

Community-led Evaluation and Dissemination of Support Resources – Pilot

Report to JISC

This report summarises progress to date on the Community-led Evaluation and Dissemination of Support Resources pilot system developed by ALT during 2011/2012.

Contents

System overview	1
Users, their views, and changes made to the system	2
General feedback about the system.....	2
Improvements stemming from the pilot.....	3
Sustaining the system.....	4
A note of thanks	4

System overview

The main deliverable is the fully functioning prototype system at <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/home>, hereafter referred to as “the site”.

Behind the system sit two Google workbooks containing scripts developed by Martin Hawksey based on an outline requirements specification written by Mark van Harmelen. The workbooks contain Google App scripts that implement the workflows that were documented earlier in the project. These are accessible from the home page of the site as a two page PDF file.

The two workbooks also contain:

- i) form generators which control the structure of the two main public-facing forms that support the operation of the site, namely:
 - a form on which to apply to become a reviewer of resources suggested for review;
 - a form from which to suggest a resource for review or to submit a review of a resource¹.
- ii) editable tag-lists which determine which expertise tags are offered by new reviewers and which subject tags are offered to reviewers when resources are initially identified for review;
- iii) interfaces to allow the administrator to:
 - approve or not expressions of interest in being a reviewer;
 - allocate resources to reviewers based on their expertise;
 - edit all system emails;
 - publish reviews to the site.

¹ This form can also be installed as a browser toolbar “bookmarklet”, enabling users to submit a resource for consideration for review with minimal interruption to their work.

All published reviews are visible on the site. They can also be accessed by users by subscribing to the site's RSS feed.

All components of the system are available for reuse by any individual or organisation wishing to do so. After JISC's sign off of this final report to JISC we will make "content-free" versions of each of the workbooks available from the site for others to reuse as they see fit².

Users, their views, and changes made to the system

ALT sought volunteers from amongst its members to act as review writers and as pilot consumers of the output from the system. The two groups of volunteers (whose contribution is acknowledged on the site itself) worked as follows.

1. After allocation by ALT, reviews were written by Adam Warren, Alex Spiers, Bob Ridge-Stearn, Carmel de Nahlik, Charles Juwah, David Callaghan, Dominik Lukes, Niall Watts, Phil Richards, Richard Evans, Richard M. Davis, Sarah Horrigan, Steve Ryan and Thomas Cochrane³. A total of 22 reviews were contributed.
2. Published reviews were then considered by another group of volunteers - David Smith, Debra Robertson-Welsh, Jim Emery, Joanna Stroud, John Hill, Laura Hollinshead, Mary Jacob, Richard Evans, Richard M. Davis, Sally Hanford, Steve Ryan, Sukhtinder Kaur and Tendai Dube. Their role was to provide feedback on the utility of the reviews and of the system more generally⁴. Feedback was given using the form at <http://tinyurl.com/cjon3av>. 16 feedback items were submitted overall.

General feedback about the system

Here is a selection of comments made by those who commented on the system output.

1. *This looks like a very promising and useful system. I've had something similar in mind for the Digital Preservation and Repositories communities that I am closely involved with, where there is also a daunting, growing mass of current information. I hope the ALT approach is successful, and perhaps we can adapt the model for other related fields too (perhaps with JISC's support).*
2. *Great idea, potentially this could be very important.*
3. *It's useful to read reviewers personal views and suggestions as this may help contextualise to others in various roles (learning technologist; academic etc). Having this element in a review even if its a personal view adds some human tone to the utility being reviewed. The type of resource being reviewed and level of detail varies depending on what is being reviewed, though keeping reviews short are useful. The tags can be very useful and it would be good to see some form of top level of categorisation to able to search for reviews. Knowing more about the reviewer, normal details i.e. Role etc can help.*
4. *I think it's a great idea - it's going to be a mammoth task though!*
5. *It would be interesting to know who would be able to create the reviews and whether it just ends up being the people who know the right people who are invited into the circle of trust.*
6. *As a reader of reviews, I think the system can be particularly useful as a starting point for people new to technology enhanced learning, teaching and assessment as well as for busy academics, though anyone else may also benefit. The reviews can help them decide which resources to explore first etc. I found the use of tags quite useful for that purpose. One can pick the most relevant resource that way. Some reviews also indicated towards the end whom the resource would particularly interest which is useful.*
7. *I can see having community peers providing reviews will be beneficial but the challenge will be that they don't become another stream of information that I can't keep on top off (in addition to emails, blogs and various mailing lists).*

² We are not certain about the license terms and "use at own risk" terms that should be applied to the publicly available re-usable version of the system, believing that this ought to be discussed with JISC and with Martin Hawksey before these versions are published.

³ Reviews to date are on the prototype site at <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/reviews>.

