Suggestions for MOOCs platforms from the Course Managers’ point of view -- the experience of Taipei Medical University
Ya-Hui(Carol) Tang, Ming-Yi(Amanda) Lin, Yu-Zuo Lin, Hsu-Tien (Marian) Wan
Office of Information Technology, Taipei Medical University
Taipei City, TAIWAN
caroltang@tmu.edu.tw, amanda@tmu.edu.tw, aro@tmu.edu.tw, wanhsu@tmu.edu.tw

Abstract

During the past year, Taipei Medical University (TMU) has working on providing quality MOOCs for learners. As course managers of TMU, we have to learn how to set up and manage courses in various MOOCs platforms. After finish 6 MOOCs in 3 different platforms, we would like to share our user experience (UX) from the course managers’ point of view. First, we would try to list the basic functions and their differences from different platforms. Then, we would explain the pros and cons of these MOOCs platforms. Finally, we would like to point out what we think the “best practice” on MOOCs platform development.

Keyword: MOOCs, course management, difference Analysis

Introduction

In May 2014, the Minister of Education (MOE) in Taiwan had announced the MOOCs building project. There are 99 courses from 47 universities funded by the MOE, and more courses are produced by universities themselves. These courses are required to be produced and practiced. TMU has been funded 3 courses from MOE’s project, the “Medical Informatics”, “Introductory to Chinese Medicine”, and “Skills of Home Healthcare”. These courses will be on the shelve by the end of 2014. Besides of these 3 courses, TMU has produced 3 extra courses, mostly related to professional healthcare topics.

In the quality control of MOOCs, effectiveness is one of the indicators to evaluate these MOOCs. Thus, the usability of platforms should be considered as a key factor for delivering good UX to learners. Since 2012, the year of MOOCs, there are a lot of new platforms providing MOOCs-hosting services. Two of the most famous platforms are Coursera and EdX. Many famous universities have their MOOCs channel on them. However, it is difficult for universities in Taiwan to join these 2 platforms. Alternatively, other platforms have shown up to provide MOOCs hosting services for universities in Taiwan. EWant and ShareCourse are two of the major players in Taiwan.

Unlike other e-learning platforms in Taiwan, both ShareCourse and EWant are specifically focused on MOOCs. The software architecture of ShareCourse is similar to OpenEdX, while the software architecture of EWant is based on Moodle. As for now, both platforms are build for native Chinese learners. Ewant has more connection with universities in China, as well as more members in China.
As a professional content provider, TMU would like to keep “open” on platform selection. Thus, we would able to compare the functionalities of different platforms and provide our suggestion on “good practice” of a MOOCs platform.

Functionalities of MOOCs platforms

We’ve tested 4 MOOCs platforms, including OpenEdX, and 3 traditional e-learning platforms. For marketing reasons, we’ve chosen EWant and ShareCourse to host TMU’s MOOCs. There are 3 courses on EWant, and 3 courses on ShareCourse as well. Then, we compare functions of these 2 platforms.

A. Major functions of platform 1: EWant
   1. Course description
   2. Unit management
   3. Members
   4. Bulletin boards
   5. Course map
   6. Videos
   7. Teaching materials
   8. Homework
   9. Quiz
   10. Forum
   11. Questionnaire
   12. Email notification
   13. Score setting and scoring

B. Major functions of platform 2: ShareCourse
   1. View course
   2. Bulletin board
   3. Email notification
   4. Course outline
   5. Chapters
   6. Video
   7. In-video practice tool
   8. TA setting
   9. Homework
   10. Quiz
   11. Certificate
   12. Members
   13. Statistics
   14. Course copy and deletion

As shown above, we conclude similar functions of these 2 platforms are:

1. Course description: descript the basic information regarding the course, such as, study period, instructors, course requirement, prerequisites, course schedule, etc.
2. Learning unit: design knowledge or concepts by using chapters or units.
3. Members: knowing how many learners register to this course.
4. Bulletin, forum and email notification: release messages or increase interaction with learners.
5. Videos: it is a “must” for online courses.
6. Homework and quiz
7. Scoring: setup score weighting and calculate learner’s score, usually automatically.

Also, some nice functions are only provided by one of the platforms. For example, in-video practice tools could let course managers design small quiz activities in between 2 video clips. It could let the course more interactive and interesting. Another example is the questionnaire tool. Build-in questionnaire tool could let course managers easier to do informative evaluation of the course. Some management tools are also useful, such as, certification tools, and teaching assistant tools. Peer review function on homework in MOOCs has get a lot of attention recently. Unfortunately, both platforms haven’t provided steady functionalities in this aspect.

Suggestions of UX

To define the proper UX for MOOCs platforms, we explain it through 3 directions, from learners, from course managers, and users from different countries.

A. From learners
   ● Google calendar can remind students the start and end days of each course. It is a good tool to keep tracking on course.
   ● A learning progress bar could remind the progress of the learner in the course, which may assist the effectiveness of learning.
   ● Detailed user manual or video could assist newers.
   ● Advanced sorting function in discussion forums is necessary. For example, discussion can be sorted by popularity or priority. It would let learners find important messages easily.
   ● Note-writing tools might be added for videos. It may increase the efficiency of learning through videos.
   ● Single sign-on with Google or Facebook is easier. However, consistence and localization should be considered.

B. From course managers
   ● Course statistics are valuable data for managers. The platform should provide graphical data presentation tools or data APIs. For example, in the MOE project, it requires all funded universities to provide amount of domestic/abroad learners and their passing rate of each course.
   ● Some course tools are too complicated to use. Tips or step reminders should be added into the system flow.
   ● Management tools should be well organized. It is hard for course managers to setup one tool by switch between different functions or screens.
   ● Detailed user manual or video could assist newers.
   ● Quiz tools is important for MOOCs course managers, especially for large numbers of learners. Import function is necessary.
   ● In-video quizzes make courses more interesting and interactive. Easy-to-edit and keep records is a plus.
   ● Scoring of homework should still be the right of instructors or course managers.

C. From users of different countries (in our case, China is the most concerning region)
   ● Facebook, YouTube, and Google are not available in China. Thus, using localized social media tools is necessary. (We use Youku for video streaming instead.)
Studies show that the usage of social networking tools facilitate the course. In this case, one may consider use Microblog in China instead of using Facebook in other area.

For international learners other than native Chinese, an English interface should be expected. So is the certificate.

Most MOOCs platforms today are newly developed. Functions and course tools are either in beta testing or under construction. To build a better eco-system of MOOCs, we would like to provide some clues, as course managers, to let platform service providers to polish their systems toward a better direction.

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