

# 3-60 Mobile Film Festival – A Model for Engaging Students and Local Communities Through Mobile Communications and Social Networking.

Dan Munnerley, Instructional Designer, Center for Teaching and Learning, Zayed University, UAE.  
dan@munnerley.com

**Abstract:** The 3-60 mobile film festival was born in the classroom, a response to the intense relationship that our students have with their mobile phones. The festival aims to promote dialogue within diverse communities through the making and sharing of short films produced on mobile devices. This brief paper builds upon a “Mobile Filmmaking” pilot project delivered to students at Zayed University. It addresses the technical aspects of designing, developing and implementing a festival website based on open-source software, accessibility guidelines and the tenets of usability.



## Background

In recent years mobile and Internet communication technologies have converged and matured to a degree where they are widely accepted and a well-utilized form of daily social interaction. Enabling this adoption into our daily life has been technologies like text messaging, MMS, 3G Video and Bluetooth. These technologies combined with social networking sites like Flickr, Blogger, Playtxt and Myspace form a rich community toolset for the net boomers, gen-y or PlayStation generation, (typically ‘our students’)

Social Internet technologies enable new and complex rules of collaborative engagement. Traditional one-to-one forms of communication have evolved into the shared group experience, blogging, vlogging, podcasts along with forums, discussion boards and commenting, which provide a myriad of ways to be seen, read, heard and judged. It’s not uncommon to hear a student say “email is what my parents do”.

In this brief paper, I will focus on online video, which, in itself is not a new phenomenon. Those users and developers involved before the internet boom/bust will remember 1<sup>st</sup> generation websites, like pop.com and indieWIRE which pioneered the online video format. What separates the current generation of video makers is the influence of blogging technologies, broadband access and sophisticated content syndication, which as Steve Rubel suggests, makes video content easier to find and share. We have seen good evidence of this in the events of 9/11, the Gulf War and more recently the Tsunami in Asia, where these catastrophes

have unfolded online, reaching mass audiences quicker than CNN or the BBC could do so with their Breaking News. The benefits of, "Location, Speed and Freedom", (Udell, 2005) have empowered these citizen journalists with a new array of delivery tools that they intend to use.

Drawing upon these recent developments in mobile and Internet technologies and their speedy adoption by the net generation, the 3-60 Mobile Film Festival aims to capitalize on this phenomenon.

### **3-60 Mobile Film Festival**

The Mobile Film Festival aims to encourage and promote dialogue within the diverse communities living in our Middle Eastern region.

The criteria for the festival are simple, take a 360° view of your world and transfer it to 3 x 60-second films. They must be recorded on a mobile device and represent element(s) of: 'your daily life', 'your environment', or 'your thoughts'. The movies can work together as a film triptych or individually to convey their message. The festival provides the filmmakers with a framework and a platform where they can have their films seen and reviewed by others.

The timing of the festival coincides with the SAE Short Film Competition, which begins on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Held across the MENA region, this event invites submissions from filmmakers producing 3-15 min films. The 3-60 festival expands this competition to include mobile users and widens its scope by offering a platform to encourage two-way communication between filmmakers and viewers. As Jon Udell points out, before the online video revolution, the flow of data has been one way - from producers to consumers – and what the 3-60 Mobile Film Festival website reflects is the more interactive two-way model that Tim Berners-Lee envisioned in the mid-'90s.

The technology that drives the festival site was chosen to be affordable, simple to use and accessible to as a wider group as possible. To be affordable required the use of open-source software, Broadcast Machine ([participatoryculture.org](http://participatoryculture.org)) and phpBB handle the file upload, channel creation and discussion forums. Good design principles and adherence to the W3C standards provided a simple to use interface and accessible content. Whilst capitalizing on iTunes fever, film submissions will be released as an RSS Channel, which can be subscribed through iTunes, Democracy, Veoh and Fireant. For the end-user, this is a one-click subscription.

### **Student Pilot Project**

To gain a better understanding of the issues involved with filming, editing and submitting movies produced on Mobile devices, a pilot project was run twice for 10 weeks over two semesters in 2005/6. The students from the College of Communication, Zayed University, were asked to produce a 60-sec movie based on the theme "My UAE", (United Arab Emirates). The students had to shoot footage using a mobile device, though editing and post-production could be made with any software they choose or find. This encouraged our students to research available resources. Thus, the project included searching, downloading, installing and evaluating available software, then sharing the knowledge between the group - a true set of skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner.

During this project, the students used 8 different kinds of phones and PDA, often sharing the phones and forming groups to complete the task. The most common tool for editing was Moviemaker, while some used in-camera software and other 3<sup>rd</sup> party editors like Premiere and iMovie. The most difficult part for the students was the audio mix. Some students simply laid a music track over the entire content, while others kept the original sound, which was of poor quality but real interest overall. The file size for 60seconds varied from 1mb to 8mb depending on quality, image size, content type and audio. The movie file formats were mp4, MOV, 3gp, Avi and WMV, the compression in most cases was mp4, though there was also DivX and XviD.

The findings of this pilot project have assisted us with choosing an appropriate system for film submission and file-sharing online. The use of Broadcast Machine for submission and channel creation has allowed us to work with a wide variety of file formats and compression codecs. However, making content available through iTunes limited us to QuickTime compatible formats. There is a balance to be found here, between the large audience that iTunes provides and the limiting proprietary nature of its format.

The students responded positively to the pilot, producing a wide variety of films reflecting their unique view of the world. The ZU students have a dominant oral tradition and their responses reaffirmed that 'Podcasts and Vlogs help pass the oral history of one generation to another, enabling students to create digital representations of the knowledge in a medium that is relevant to their teen culture.' (Ishizuka, 2005: p56). Embracing mobile technology, engaging the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner, and allowing the student to construct their understanding, are the primary outcomes of this pilot, and are the core benefits of running a this project.

## References

Green, H. (2005). Online Video: The Sequel. *Business Week*, Retrieved April 26, 2006, from the Academic Search Premier database.

*iDidaMovie Rules*. (2006). Retrieved April 26, 2006, from <http://www.aste.org/index.cfm/1,51,125.htm>

Ishizuka, K (2005). Follow the Leader. *School Library Journal*, 51(12), 56-57. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from Academic Research Library database.

Jain, R (1998). Tomorrow's Internet; The two key drivers which will define tomorrow's internet are broadband networks and mobile phones. *Business Today*, 98. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from ABI/INFORM Global database.

Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. (2004). Retrieved April 26, 2006, from [http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/images/stories/otherdocs/P21\\_Report.pdf](http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/images/stories/otherdocs/P21_Report.pdf)

O'Grady, P (2005). A new medium comes of age. *New Statesman*, 18(840), 14-15. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from ProQuest European Business database.

Romano, A (2005). Why Everybody Is a Reporter. *Broadcasting & Cable*, 135(34), 14-15. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from ABI/INFORM Global database.

Yager, T (2006). Broadband Fever Spikes. *InfoWorld*, 28(4), 18. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from ABI/INFORM Global database.

Udell, J (2005). Routine Citizen Journalism. *InfoWorld*, 27(43), 40. Retrieved April 26, 2006, from ABI/INFORM Global database.

## Acknowledgments

Dr. James Piccowye, M.B. Assistant Professor, College of Communications, Zayed University, Dubai, UAE  
Dr. Elizabeth Faier, Director, Sheikhha Fatima bint Mubarak Program for Leadership, Zayed University, Dubai, UAE