Publiradio.net: Application for creating radio advertising within the framework of the EHEA

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Abstract

The teaching innovation experience that is presented in this article is the result of four years of work that the Publiradio group in the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising has spent dreaming up, designing and launching an online platform (*Publiradio.net*) for creating radio advertising. As part of the new teaching culture derived from the implementation of the ECTS credits, Publiradio.net has shown itself to be a support tool for classroom learning primarily aimed at fostering students' independent learning both individually and as groups, while it also is a website with the goal of becoming a benchmark instrument within education in audiovisual communication and advertising.

General area of interest of this innovation

If the radio has shown itself over time to be a powerful instrument for fostering learning both inside and outside the classroom (Artega, C. et al., 2004, Perona, J.J., 2001), *Publiradio.net* is a heretofore unseen educational tool not just because of its function within *cyber-teaching* but also because of the contents it offers. Currently there is no other teaching platform that brings together every single aspect related to radio advertising in a single space.

Publiradio.net is a website open to anyone interested in the subject, in that access to all of its contents is totally free. Nevertheless, as a project it is especially designed for the course *Theory and Technique of Radio Language* (second year, first term) in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations in the Faculty of Communications Studies at the UAB. What is more, given its transversal nature, everything it covers is totally valid for courses on advertising creativity, as well as for the remaining courses on radio that are part of the curricula of the Communications Studies degree programmes.

1. Objectives

Since 2003, the Publiradio research group has been working on developing an online teaching tool that would serve as an educational complement to the courses on radio advertising offered as part of the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations. The result of this systematic effort was the creation of the application *Publiradio.net*, which starting in academic year 2006-07 effectively became part of the theoretical-practical support of the course *Theory and Technique of Radio Language*, which is taught during the first term of the second year of each degree programme.

In the first phase, the group focused on creating the virtual platform and defining its main sections and contents. Once the project came to light and *Publiradio.net* took its place on Internet, Publiradio set out to adapt the virtual resource to the most significant requirements resulting from the implementation of the new teaching methodology (ECTS credits) derived from the process of adapting university education to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The launch of this application first worked as an online trial, so that we could detect the strong and weak points of the platform and get to know the sections that needed reinforcement, supplementation and/or improvement. Given the fact that the application is a living, evolving tool that requires constant updating and maintenance, Publiradio decided to optimise its use as an instrument for creating radio advertising for students in the courses on radio advertising. Therefore, the following goals were set:

1.1. Main objectives

1. To adapt the *Publiradio.net* online platform in order to encourage students' independent study and turn them into active agents in their learning process.
2. To offers students useful teaching tools that would enable them to independently do the different exercises and practices assigned in the courses on radio advertising, both individually and in groups.
3. To foster students' creativity and critical spirit, as well as to encourage experimentation with the different elements of radio language (Balsebre, A., 1994, Gutiérrez and Perona, 2002) when designing radio advertising products.
4. To get more intense learning and knowledge of radio creativity and creation among students in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations.
5. To stimulate students to acquire the most important specific skills that define the courses on radio advertising and advertising creativity. These skills include:
   - *In the realm of independent learning:* Learning how to learn. Knowing how to manage the time available by planning their activities realistically, functionally. Developing working, study and research skills both individually and in groups. Helping students to acquire mature, professional standards when choosing the different resources available to them for their education. Knowing how to evaluate radio advertising products.
   - *Artistic and creative realm:* Developing ideas and concepts adapted to the radio environment. Developing the imagination and productive thinking.

- *Technological realm:* To become familiar with the computer programmes that are used to complement the theoretical education, and which enable users to process sound to produce radio advertising products and contents.
- *Communication realm:* To be capable of persuading. Writing and verbalising ideas (locution) appropriately. Being able to argue and justify the appropriateness of the piece developed.