⁴ Feedback was provided using the form at <http://goo.gl/Y8E7v>

8. *In finishing, I would like to applaud this process as it both helps to refine and sift the overwhelming amount of data and encourages others to contribute to this process and the ALT community.*
9. *There is a plethora of blogs providing opinion and reviews of resources and research. Many of which are self serving. The dissemination of such resources through a peer reviewed community of practice/medium is long overdue. Where tags have been included I see these as valuable as they make searching for relevant information more streamlined.*
10. *I think it is a great idea to invite ALT members to review publications, conference sessions, video clips and other online materials. I hope that this is opened up for all members. Although there might be a large number of contributions, the search feature does make it easy to find the items you want.*
11. *Presentation is neat, logical, and easy to follow. Search utility is functional, but there could be more developed ways of grouping tagged content, e.g. with clickable tags leading to segregated areas. Peer-led review of what is, at times, an extremely broad and confusing array of support material would undoubtedly prove beneficial to the LT community.*
12. *I do appreciate the full hyperlink to be used as a standard rather than using tinyurl or bit.ly for brevity - just in case anybody is tempted to do so.*
13. *A range of suggestions were made concerning improvements to the prototype system, and these are listed below with an indication as to whether and if yes how each will be addressed.*

Improvements stemming from the pilot

A range of improvements were suggested by users. These vary widely in the ease with which they can be implemented. The proposed changes are listed below with observations from ALT as to what to do about each of them.

1. There is truncation of the form at <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/registration>. This resulted from increasing the number of fields in the form and adding additional field prompts in response to feedback from the pilot. *We are working to fix this.*
2. One user reported being unable to get the bookmarklet to work on a Mac using Safari and Snow Leopard. *We have been unable to replicate this relatively minor problem. At some point we will arrange a screensharing session with the user reporting the issues with a view to understanding the problem and if possible fixing it.*
3. Make <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/reviews> filterable by tags and filterable by review author. *We agree that in a production version of the service there would be some advantages for users if the output from the site (that is, the reviews) could be filtered by tag, author, etc. We believe that the most economically and functional way to do this would to import the RSS feed from the site into an installation of WordPress. This would enable some of the easy functionality of WordPress as a publishing platform to be used on the output from the site, rather than putting resources needlessly into customisation.*
4. Enable a reviewer to contribute links to similar resources that may also be of interest. *We have added an extra field to the review form for such additions. The updated review form is at <http://tinyurl.com/bq9gbb6>.*
5. Allow users to subscribe to a subset of the RSS filtered by tags, resource categories, or authors. *See our response to issue #3.*
6. Include a tag cloud on <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/reviews>. *This would be disproportionately expensive to do within the site, and tags would not be clickable. Pushing the output to WordPress – see our response to #3 above – would allow the publication of a clickable tag cloud.*
7. Allow a reviewer to add an image or video thumbnail. *This would be hard to achieve – image storage would be the main problem – and the benefits are limited. We do not intend to act on this suggestion.*

8. Include a tweet-length limited resource title so that if the RSS feed from <https://sites.google.com/site/reviewsiteex/reviews> outputs to a Twitter channel the resulting tweets are complete. *We have included some explanatory text encouraging users to choose the title of the resource they are reviewing with care.*
9. Allow reviewers to give a resource a "star rating" against one or more aspects. *In a future iteration of the service we will consider implementing this feature, asking users to rate resources according to i) their overall utility and ii) their overall clarity.*
10. Find a way of controlling the tag vocabulary that is available to users. *We have dealt with this by adding to the instructions to users to encourage them to use existing tags rather than rushing to invent their own. In a future iteration of this service we will look to providing users with a clear view of the available tags rather than have them have to discover tags iteratively. Separately, in a production service it would fall to the administrator/editor to occasionally prune the tag vocabularies.*
11. Allow admin. or reviewers or submitters of resources for review to categorise them by asset type (e.g. video, guide, article etc). *We have improved the range of options on the review form at <http://tinyurl.com/bq9gbb6> and made the wrap-around instructions clearer.*
12. Enable users of reviews to rate their utility. *Pushing the output to WordPress – see our response to #3 above – would allow the use of WordPress tools to achieve this.*
13. Allow someone whose resource has been reviewed to have a “right of reply”. *A possibility would be to include on each review an email address to which comments could be sent. A better alternative would be to take care of this process within WordPress, if – see our response to #3 above – the output from the site had been pushed into WordPress. However, the benefits of such an addition might be small in relation to the costs if implementing it and the potential ensuing complications for management.*

Sustaining the system

The pilot process has shown that the system is valued in our community even in its prototype form, and that it is reasonably straightforward to administer. The ALT Publications Committee is now considering whether or not to integrate use of the system – with the improvements that have been made to it as a result of the feedback from users – into ALT’s activities on a long term basis.

A note of thanks

ALT’s thanks are due to:

- JISC for supporting this small-scale pilot project;
- Lawrie Phipps for his patient and constructive feedback during the project from a JISC perspective;
- Mark van Harmelen for his work on the original requirements specification;
- Members of the ALT community who wrote reviews and read and commented on others’ reviews and on the utility of the service overall.

We particularly thank Martin Hawksey for his crucial work to implement the system within Google Apps.

Seb Schmoller

Senior Advisor, Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

15 June 2012