



Skills for Work

Creative Digital Media (Intermediate 1)

Guide to storage options for multimedia files



Introduction

This guide highlights issues and solutions in storing e-portfolio evidence for the Units in the Skills for Work Creative Digital Media Course — particularly media elements with large storage requirements such as video and audio.

It focuses on issues regarding:

- ◆ ease of use
- ◆ longevity of storage
- ◆ internal and external verification
- ◆ links to the Deskspace e-portfolio system

and highlights the advantages and disadvantages of potential solutions.

Background information

The Skills for Work Creative Media Course has been designed to provide an introduction to the digital media industry and its sectors. These include radio, television/DVD, games and software, publishing, and websites.

Candidates have to create digital media assets such as text, digital stills, digital video and digital audio, some of which may have very large file sizes.

Deskspace E-portfolio system

SQA provides Deskspace, an e-portfolio system for all candidates on Skills for Work Courses. It allows access to the assessment evidence in a central location. Evidence from the e-portfolio can be accessed by assessors and verified by both internal verifiers and External Verifiers.

Space for uploaded files is limited within the Deskspace system and consequently the system will not be able to store the large files that some of the Units of the Skills for Work Digital Media Course may require. However, Deskspace offers an excellent central place for managing candidate progress and for candidates to take responsibility for their learning.

Finding a suitable solution

There are a number of possible solutions to the question of large file storage. These include using an online file repository, using local storage facilities, or allowing candidates to use their own services to store assessment evidence.

Online storage

An online file repository is usually a web-based application that runs within a web browser. A user uploads data from their computer system and the data can then be accessed on any computer with an internet connection. Many repositories offer fairly large online storage capacities that could handle the large storage

requirements that will be required for the Creative Digital Media Course. However, it is important to check whether tutors and External Verifiers will be able to access the files.

Key issues to consider, therefore, are:

- ◆ the storage requirements, both in total and for individual files
- ◆ availability and longevity of assessment evidence
- ◆ any restrictions on uploads which may affect the quality of assessment evidence
- ◆ cost and resource implications
- ◆ accessibility for tutors and verifiers

Centre-based storage

An alternative, but perhaps more traditional solution, is to store the digital media elements generated as part of the Course locally within centres. The centre would then be responsible for obtaining server space to store data and for ensuring that the candidate material is externally accessible.

A major advantage in storing data locally is that control can be kept of the assets at all times, something that is not guaranteed with online repositories. As such, the longevity of data will be controlled by the individual centre in line with SQA requirements. However, the server hardware, software, its setup, deployment and ongoing maintenance, will be expensive and it is a considerable responsibility which not all centres may be set up to cope with. The ease of use for the candidate will vary in centres depending on their particular set-up.

Local policies and procedures may cause difficulties in linking the files to Desktopspace and allowing access to server-based files externally. This could cause difficulties both for candidates and tutors who wish to work remotely, and for External Verifiers who would appreciate remote access to assets.

Online storage solutions

Online repositories allow the issues associated with the storage of large files to be considered externally to the centre. Reliability is a key issue, particularly as the repository is storing examination evidence. It is important to ensure that any service selected employs back-up techniques to prevent data loss and to be aware that repositories also reserve the right to remove data that does not meet their terms and conditions. With the foregoing in mind, the risk of data being lost should always be taken into account and a local copy of all data stored within the centre on suitable media such as CD or DVD.

The main problem with some online repositories is that access is limited to the user account only so that third-party access is not possible. File repositories that do not allow access to files from third parties have been omitted from this guide as both the assessor and SQA must be able to access the online-stored files for assessment and verification purposes.

The three example online repositories outlined below offer the type of storage that the e-portfolio system for the Creative Digital Media Course requires. Individual centres considering this kind of solution will need to weigh-up the particular issues affecting their situation and require that the chosen website is cleared for use on their network.

Box: www.box.net

Box is a web-based service that allows users to create an online space that can store files. The entry level account is free and gives 1 Gb of online storage. However, it does have a file size limit of 25 Mb, which would be limiting. Paid accounts start at approx £5.15 per calendar month per user. Prices for an institutional-based subscription are around £1474 per year for 50 users, each with 15 Gb of storage.

The service seems to be well established and secure. It is easy to use, with a simple web interface that will allow a user to add files using a drag-and-drop feature. Stored files can be accessed on an individual basis through a unique URL. This means that the files stored on Box can be linked from inside Desktopspace and accessed on any system that has internet access.

There appears to be no time limit set on the files stored in box.net. Their terms and conditions do, however, state that: 'In the event that Box.net concludes offering data storage services, Box.net users will receive the option to have their stored files sent to them in CD or other format selected by Box.net. Box.net does not guarantee length of service'.

Humyo: www.humyo.com

The Humyo service has an entry level account which is free but supported through advertising. It gives 10 Gb of space, with 5 Gb of this space reserved for audio and video files and the remaining space for all other file types. A paid-for service

is available at £45.99 per user per year for 100 Gb of storage, or £199.99 for 10 users per year with up to 250 Gb of storage.

The service is very easy to use, it is entirely website based with a simple interface. Files can be accessed on an individual basis and given a unique URL. This web link will allow the files to be linked from Deskspace and accessed on any system that has internet access.

There currently appears to be no time limit set on the files stored, but if the account has not been used in 90 days, and the user does not respond to an initial email, then the data will be deleted.

Dropbox: www.getdropbox.com

Dropbox allows the user to store any kind of data online. All files are transported securely over SSL technology and are well encrypted. The current plan allows 2 Gb of free storage. There is also a 50 Gb plan that currently costs £69 for a year of storage. However, there does not appear to be an institutional pricing scheme.

Dropbox is entirely web based and is very easy to use. Any file can be published in the 'public area' making it available by web link which can be referenced inside Deskspace. A useful feature of Dropbox is the facility to save bandwidth; if you make a change to a file, Dropbox will only update the piece of the file that changed, saving time when uploading multiple versions of large files. There does not seem to be any form of time limit expiry on the files stored within Dropbox.

Candidate-selected storage

Candidates may already have established relationships with providers of online storage — such as YouTube; Flickr or social networking sites — and may wish to store their assessment evidence together with their other material.

While some of the solutions that candidates may choose may be well suited to the task, some online services can delete material should the candidate go over their storage limit; may compress files to a quality which would not make them suitable as assessment evidence; may not be stable or robust enough to cope with large files; and may not allow the kind of external access that would be required to support electronic verification.

It would be wise to be cautious should a candidate intend to use their own selected storage solution and to ensure that a back-up is taken of it elsewhere so that the assessment evidence remains accessible and of high quality.

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