

To : WRT 307

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Subject: Audience Analysis - Collaboration Software

Our team interviewed a sample of 19 university students through an online survey. The participants were asked to elaborate on their experiences with, and opinions of collaboration software.

Survey Results

Results from the survey show, when students think of collaboration software they think of real-time, multiple-participant, sharing and editing of a document. Most participants mention “Google Docs”, a synchronous online collaboration software boasting the aforementioned features. 95% of survey participants have actually used this platform and applauded its success in allowing for real-time editing and sharing of documents between a group of people.

However, one participant’s comment brings up a major point, “I like options to work synchronously AND asynchronously since both are important to a project at different times. For example, sync can be good for brainstorming, but not very good for drafting.” This idea may be the solution to the problem cited by 4 participants, that the real-time collaboration can become chaotic and frustrating; that is, when too many group members are trying to edit at once. Of course, in these cases, features such as commenting and chatting within a document can ease the chaos, however our survey did not specifically allow for analysis of participant’s software skill levels.

The drafting and finalization period of a project is where asynchronous software is useful, however survey results show that participants have limited experience with many asynchronous programs, with only 30% having had experience with “wikis” and 5% with the software, “Etherpad”. Our team believes that the primary reason for this is lack of awareness of the existence of these softwares. Google Docs being the most prominent and marketed as easy-to-use software that the average user doesn’t bother to research other tools. When an individual thinks asynchronous, it’s likely that he or she imagines back-and-forth emailing between group members. Even in the case of those who know of other asynchronous programs, it is likely that there is a lack of knowledge of how to take advantage of their features.

When asked, what feature is most frustrating about collaboration efforts, synchronous or asynchronous, one participant answered, “Communication between the people working together.” He went on to suggest the ideal situation of working in the same room physically with your group, while collaborating on a synchronous software, “I believe collaboration software works best when you are working on it with others in person so you can talk to the actual people in your group, instead of having to communicate over the software.” Even in this age of technology, it should be noted that university students will still strongly value the effectiveness of an in-person group meeting, with 45% preferring that as a means of getting a project done. Working remotely, whether asynchronous or synchronous, raises difficulties in getting everyone online at the same time, which can become even more problematic due to connectivity issues. Access to the web during a project, by its nature, allows for many distractions on social media, online shopping, blogs etc.

Recommendations

Through our data analysis period, our team has concluded that a useful technology briefing would be one that encompasses both types of collaboration software- synchronous and asynchronous. Responses show that perhaps the ideal way to collaborate on a project would be multi platform- encompassing synchronous software and asynchronous software. Our results show that when this area of technology is questioned the primary software that comes to mind for university students is "GoogleDocs". A briefing that explores other programs such as Etherpad, Wikis, and forums would provide students the opportunity to discover alternatives to "Docs" that may better suit to their collaboration needs in the future. There is an abundance of great softwares available which are both synchronous and asynchronous; results prove that students currently do not possess the knowledge of their existence or vocabulary of skills to take advantage of their features.