1.2. Secondary objectives

These are the goals that are more generic and that were already expressed explicitly in the idea that spurred Publiradio to create the teaching innovation platform *Publiradio.net*. These goals include:

1. To build an original application for independent learning on radio advertising in congruence with the *digital environment* of the studies managed by the Faculty of Communications Studies, which requires a higher degree of interaction between the student and the machine, and between the student and the professor.
2. To introduce a new level of innovation in the traditional *analogical* structure of the theoretical-practical learning process of students in the Faculty of Communications Studies who are taking courses related to radio and advertising.
3. To detect and include, in line with the new teaching culture derived from European convergence, the resources needed to ensure attainment of the educational goals, as well as the acquisition of the knowledge and skills necessary for graduates. In this sense, we understand that we must train students who are capable of responding to professional innovation which, in the realm of radio advertising, is required by the advertisers, advertising agencies and media agencies, and to thus neutralise the rising decline in interest in radio (Balsebre, A. et al., 2006).
4. To help to lower the level of marginalisation of radio creativity within the world of advertising.

2. Description of the project

As mentioned above, this project is a significant part of the course *Theory and Technique of Radio Language*, although it is also a useful project for any course related to the radio and creativity.

The main activities developed by the *Publiradio* research and teaching innovation group were aimed at constructing a powerful online tool so that students can discriminate between the different resources that are available to them and choose, with the aid of the faculty, the ones that are essential in the different phases of learning that are established in each course. Therefore, among other actions, the materials that have been included in the application have been organised using categories that are educationally coherent with the curricula in order to facilitate the tracking of the materials within the framework of continuous assessment.

With this philosophy in mind and with the goal of providing students with teaching resources for their education, we constructed the different sections of *Publiradio.net*, a website that features the following elements:

2.1. The sound library

A database of radio advertising products was assembled by including the jingles that are produced both in Spain and abroad, and especially in the different European countries, based on a documentary and bibliographic search of radio jingles in particular and of radio advertising in general. Within the sound library, students can find advertising productions that especially stand out for the use they make of the expressive potential of the components of radio language or because of the creative strategy they use. This section includes jingles from the 1940s until today. Each of the pieces included in the sound library is identified via a technical file, and users may listen to all of them. The sound library section enables students to access examples of radio advertising products. By September 2007 (the date the second phase of the project finished), this section contained a total of 264 sound documents.

2.2. The virtual classroom

Students have also been furnished with a virtual classroom (with sound resources and lessons) which not only fosters student-professor and student-student interaction but also gives teachers supplementary instruments to reinforce the theoretical-practical classroom teaching. The different sound elements (effects, music, separators) facilitate radio montage and become extremely useful instruments when developing the different teaching practices scheduled through the year (creating jingles, advertorials, product descriptions, micro-spaces, etc.). As sound resources, the students have more than 350 effects and tunes at their disposal. Likewise, the lessons (teaching units that complement the classroom syllabus) enable students to delve further into the basic concepts taught in the courses on radio advertising. At the end of the project, the platform had five online texts on radio language and on the strategic and communicative management of communication. The virtual classroom is unquestionably the section used most often by students when doing their practices.

2.3. Other educational elements

Within the education section students are furnished with educational resources that enable us to introduce novel systems for transmitting contents such as videos of classes, lectures, presentations, etc. Likewise, the research section shares the latest news in research in the field of radio advertising (as this article was being written, the students could see six online texts in article and presentation format).

2.4. Databases of creatives, advertisers, agencies and announcers

The students can get to know the main players in the world of radio advertising in our country, including the top creatives specialising in radio advertising, the most active

advertisers in terms of advertising investment within radio, and the agencies that come up with the majority of radio messages that can be heard every day on the different stations. In terms of announcers, the students can become familiar with the leading voices on the radio scene. In this case, they are offered an audiovisual database of the professional announcers in radio advertising with a description of the profile of their voices so that they can begin to familiarise themselves with the broad spectrum of acoustic registers and know how to recognise the voices delivering the advertising message. In all cases, the different elements on these databases are identified with a descriptive file and further information in pdf files. By September 2007, the application contained 113 documentary files: 14 on announcers, 19 on creatives, 37 on agencies and 43 on advertisers.

