

Epster design: a leap into the unknown



James Molloy
College Liaison Librarian
Engineering and Architecture
University College Dublin
james.molloy@ucd.ie



Susan Boyle
College Liaison Librarian
Business and Law
University College Dublin
susan.boyle@ucd.ie

If you haven't yet come across the concept of the electronic poster or 'eposter', then chances are you probably will sometime soon as the format will certainly come into popularity at conferences in the coming years. This article aims to share a recent experience we had of transforming a traditional printed poster presented at the 2014 LILAC conference and turning it into an eposter for the EdTech 2014 conference here in Dublin. Both posters are available for you to view and refer to when making comparisons.

WHAT IS AN EPOSTER?

An eposter allows the presenter to create a deeper visual message through the inclusion of additional slides in PowerPoint (the EdTech conference allowed a maximum of ten slides) and by embedding multimedia content (e.g. videos, animated charts or graphs, hyperlinks, 3D models and animations) alongside static elements such as titles, logos, abstracts, supporting texts and summaries. The eposter should in theory be displayed on an interactive whiteboard; however, it can also be displayed as a PowerPoint slideshow on a projected screen. The specifications will be set by the particular conference in

their guidelines, but put in its simplest form, an eposter is an interactive poster that enables users to navigate through the story or message that the authors want to tell.

HOW DID THE OPPORTUNITY COME ABOUT?

As many of us know, the genuine time and effort put into the design of a printed poster is not always reflected or appreciated during the conference programme, where poster presentations can often be relegated to the fringes during a coffee break (Halligan, 2008; Moore *et al.*, 2001).

Although you have what is in effect a published item, often showcasing a work-in-progress (Ellerbee, 2009), and it is often the springboard to a full published academic article, the experience of investing a lot of time for little reward can leave the author(s) of a poster wondering if it is really worthwhile.

We recently presented a poster at the LILAC Conference 2014, and while we were in the process of creating it we noticed that an upcom-

Opportunity out of change: designing a new approach to student & teaching support at UCD Library

Susan Boyle, James Molloy, Josh Clark

Abstract: This poster presents UCD Library's two eLearning 'showcase environments' on our website; the Learning Support Menu space geared towards academic staff and the Supporting Your Learning space aimed at students. These online spaces were devised to promote a suite of varied, self-paced, eLearning objects created by the Library eLearning team using Articulate Storyline and Captivate. These eLearning objects have a strong branded identity, are arranged by need and are intended to complement our face-to-face training sessions. All design decisions were "user centred". A prioritized framework was developed based on identifiable needs culminating in a creative and successful in-house production of eLearning objects. This in turn has raised our profile as eLearning Librarians within the university.

Change [Restructuring – impetus to explore new approach with less staff]	Inspiration [Heatherwick Expo as a captivating concept to showcase learning supports]	Approach [Implement a programme to exploit eLearning technologies within the Library's Strategic Plan]	Partners [Library Outreach, UCD Media Services, Bord na Gaeilge & UCD Teaching & Learning]
Student Showcase [Our Supporting Your Learning Space is a gateway for students to discover online tutorials]	Sample of ELearning objects • Point of need • Relevant • Self-paced	Staff Showcase [Our Learning Support Menu for academics provides library solutions to embed in programmes]	Next... • Self-directed • Academic led • Librarian facilitated
Build... • Productive workflow within eLearning team • Tailored content • A varied range of learning objects using eLearning authoring software • Non eLearning content & Game Based Learning • Audible & user friendly language	Design... • Unified branding • Intuitive icons for different content types • For accessibility using best practice • To be mobile compliant • To adapt to new technologies • Built in search functions • User friendly interface	Consider... • Measurement/Assessment • Software upgrades • eLearning as a complement rather than a substitute for face-to-face sessions • Feedback mechanisms to improve development • How to build autonomy & avoid outsourcing content • Future collaborations	Next... • Promotion – to improve awareness & raise profile • Facilitate more student & academic engagement • Make RLO's available via Creative Commons • Deal with potential challenges e.g. Discovery tool changeover • Sustainable decisions

Endorsing Working Group: Susan Boyle, James Molloy, Jennifer Collins, Michelle Dellar, Sue Dill, Carmel Morris, Emily Doherty, Gerard Walsh, Siarnuid Stokes, Sarah Hood, Managers: Peter Hickey & Marie Burke, Outreach Team: Joshua Clark, Anna Schmitt, Melanie Simpson & Rosalind Pae. Please contact authors for reuse permission.

