will probably improve over time and increase price	Has been since 2011

	Camtasia	Captivate	BBFlashback	Screencast-O-Matic	Microsoft Expression Encoder	Capture Firefox
Does the tool require a server run by the manufacturer?	No	No	No	Yes; editing suite is online and requires the latest Java-enabled browser	No	No
How easily can source files be migrated to another tool (if necessary) in the future?	Cannot be done	Not sure how easily	Cannot be done	Cannot be done	Not likely	Cannot be done
How prominent are advertising banners, watermarks, etc?	No watermarks	None	None	None in pro version	None	None
Overall rating (1-5)	4	5 4	2.5 4	1.5 2.5	2	1

Appendix B: CAWG Evaluation Criteria

Cost

- · How much does it cost?

Operating Systems

- · Will the program run on both Microsoft and Apple?
- · Can the program produce videos that will play on mobile devices?

Editing

- · What objects (such as texts or arrows) can be inserted?
- · Can static screenshots be imported?
- · Can the designs of objects (ie. arrows) be changed?
- · Are cursor highlighting functions available?
- · How extensive are the animation options?
- · How precisely can timing of individual objects be controlled?
- · How well and at what level can you insert, replace, and edit audio files?

Output

- · What output formats are supported? **Please include a full list.**
- · Will videos work on mobile devices?
- · Can you customize the appearance of the viewer?
- · Can video format be uploaded to Blackboard?
- · Can video format be uploaded to Moodle?
- · Are the videos downloadable or hosted?

Interactivity

- · Does the software allow for quizzing?
- · Does the software allow for a searchable table of contents or navigation menu so viewers can jump to different sections?
- · Can interactive buttons and stop points be inserted?

User-friendliness

- Can you delete or add individual sequences?
- Is it possible to replace individual screenshots?
- Is it possible to edit mouse paths?
- Is it possible to make changes later on to the design?

Usability

- Is there some good documentation?
- Do you need much training, or can you get started immediately?
- What's your personal preference?

Strategic questions

- How likely is the tool to be discontinued?
- Does the tool require a server run by the manufacturer?
- How easily can source files be migrated to another tool (if necessary) in the future?
- How prominent are advertising banners, watermarks, etc?

General

- Please rate this software according to how well you think it meets your library's needs:

  - This software is not sufficient for my library's needs.
  - This software just barely meets my library's needs.
  - This software exactly meets my library's needs
  - This software somewhat exceeds my library's needs
  - This software far exceeds my library's needs