For the last year, visual media has been capturing an increasing amount of attention on the Internet. Many of us are trading YouTube URLs and listening to podcasts. Since we at EDUCAUSE found ourselves consuming non-text media, we figured we should start creating it. After all, if “a picture is worth a thousand words,” why wouldn’t we want to model good practice and show association products to EDUCAUSE members instead of just writing about them?

There seemed to be so many reasons to use visual media: walk the talk; appeal to a younger generation of users; grab the attention of time-constrained members. So to be sure that we didn’t put it off, we committed to a project.

But carrying out the project was harder than it looked.

We had thought that screen-casting would be a good way to begin. We wanted to take people on a virtual tour of the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative (ELI) website and to highlight features of the Discovery Tools. Capturing the screen while telling viewers what’s happening sounds straightforward. And it is, conceptually.

However, the application we used didn’t have much documentation. It was probably designed for the Net Generation, peer-to-peer, trial-and-error learning style. Finally, when blundering around didn’t yield the desired result and after realizing that the documentation was no help, I plucked up the courage to call a colleague and admit ignorance. The only problem was that he didn’t know either. So I went back to trial-and-error. After a while, of course, trial-and-error can be mind-numbing. And when you do succeed, you usually can’t remember what you did that made it work. Back to trial-and-error.

For screencasts, the user narrates what is being shown on the screen. I thought I would be able to just talk through the process. But the results—particularly the “um,” “uh,” and stumbling—led to the need to create a script. This added time that I hadn’t counted on investing.

Script in hand, I tried mousing my way through the tour while reading. This too was harder than it looked. In fact, it just didn’t work. I was consistently getting lost, either in the script or on the screen.

So I narrated the script. Then I played the audio back as I moused through the tour. This seemed like the perfect solution—except that the audio and visuals didn’t synch. I then had to clip segments of the visuals to fit with the audio. That’s when I discovered that gesturing with the mouse is a really bad idea if you need to take out tiny segments. Every nip-and-tuck was visible. Back to the beginning.

In the end, it all worked out. But this project was a good reminder that every time we think we know what someone should do, we may need to step back and think. Why don’t faculty integrate more technology into their courses? Why don’t they change their pedagogy? Perhaps the problem is the time involved: the time that is needed to learn something new; the time that must be freed up from all the other demands of the job. Perhaps it is too little confidence—or too much frustration. Why spend all those hours doing something you’re not sure anyone will appreciate? Perhaps it is a lack of support. Or perhaps it is the question you ask yourself (or that your colleagues ask): “What’s the matter with the status quo?”

In spite of the time, frustration, and lack of support, creating the screen cast was a good idea. I’m glad I did it. But in the future, I’ll also be more cautious about judging others’ use of media—because it is harder than it looks.