Optimizing the Video Pipeline for the Current Global Climate

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At Dell, short video demos to improve customer self-service for replacing parts, such as disk drives in laptops, have become a major priority across the business.

When we initially planned our IDEAS presentation, the focus was on how the Information Design and Development organization has transformed its Visual Design service, previously providing individual videos and images on request, into a rapid-delivery shop working collaboratively with writers, eServices, and Translation to produce hundreds of videos yearly as a standard deliverable for new releases and for addressing post-release problems.

This presentation also would demonstrate how we have been able to show the value of the IDD organization to the organization as a whole – always an ongoing need to show that technical documentation is more than a commodity. As it turned out, demonstrating that value has been even more dramatic than we anticipated four months ago.

The current global climate – specifically, Covid-19 – has both intensified the importance of supporting customer self-service (site visits even for complex procedures are generally impossible) but also derailed the ability of videographers to travel to or access hardware in a lab. This is an issue likely facing many technology companies.

At Dell, we're well accustomed to work remotely, but our hardware specialists – writers as well as videographers – are definitely hands-on.

So, we faced two challenges:

- How do you record a hardware procedure when you can't travel or go to an office to access the hardware?
- How do we keep producing and even scale up video production to meet increasing demand for self-service?

In this case, necessity was the mother of invention. Specifically, an "invention" our Visual Design team had often considered but always back-burnered as cost-prohibitive in startup costs for tools and training and integration into our processes: 3D videos from CAD drawings available for 95% of our products. Suddenly, that back burner became urgent.

We'll show how we figured out a new process using 3D CAD drawings and 3D software to make those drawings come alive, and how we integrated that process into a collaborative workflow to keep writers in the loop and strenghten the input and engagement from SMEs.

Here is how our process has adapted to this new constraint and opportunity:

- We still begin with the written procedures writers create when a product releases
- After a short training, writers turn procedures into scripts, stretching their skills
- Now, our Visual Design team uses those scripts and CAD drawings to produce Version 1 of a 3D video.
- We bring in SMEs who have actually worked with the product to provide feedback. Giving feedback on a video gets much more engagement than feedback on a written doc.
- Review can go through several rapid iterations, possible because we didn't "hard code" the procedure in film but in readily editable 3D drawings.
- The writer is part of the feedback process throughout, signing off on QA to ensure technical accuracy and updating the written doc if basic steps change. The complementary video provides nuances it would be hard to capture in text.

Next on our horizon

We're in the rapid-evolution mode with these strategic goals on our horizon:

- Determine 3D video cost basis for future planning
- Incorporate lessons learned into our standard processes
- Plan how writers can take advantage of the 3D process if hands on equipment is not available
- Videos are now published standalone on YouTube or Dell Brightcove and linked to from tech docs, KnowledgeBase articles, and other content. We are looking at the best user experience for embedding videos directly in our written topics.