

# Building Pathfinders with Free Screen Capture Tools

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*This article outlines freely available screen capturing tools, covering their benefits and drawbacks as well as their potential applications. In discussing these tools, the author illustrates how they can be used to build pathfinding tutorials for users and how these tutorials can be shared with users. The author notes that the availability of these screen capturing tools at no cost, coupled with their ease of use, provides ample opportunity for low-stakes experimentation from library staff in building dynamic pathfinders to promote the discovery of library resources.*

One of the goals related to discovery in the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries' strategic plan is to "expand user awareness of library resources, services and staff expertise through promotion and technology."<sup>1</sup> Screencasting videos and screenshots can be used effectively to show users how to access materials using finding tools in a systematic, step-by-step way. Screencasting and screen capturing tools are becoming more intuitive to learn and use and can be downloaded for free. As such, these tools are becoming an efficient and effective method for building pathfinders for users. One such tool is Jing (<http://www.jingproject.com>), free-ware that is easy to download and use. Jing allows for short screencasts of five minutes or less to be created and uploaded to a remote server on Screencast.com. Once a Jing screencast is uploaded, Screencast.com provides a URL for the screencast that can be shared via e-mail or instant message or on a webpage. Another function of Jing is recording screenshots, which can be annotated and shared by URL or pasted into documents or presentations. Jing serves as an effective tool for enabling librarians working with students via chat or instant messaging to quickly create screenshots and videos that visually demonstrate to students how to get the information they need. Jing stores the screenshots and videos on its server, which allows those files to be reused in subject or course guides and in course management systems, course syllabi, and library instructional handouts. Moreover, Jing's files storage provides an opportunity for librarians to incorporate tutorials into a variety of spaces where patrons may need them in such a manner that does not require internal library server space or work from internal library Web specialists.

Trailfire (<http://www.trailfire.com>) is another screen-capturing tool that can be utilized in the same manner. Trailfire allows users to create a trail of webpage

screenshots that can be annotated with notes and shared with others via a URL. Such trails can provide users with a step-by-step slideshow outlining how to obtain specific resources. When a trail is created with Trailfire, a URL is provided to share. Like Jing, Trailfire is free to download and easy to learn and use.

Wink (<http://debugmode.com/wink>) was originally created for producing software tutorials, which makes it well suited for creating tutorials about how to use databases. Although Wink is much less sophisticated than expensive software packages, it can capture screenshots, add explanation boxes, buttons, titles, and voice to your tutorials. Screenshots are captured automatically as you use your computer on the basis of mouse and keyboard input. Wink files can be converted into very compressed Flash presentations and a wide range of other file types, such as PDF, but do not support AVI files. As such, Wink tutorials converted to Flash have a fluid movie feel similar to Jing screencasts, but Wink tutorials also can be converted to more static formats like PDF, which provides added flexibility.

SlideShare (<http://www.slideshare.net>) allows for the conversion of uploaded PowerPoint, OpenOffice, or PDF files into online flash movies. An option to sync audio to the slides is available, and widgets can be created to embed slideshows onto websites, blogs, subject guides, or even social networking sites.

Any of these tools can be utilized for just-in-time virtual reference questions in addition to the common use of just-in-case instructional tutorials. Such just-in-time screen capturing and screencasting offer a viable solution for providing more equitable service and teachable moments within virtual reference applications. These tools allow library staff to answer patron questions via e-mail and chat reference in a manner that allows patrons to see processes for obtaining information sources. Demonstrations that are typically provided in face-to-face reference interactions and classroom instruction sessions can be provided to patrons virtually. The efficiency of this practice is that it is simpler and faster to capture and share a screencast tutorial when answering virtual reference questions than to explain complex processes in written form. Additionally, the fact that these tools are freely available and easy to use provides library staff the opportunity to pursue low-stakes experimentation with screen capturing and screencasting.

The primary drawback to these freely available tools is that none of them provides a screencast that allows for both voice and text annotations, unlike commercial products such as Camtasia and Captivate. However, tutorials rendered with these freely available tools can be repurposed into a tutorial within commercial applications like Camtasia Studio (<http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp>) and Adobe Captivate (<http://www.adobe.com/products/captivate/>).

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As previously mentioned, these easy-to-use tools can allow screencast videos and screenshots to be integrated into a variety of online spaces. A particularly effective type of online space for potential integration of such screencast videos and screenshots are library “how do I find . . .” research help guides. Many of these “how do I find . . .” research help guides serve as pathfinders for patrons, outlining processes for obtaining information sources. Currently, many of these pathfinders are in text form, and experimentation with the tools outlined in this article can

empower library staff to enhance their own pathfinders with screencast videos and screenshot tutorials.

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