

Finding 'free to use' digital media demonstration

Blog by Michelle Pauli

The session is starting to fill, an impressive feat given that just outside the room are tables laden with the food for lunch. Nonetheless, the issue of finding digital media you can use on the web, for free, is a hot topic, and it promises to be a very useful session.

It's presented by Zak Mensah from the University of Bristol who works for [JISC Digital Media](#) which is part of JISC Advance. He kicks off by detailing some of the helpful advice available through JISC Digital Media - as well as publications and helpsheets, it also offers training, consultancy and a free helpdesk. Anyone in HE can approach the helpdesk and ask any question, big or small - a really useful service.

"What's wrong with Google?" asks Zak. Isn't it the first stop for everyone? But! There are often issues with results from the search engine: quality and not knowing where the content has come from. This is a really key problem - we need to be able to reference all resources we use so it's not practical to just use "stuff" from the web. Google will find millions of images of the Mona Lisa but can you use them? Is a shaky photo taken by a cameraphone going to be good enough quality for your purposes, even if it is in the public domain? In addition, search engines won't necessarily find any of the collections that higher education *can* use. And then there is copyright... Don't assume that because it's in your VLE you can use it. Always make sure you know who owns the copyright and if you have permission to use it. There *are* copyright exceptions, such as 'fair dealing' but it's an increasingly grey area so you need to talk to a legal expert (try JISC Legal).

Zak moves onto the things that *can* be used. He runs through the four different [Creative Commons](#) licences and offers some steers on things to watch out for. One of these is the Share Alike licence - if you use something with a Share Alike licence then you have to permit whatever you create with it to be used on the same basis and this is actually not allowed by the University of Bristol as it conflicts with its own copyright constraints. You also need to make sure that if someone has marked something up with a Creative Commons licence then they do have the right to do that (Zak gives the example of people who upload Nike ads to the Vimeo video-sharing platform, and mark them up as Creative Commons). Be careful with people! Think about whether you need a model release form if you're using photos of people and think about trademarks, company logos, performance and recording rights and so on.

Just as the mood in the room is starting to droop, Zak reassures us that there are some low-cost solutions. One of these is the British Library's marvellous [Archival Sound Recordings](#) project (funded by the JISC Digitisation Programme). [Film and Sound Online](#) is another good place to look. BUFC is the place to go if you can afford to buy episodes of programmes. [JISC Collections](#) has a massive collection of resources, some free, some paid for.

There are also institutions such as museums and libraries that have collections of resources with no known copyright. These will be marked up with a disclaimer and available as ['commons'](#).

"It's my best find for quite some time," says Zak.

The [Freesound Project](#) contains sounds like bells and whistles. Quality varies as anyone is allowed to upload, you always need to read the terms and conditions but it can be a useful place to try for sounds for teaching.

Zak's other big tip is searching Flickr for Creative Commons-licensed material. One tip, though: even when you're on the [Flickr Creative Commons page](#), the search box still defaults to 'everything' so you need to remember to restrict the search to Creative Commons. Don't forget you can always contact the person who has uploaded the image to double check that you can use it.

Zak's other top tip is to collect an 'evidence trail' - he tags everything he wants to use as CC so that he can find them again and check easily. It's also helpful if other people want to use it.

iTunes U can be another good place - though always check as not everything on it is Creative Commons.

Think about file formats, urges Zak. Mpeg4 is good for video on the web but it is quite large so you might go for H264 format but that won't work on Firefox. HTML 5 is supporting video better, it's just coming in, and should make life easier. MP3 is what people tend to use for audio on the web. A free tool called [Handbrake](#) lets you change formats.

No time for questions but Zak assures everyone that he and his team will be around today and tomorrow, ready to talk, and there's tons of useful stuff on the [website](#) to explore.