

What Comprises an Effective Videoconferencing "Best Practices" Video?

"Best practices" constitute excellence in teaching that include "effective actions teachers take, and requisite conditions teachers establish, to facilitate learning." (Drummond, 1994)

Access to "best practices" is particularly critical when teaching involves the use of technology, since teaching with technology is a relatively new experience for most instructors. Yet, web searches reveal that there are few "best practices" of this type readily available for instructors. To help meet this need, Instructional Communications Systems (ICS) is developing teaching with technology "best practices" in a variety of forms: text, video sequences and Web format.

In developing "best practices" it is important to consider the critical elements that comprise "best practices" of this type. During the ICS research process, five critical areas emerged: 1) Instructor expertise, 2) Content structure and instruction techniques, 3) Learner participation/interaction, 4) Learning results and 5) "best practices" production qualities. Other important factors for the instructor, participants and learning organization were: 1) Discussion of instructor training, 2) Reasons for choosing the specific technology, 3) Description of component technology tools and 4) Program/ Course cost estimates that would include: a) Return on investment (ROI) and b) Cost benefit analysis (CBA).

Instructor expertise - The most critical factor noted was the expertise of the instructor. This included both the background knowledge of the instructor in the area of content, the instructor's expertise in teaching and the expert manner in which the instructor had learned about the technology and seamlessly used the most appropriate technology(ies) to work with the content. Learners also wanted to be able to contact the instructor in order to further tap into that expertise.

Content structure and instruction techniques - The inclusion of the program/course title was important as well as the reasons for selecting the videoconferencing technology for that particular content. This, it was hoped, would not only provide necessary background information but would also indicate challenges that were presented to the instructor and the manner in which the challenges were resolved. It was also critical to find out course objectives, to learn about how the course was structured and to hear about and see some of the instruction techniques. In addition, they wanted to know if the course design could be replicated or adapted.

Learner information and participation - Other instructors wanted to know how the expert instructor obtained both demographic and personal information about the participants and what methods were used. They also wanted to know how learners were actively engaged in the learning process during the program/course.

Learning results - Paramount questions were: "What learning actually occurred?" What types of assessment were used? and "Did the students learn as well in this environment as in the traditional classroom?"

"Best practices" production qualities - The effectiveness of sharing the "best practices" information depends to a great extent on the level of the production quality, be it text, video or in Web format. For example, in video, the sequences should be short, no longer than 3 or 4 minutes and carefully planned and edited. Ideally it should include shots of the instructor and class shots, depicting actual teaching and learning styles. The picture quality of the video is important. Equally important is the quality of the audio.

Other important factors - other factors that surfaced that were important components of "best practices" were: 1) Mention of the type of training the instructor received, 2) Reasons the instructor used for choosing the specific technology(ies), 3) Descriptions of component technology tools (i.e. email, Listservs, Web pages, videotapes, audio calls, document camera, etc.) and 4) Program/Course cost estimates that would include: a) Return on investment (ROI) and b) Cost benefit analysis (CBA).

References

Educause Effective Practices and Solutions:

<http://www.hi.is/~joner/eaps/educausp.htm>

Drummond, T. (1994). "A Brief Summary of the Best Practices in College Teaching":

<http://northonline.sccd.ctc.edu/eceprog/bstprac.htm>