Using Open Source Tools to Bridge Public Websites and Online Courses

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Abstract

This best practices session will demonstrate how some features of an open source Learning Management System (LMS) can be used to bridge public facing informational websites and online educational tools. By utilizing RSS feeds and some custom scripting, information can be displayed on public web sites to exemplify the work and research being done by the sites community members, keeping the actual contribution of work inside the LMS system. Users interested in joining and contributing to the site and the work being done by the group can request membership. The development of this hybrid site is an example of a low-cost but effective method of harnessing the content and social power of the “long-tail of the internet” (O’Reilly, 2005).

As per O’Reilly’s definition of Web 2.0 applications, it’s the group of users interactivity with the site and inputting relevant data that gives the site value. Much like social networking systems like NING and Facebook, the site will develop as more users become interested, request registration and begin contributing. However, unlike these social networking sites, the users of the LMS become 'enrolled' in a course and can be included in the many activities and resources that are supported in the LMS, while simultaneously contributing to the public facing information site. The bridging of the internal content to the external display of the site extends the idea of an online course to include a group of individuals drawn in by the content of the site, it also allows the content that the individuals are contributing to draw others in, without fully opening the course to the public.

References