

# Case study

## Skype + Google Docs



### Background

Campaspe College of Adult Education is a small RTO in the country town of Echuca. The team involved in this project are a group of people with basic computer literacy skills who wanted familiar, easy to use programs to deliver content online to off-campus students. Most of the project group had used Skype before in a social setting in the past and had not really considered it too heavily for a delivery tool due to its limited functionality. I decided to incorporate Google Docs (particularly the word processing application) as it is perfect for collaborative work and mirrors and is compatible with Microsoft Word; a program that all staff at CCAE use every day.

While there are other online teleconferencing tools that could have been used and provide the functionality that Skype lacks; and they were shown MS Lync in a half hour seminar, they did not want to “reinvent the wheel” by learning how to use another format of the same thing.

### What was done

The project commenced with small discussion groups to figure out what it actually was that we wanted. We made a list of functions that any form of online conferencing would need to cater to, such as ease of access / number of participants at once etc. and I went away to do some further research. Reiterating the *Background* notes above, staff were insistent on using a platform that they were familiar with so my choice after a small session on MS Lync was limited to Skype.

We conferenced from one end of the school to the other to ensure that, at least within our own college and close to other staff members, that we had enough knowledge of the program to continue. With minimal teething issues, we decided this would definitely be the format that we would use.

I then set about putting together an online tutorial where we would all be using Skype and then work through how to get into Google Docs and use the program to suit a classroom situation. Please feel free to have a look at the *Skype + Google Docs Tutorial*

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/19J2ge\\_Vfy-lLe8Qa1C7rF\\_WsA0WVo5q-38rhdTDI69k/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/19J2ge_Vfy-lLe8Qa1C7rF_WsA0WVo5q-38rhdTDI69k/edit)

As it happens, all of the staff involved had a Gmail account, making it easier to allow collaboration within the document when I set it to "Open".

## **Benefits experienced by [organisation]**

So far we are still in the "Beta testing" phase and have not launched the project for use as an online classroom. The potential benefits to the staff lie in the fact that content can be delivered to our off campus students via a teacher in an almost face-to-face context, rather than completing work through an LMS and not having much in the way of teacher guidance and delayed support.

For our RTO, this online project has the potential to boost our attendance and enrolment figures, as there are less excuses for not coming into the college (flat tyre / feeling sick) and students can still put in some work even if they are laid up in bed or are travelling. We also have a wider geographical scope that we can deliver to, as alluded to in the last sentence, so we may no longer be limited to where and even when we deliver content once staff feel confident enough.

I feel that once staff have mastered this simple way of delivering content online, they may wish to take the next step and opt for an integrated online tool such as MS Lync, but further professional development to work on baseline Web 2.0 skills is still necessary.

## **Lessons learnt**

The biggest lesson that was learnt throughout this project, and indeed throughout the whole ementor process, is that it is far better to give a person something simple that is within, or only slightly extends, their current level of knowledge and comfort rather than dazzling them with something that, once you have left their organisation, they have no idea how to use.

Ironically, the biggest issue regarding getting an online delivery system of the ground was the tyranny of distance. Being so far away from Swan Hill made it very difficult to engage them on a regular basis. This led to a disjointed approach and, when the missed the PD seminar that I had organised once CCAE's project group had the hang of Skype + Google Docs, there was not enough time left in the term to catch them up.

## **The results**

As we are now on the verge of having staff confident enough to deliver some of their content online, I would consider the project to be successful within our organisation. Staff can now deliver what they feel to be engaging and most importantly substantial learning opportunities for their students. Lessons can be taught in "real time" and student likewise can contact staff via Skype between certain hours if they feel the need for one-to-one sessions.

The failures of this project lie in not being able to engage centres from outside our own. They were quite excited about the project from the outset, with two of them feeling that the project was well and truly within their staff members capabilities, however as I mentioned earlier, once they missed the PD seminar there was a real gulf between the project team at our RTO and them.

## Reflections and suggestions

Before undertaking this program I would make the following suggestions:

- Ensure all staff have used and are comfortable with Skype,
- Create or assist in creating a Gmail account at the earliest juncture if necessary,
- Get the project team to work together and designate 3-5 hours of collaborative work to problem solve and work out what is necessary for your clients.

From an in-house perspective, the whole experience of getting this project to the stage that it is now has been quite simple. The biggest difficulty for trainers has been navigating and getting used to Google Docs, as Skype was already somewhat familiar. However, once staff began to bring offline MS Word content over to the Google Docs word processing equivalent (and a bit of trial and error) staff felt confident enough to give it a go between themselves, with minimal turnaround time. This meant from a purely administrative perspective, less money was sunk into the project for a rather large gain from our organisation.

## For more information

**For more information on Skype + Google Docs:**

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