LILAC poster

ing EdTech conference here at University College Dublin was looking for eposter submissions. This caught our attention: for a start, the audience would be entirely different as EdTech is primarily aimed at an audience of educational technologists and those working with technology in higher education in Ireland; secondly, we had never encountered eposters before and it was a great opportunity to try something new and innovative. The title and the abstract were changed and the submission was accepted by the conference review committee.

TRANSFORMATION FROM A POSTER TO AN EPOSTER

You can approach the design of an eposter fresh from ground up; however, we had the foundation of what we needed with the poster we designed for LILAC. We used the bulk of this poster as our anchor or homepage slide; it featured the traditional title, author information, abstract and main theme headings for the additional slides. We also featured a timeline on the recommendation of the review panel from our submission entry. The main difference between creating a traditional

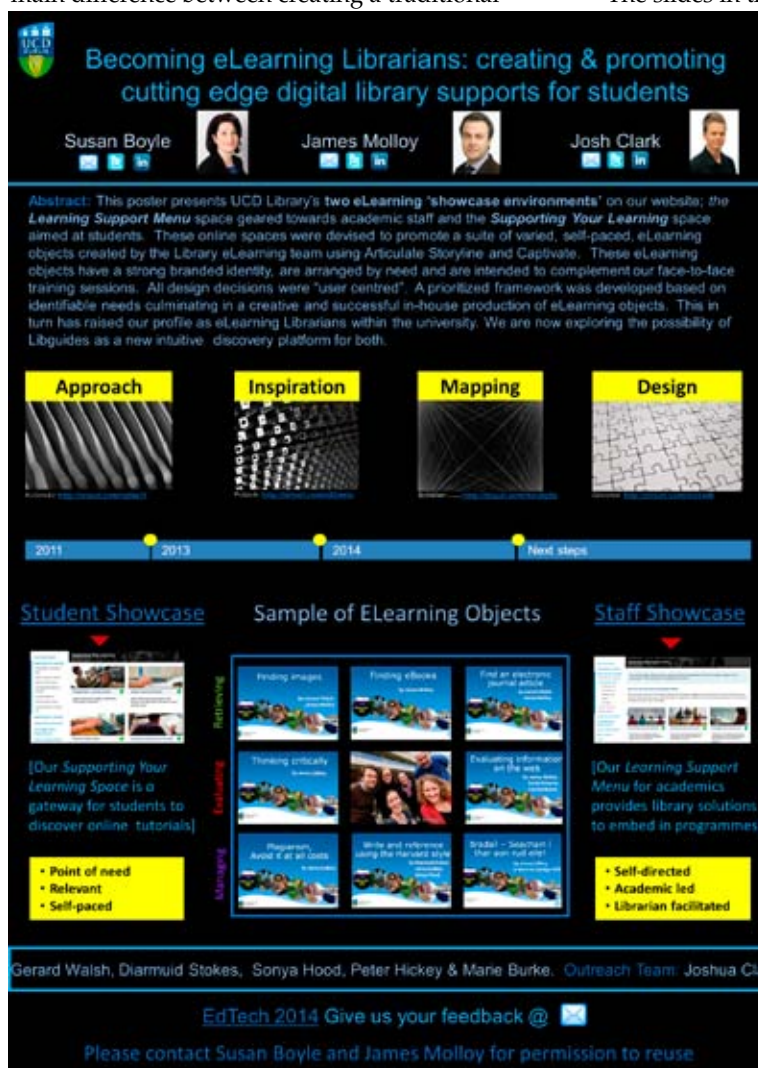
poster and an eposter is that the former requires you to strip down the amount of information and make a judgement on what to include and what needs to be sacrificed while still getting your message across, whereas the latter provides you with an open palette to include a very generous amount of information. The important thing is to do this in such a way as to still make sense of the story that you are trying to tell. You must avoid being tempted to go overboard and add too much content, as the general principles of good poster design still apply: good organisation, a concise and clear explanation and a clear pathway through the poster (Brown, 1997).

