

Formats

FMG is only using streaming video in their web delivery. Currently they have QuickTime and Windows Media files (WMV) available to users. They have a streaming Flash solution in beta and are in the final stages of making it available to users. They will replace their QuickTime streams with the Flash video streams. The "masters" which they use for archiving are in MPEG-2 format. They never offer these files in their web presence. We cannot offer or use a progressive download of FMG videos ever. We will need to always use streaming video for presentation. FMG will provide us MPEG-2 files and we will create our own streaming files.

Thumbnails

FMG said they would provide thumbnails of videos delivered to us. The representative is adverse to us creating our own thumbnails as they are concerned any thumbnails generated by us might not represent their content in the highest light.

Annotations (Segments)

The FMG tools that create what we call annotations and they call segments is an online tool that is ASP based and currently uses the streaming Windows Media Format. FMG pays for education professionals to create quality segments of a video which are comprised of start/stop points, title and description metadata. FMG users can also create their own segments if the user is not satisfied with the pre-produced segments. It is very simple and straightforward process. As suspected their tool does not allow for scrubbing because they use streaming formats, and thus annotations/segments do not have the granular timing precision achievable with progressive download.

Learning Object(Playlist)

The segments FMG pays to have produced are available for their users to create what they call a playlist. A playlist is a series of segments strung together for playback. The playlist creator is also web-based and offers reordering of segments and an additional title and note fields for the playlist itself. We have a similar concept of a playlist that we have been calling a learning object. The Learning Object feature is not intended for our first release of the annotation tool.

Partnership and Boundaries

FMG is adverse to allowing us to offer annotation/segmentation capability of their videos. They were open to us using their pre-produced annotations/segments. The pre-produced annotation cannot be edited of course. FMG was open to allowing our users to add additional notes to the pre-produced annotations however. The idea was floated that FMG would export the segmentation information of a video from their SQL database, and we would somehow map/import that into our infrastructure. The pre-produced segments did not seem to be in flux so continual updating would not happen with high regularity.

FMG did not have a response as to whether our tool could allow our users to "mix" FMG pre-produced annotations with non-FMG material into a playlist/learning object. The representative is going to get back to us in either direction.

This raised the topic that other vendors might not be agreeable to this or they might not even be agreeable to having annotations created using their content. The licensees and contract writers need to be aware of this when licensing content. It was agreed amongst the NJVid representatives that if a vendor did not allow for mixing their video annotations with other content providers' video annotations then the vendor's annotations and videos will not be available for use in the Learning Object portion of the annotation tool. While we could provide a technical solution, being able to express the delicate copyright issues surrounding this to an end user is too daunting.

Summary and Effect on Annotation Tool Design

We will need to support progressive and streaming video formats in the annotation tool. We will preference progressive formats because we still think user experience when "scrubbing" the video for start and stop points will be better. We will need to support "importing" external, non-editable, annotations/segments from vendors.

As far as access control in general we need to take this position:

Of all the videos that will be in NJVid some might not be allowed to be used in annotations. Of this subset that does allow annotations to be created using them, some might not be allowed to be used in a learning object/playlist. Provided annotations/segmentations from a vendor might or might not be allowed to be used in a learning object/playlist.

FMG and Other Commercial Video Partnership

We (steering committee and commercial video WG) need to decide whether and how to support enabling users to access the FMG (or other vendor) website, to use their annotation and playlist tools. The decision is based not on our desire to be competitive to FMG (or other vendor) but simply to avoid confusion for users and to develop an extensible approach to commercial videos that enables us to support X number of commercial licenses. We are using FMG as our test case, just as our alpha implementers are our test participants, but we are designing for the long-term, when we have many commercial video licenses and many participating organizations.