Designing a Multimedia Center for Everyone: The Freedman Center

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The Freedman Center is Case Western Reserve University's new multimedia lab built for Faculty, Staff, and students. Providing them with the tools and experiences needed to create dynamic multimedia presentations. But, designing a center for an audience with such a wide variety of needs, interests, and skills can be a challenge. In addition to creating a friendly and useful environment the Center also has to focus on maximizing its limited resources.

To that end the Center has taken a middle of the road approach to hardware and software. Everything (for the most part) in the Freedman Center is affordable so that not only is the equipment friendly (not scary) but for those that want to purchase their own it is also very accessible.

Audio / Video Workstations

There are 4 A/V Workstations in the Center, able to digitize audio and video from a wide variety of sources. The equipment is not rack mounted professional gear but consumer level equipment placed on a 'monolith' of sleekly designed shelves. The video and audio sources run to selector switches and the video and audio signals are converted from A to D with separate converter boxes. Only two cables run from the 'monolith' to the computer IEEE1394 for Video and USB for the audio and all invisible to the user.

Each of the 4 A/V 'monoliths' has a Region free DVD player, a World VCR (NTSC/PAL/SECAM), a MiniDV/SVHS Deck, a cassette deck and a direct drive 33/45/78 turntable (that can play them forwards and backwards). There is also a Laserdisc player on one of the stations and open reel-to-reel audio player on another (Beta and 8 track tape are coming soon - really). Users who bring in 16mm or 8mm films can have them dubbed to Mini DV by the center staff for self digitization later.

The Center is completely self service and users are shown in a straightforward manner how to capture, edit, encode, and author their video projects. Software ranges from Movie Maker to Vegas Video to Premiere Pro and Elements. For every task there are several options that cater to anyone from the complete amateur to the more skilled user who just wants to use the better equipment and software.

There was great debate about how many MACs to put in the Center. The debate concluded with the facts that 1) Case is primarily a PC School and that 2) MAC users tend to already own MACs. Not to exclude any users the Center has 2 MAC Workstations (1 AV and 1 Scanning) that are very fast and loaded with the software that the average MAC user might not own such as Final Cut Pro and DVD Studio Pro.

Scanning/Multimedia Workstations

There are 6 scanning workstations in the Center. 4 of these are 'regular' scanning workstations having both a good quality flatbed scanner a 4000 DPI slide/negative scanner on each workstation.

Towards the front of the Center are 2 'specialty' scanning workstations. One these workstations has a medium format flatbed scanner that can also scan very large transparencies. This workstation also has another 4000 DPI slide scanner that also has a bulk feed attachment. The second of these workstations has a high speed-high capacity sheet fed document scanner that is always in high demand for turning handouts and notes into quick PDF files.

The scanning workstations have the complete Adobe Creative and Macromedia Suites allowing for all types of editing and authoring.

The Center also has 6 'collaborative' workstations that have a larger area for group work and the full software set of the scanning workstations.

Language Resource Center

The Center is also Case's language resource center and the perimeter of the lab contains 16 additional workstations dedicated to the language study. In addition to the curricular materials available by the departments, users can check out language learning 'chips' on a wide variety of languages for self study.

Loaned Equipment

The Center also has some specialty equipment for loan. Users can check out Analog or Digital Headphones (with a microphone) or a Tablet for use in the Center. The Center also has 2 Mini DV Cameras, 2 Digital Cameras, 2 5GB Portable USB Drives, and 2 Digital Voice recorders than be borrowed for up to 2 days.

About the Center

The Samuel B. and Marian K. Freedman Digital Library, Language Learning, and Multimedia Services Center is a partnership between Case Western Reserve University's Kelvin Smith Library and the College of Arts and Sciences, with support from Instructional Technology and Academic Computing (ITAC).

In the short time that it has been open it has already started to transform the culture and attitude towards multimedia on campus with Faculty, Staff and Students taking advantage of its resources for personal, professional, and most importantly educational use.

This presentation outlines some of processes that went into the development of the Center, the challenges in implementation and some of our success stories.