We took away a lot of the captions and text boxes from the LILAC poster and made the eposter homepage slide more reliant on images and main headings. This streamlined the overall design of the main page, making it less cluttered and easier to read (Moore *et al.*, 2001). There were four main headings and four individual sections on the timeline, each of which linked out to a separate page; each separate page was a mini-poster in essence. The slides in the eposter were interlinked using

embedded hyperlinks, sometimes using images as hyperlink anchors. Caption boxes that were used on the LILAC poster became a full page on the eposter, e.g. the heading 'Inspiration' went from a series of five bullet points to a full page featuring images, hyperlinks, embedded video, captions and text summaries linked together by eye-catching graphics and animations.

SOME LESSONS LEARNED

As this is generally uncharted territory for the eposter authors and possibly also for the conference IT facilitators, one will inevitably encounter some hitches and glitches along the way. The first thing to consider is that this can be a much larger undertaking depending on the number of slides you decide to include in your eposter. We used the maximum permitted ten slides; I would go no further, given the amount of time each slide took to produce; one also has to consider the amount of file memory used. We were allowed a maximum of



EdTech Eposter

15mb, and as each slide eats up memory you have to keep checking as you go to keep within your limit. If there is no limit, you still need to keep in mind the end user and the download capacity of the device they may be using, especially for mobile devices, so 15mb is a good working limit. If you happen to go over the limit, look for obvious culprits such as animations or 3D graphics that may be memory-heavy. You may also need to consider reducing the number of slides used: compressing the finished eposter to a zip file will also help. Given the number of slides, it can be easy to lose the essence of the story you are trying to tell; we found that having a back arrow key prominent on each slide to take the user back to the home 'anchor' slide helped. However, this may not be necessary if you decide to tell the story moving from the opening to the concluding slide.

For your first eposter there is no harm in keeping it relatively simple as trying something too fancy or complicated could backfire. Try and test your eposter in the venue beforehand – and the more time you have, the better, in order to rectify any glitches. Have a contingency plan. We were under the impression that our eposter would be displayed on an interactive whiteboard and that we would only need to be on hand to demonstrate to end-users how to navigate through it. Leading up to the conference we learned that the eposter would be shown as part of a series of ten eposters and that we would have to present it to all the delegates in a five-minute slot. This proved difficult as five minutes to showcase ten slides was a daunting prospect but in the end we managed to do ourselves and the eposter justice.

Keep uniformity in the overall design: be consistent with colours, typefaces and spacing and consider best accessibility practice, e.g. sans serif typefaces, large font size, etc. Use hyperlinks and graphics but don't overload. Attention to detail is vital: check, recheck and recheck again. In terms of design, layout gridlines are useful to help line things up; it pays to give proper attention to these details. Never overlook the simple things like spelling, and get someone not connected to your project to proof-read. Check the graphic resolution of images as they may have to appear on a large screen. Make sure your embedded links work, test and test again, and if you are using moving animation, set it to a medium speed. Always get copyright clearance for any image or graphic used in your presentation and include the link to the source – using a TinyURL or Bitly will save space. We used a combination of original photographs taken by UCD Media Services

and images available under Creative Commons License from Flickr. All our graphics, logos and icons were copyright free or we sought permission direct from the owners.

Finally, there are not many examples of eposters to view online. There are some on YouTube but these can be misleading as you may not encounter the same level of high-tech equipment as some of the international conferences featured. We found hardly any literature on this area of work; besides this article you may have only the conference eposter guidelines to work from. There are some Twitter forums (#eposter, #ePoster etc.) but the medium does not really allow you dispense advice, given the limited number of characters. If you can view some final presented eposters from conferences these will help give you an idea of what works and what doesn't. Our advice is to persist and ask the organisers as many questions as you can about the setup, any limitations as to file capacity, design features and most importantly how the eposter will be presented. Looking back, even though it involved a lot of work, it was a worthwhile project overall. It also helped us to clarify our project concepts into a neat, visually attractive showcase.

