THETA

The Higher Education Technology Agenda

Talk Nerdy to me

It's a constant battle to get staff to read emails, any emails, let alone ones about IT Security, changes to existing systems or preparing staff for new IT processors. The division of ICT at the University of Southern Queensland, has been increasingly concerned about the lack of engagement from staff regarding important key IT messages. We had the distinct feeling that we were being deleted more than we were being read.

At a recent conference, I was introduced to a software program called Powtoons which allows users to easily and simply create their own animated mini films. In the presentation I watched, it was being used by academics to create interesting assignment introductions for their students.

I was really excited by the output this program delivered and immediately started imagining how I could use this type of product in my training materials. Quite fortuitously, I was then approached by my manager to create a notification to staff regarding an upcoming IT change. Here was my opportunity!

Now, I just had to convince my manager and the Director of ICT, to agree to allow me to create and send out an animated video on a major technical change! I backed up my request with the cold hard facts that currently so few IT emails were being read, that anything was worth a try.

After much discussion, I was given the green light to at least create the video and I was excited. Finally I had the chance to use some of this great technology to transform IT communications from boring, text only emails, into fun, interesting animated videos.

My first video was a 'teaser' video on an upcoming change to our Wi Fi system. Staff needed to know it was coming so that they would not be surprised when the change occurred. It was the perfect time to engage our staff.

The outcome was a 1min 15sec video based off a Mission Impossible theme. It allowed me to play on the IT cool image and everything staff needed to know was in the video. No need

for additional text at this stage. I called it Mission Possible and I crossed my fingers that management would approve.

Management loved it! They could more clearly see the benefits of 'doing something different' and were excited about the scope to have another video (along the same theme) to be created for when the actual change was to occur.

So I am happy to say that since that first video, I have also created others to communicate statistical data, educate staff on e-mail spam and malware and promote upcoming IT training sessions.

Staff are becoming more engaged and we are hearing comments such as 'we can't wait to see what you send out next'.

I feel we have turned around a communication problem (that no doubt is an issue with many organsations) into not only a positive staff engagement solution, but it is also helping to change the image of ICT from boring and technical, to cool and creative.

All done with one little program that cost us $100 a year (and there is a free version available) and a bit of creativity.

I would love to be able to present our journey with the attendees of the upcoming THETA conference. I want to be able to show them just how easy it is to use and by the end of my 25 minutes, they too would be able to go back and change boring communications into exciting, fun and informative ones.

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