FEEDBACK

We got instant feedback on Twitter from delegates of the EdTech conference. It was all very positive and rewarding given the non-library audience, and we briefly became a conference trending item – which just goes to show that we librarians do know how to stand out from the crowd. Here are a few examples of the tweets we received:

'Great presentations from UCD librarians'

'Becoming eLearning librarians #edtech14, new role for librarians? Great presentation'

'Great presentation UCD library staff'

'Impressive eibrarians at ucd'

This Twitter feedback was an instant reaction to the initial visual 'first impression' of the eposter. The bold use of colour and graphics gave a strong visual appeal to the eposter and this was reflected in the feedback we received. Aim to make your presentation stand out from the competition. As the eposter can be interactive you can look to add a live feedback option for user comments, such as a Twitter feed, a Wordle, a Mentimeter voting tool or simply just adding a hyperlinked email icon.

BENEFITS

Poster and eposter submissions are a great way to get to attend and participate in conferences. However, an additional advantage of an eposter is that they can be useful for internal promotion amongst library staff to showcase a project in a large organisation. They also enhance the library's reputation, generating post-conference interest and collaborations. It is important to think about the audience looking at the poster: what they know and what is of interest to them, and to tailor, take out or add in content accordingly.

Eposters can be reused: they may be sent to an academic to explain a new service, for example, that can cut through the communication channel noise. Some academics get students to design posters on a topic as part of their coursework and need examples to show them what they expect. Others may be interested to know how you completed the work, so it can become a common topic for conversations with academics and relationship-building for liaison / subject librarians.

CONCLUSION

Go for it if the opportunity arises. The experience will mean that you probably won't want to go back to the traditional-style poster; this is a much more dynamic and satisfying way of getting your message out there. Make the poster interactive, and it will bring it to life for the end-user; don't be tempted to make it run like an average conference PowerPoint slideshow presentation. Within the next couple of years eposters may become the norm for presenting posters at future conferences. As one EdTech conference delegate tweeted: 'Ground Zero of #edtech14 eposter Presentations'. The eposter format proved to be a hit at this particular conference and the process will be improved for the 2015 conference.

REFERENCES

- S. Boyle, J. Molloy & J. Clark (2014). Becoming eLearning librarians: creating and promoting cutting edge digital library supports for students. EdTech 2014 May 29–30, 2014, University College Dublin, Ireland
- B. S. Brown (1997). Poster design – *Six points to ponder*. *Biochemical education*, 25, 136–37
- Pip Bruce Ferguson (@DocPipNZ) (2014). #edtech14 great presentations from UCD librarians, Twitter, 29 May 2014 4:59 p.m. Available at <https://twitter.com/DocPipNZ/status/472044537071038464> [accessed 29 May 2014]
- S. M. Ellerbee (2009). An artistic view of posters. *Newborn and infant nursing reviews*, 9, 109–10
- Tom Farrelly (@TomFarrelly. 2014. #edtech14 great presentation UCD library staff, Twitter, 29 May 2014, 4:43 p.m. Available at <https://twitter.com/TomFarrelly/status/472040440569823232> [accessed 29 May 2014]
- Tom Farrelly (@TomFarrelly. 2014. Becoming eLearning librarians #edtech14, new role for librarians? Great presentation', Twitter, 29 May 2014, 4:48 p.m. Available at <https://twitter.com/TomFarrelly/status/472041907305336832> [accessed 29 May 2014]
- Bernie Goldbach (@topgold). 2014. Ground Zero of #edtech14 ePoster Presentations (sic) <http://1drv.ms/1kOcgyt> Twitter, 29 May 2014, 4:45 p.m. Available at <https://twitter.com/topgold/status/472040922419445760> [accessed 29 May 2014]
- P. Halligan (2008). Poster presentations: Valuing all forms of evidence. *Nurse education in practice*, 8, 41–45.
- Irish Learning Technology Association (2014). EdTech 2014. Available at: <http://ilta.ie/edtech/edtech2014/> [accessed 2 March 2014]
- L. W. Moore, P. Augspruger, M. O. B King & C. Proffitt (2001). Insights on the poster preparation and presentation process. *Applied Nursing Research*, 14, pp. 100–4
- Tony Murphy (@AjtMurphy) (2014). 'impressive e librarians at ucd #edtech14', Twitter, 29 May 2014, 4:41 p.m. Available at <https://twitter.com/AjtMurphy/status/472039982895730688> [accessed 29 May 2014]