Finally, the platform was completed with a culling of news items related to radio and advertising, and with a section on links of interest that enable students to get further knowledge about radio advertising. Throughout the period that the project lasted, almost 100 news items and 60 high quality links were added on recording studios, advertising agencies and associations of advertising agencies, creatives and associations of creatives, advertisers and associations of advertisers, radio stations, online resources devoted to training, links with national and international research centres and specialised publications.

It is worth mentioning that within the courses on radio advertising, the faculty encourages the integration of the *Publiradio.net* online platform and the virtual campus within the structure and dynamic of the different classes. This enables us to forge synergies that facilitate both students' work and the resolution of queries that arise when they are doing the practices. It also establishes more fluid channels of professor-student and student-student communication. Therefore, a dynamic is established which involves three basic elements: the teacher-led classes, where the main theoretical concepts are explained and the different activities that students have to perform are assigned; the Publiradio.net platform, where students can access resources that help them to do their practices and projects along with materials that help them to complement the theoretical contents; and the virtual campus, which serves as a point of communication and gathering for turning in practices in given cases and for tutoring on the different projects (the scripts and briefings of the pieces are reviewed before their final production).

3. Methodology

The execution of this project has gone through different methodological phases, including:

3.1. Prior phase. Studying and analysing the needs and requirements of the application

1. Analysis of the exercises and practices assigned within the courses on radio advertising. Identification of the resources needed for students to perform them.

2. Launch of the process of benchmarking (comparative evaluation of the competition). Study and analysis of the best practices in developing online teaching platforms and constructing databases. Study and analysis of the databases on radio advertising that are used by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in London, IRCAM in Paris and the Museum of Radio and Television in New York in order to establish the process of defining and creating our own database for the design of the online application.
3. Definition of the different sections of the website and their contents. Identification of the aspects needing improvement, expansion and/or rectification.
4. Study of the technical requirements and prediction of the platform's possibilities of growth in terms of the number of hits and volume of material it could ultimately store (making possible and ensuring its growth).

3.2. Phase 1. Searching for and developing contents

1. Searching for the basic contents needed to perform the practices (sound effects, music, separators, etc.) and including them on the platform.
2. Documentary research on radio jingles.
3. Documentary research on the history of radio advertising.
4. Bibliographic research on radio advertising.
5. Identifying websites with related, relevant contents for students' education. Searching for URLs that might become part of the section on links to the *Publiradio.net* platform.
6. Getting in touch with creatives, agencies and advertisers to get the information needed to fill out the descriptive files and biographic data that appear on the website.
7. Documentary research to draw up a Who's Who in the world of radio advertising announcers and a psycho-acoustic study to catalogue the different voices.
8. A public relations campaign with agencies and sound studios to secure the cooperation and permits needed to broadcast sound materials owned by them, restricted to the UAB.
9. Developing the different models of practices for independent learning in the process of producing radio jingles.
10. Developing the different lessons that serve as monographs on specific concepts related to radio advertising. They serve as a theoretical complement to the classes.

3.3. Phase 2. Adding the contents and teaching resources to the *Publiradio.net* platform

1. Operational computer design and technical production of the website, consisting of the online application, in coherence with the goals set and with the contents that need to be housed.

2. Addition of the different materials into the sections on the application following the criteria of relevancy and interest. The materials were included on the platform and made available to students through the possibility of downloading and expanding on information (through attached pdf documents that can be downloaded and/or read onscreen).

3.4. Phase 3. Disseminating the website and recruiting new associates for the platform

1. Communication. Dissemination of the existence of the platform as a teaching innovation tool beyond the specific setting of our degree programme and faculty. Contact with educators, researchers and professionals in radio advertising to ask for their cooperation in expanding the contents of the website through their own contributions (articles, dissemination of their studies, lectures, etc.).

3.5. Phase 4. Assessing the results, updates and maintenance.

1. Assessment of the results. Assessment of the different exercises and projects done by students according to the degree to which they met the goal set (what students were supposed to do) and the level of creativity shown in the projects (criteria when choosing and using the different resources; skilfully developing the message in terms of content and form).
2. Quantification of the degree to which the teaching innovation platform is used by students in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations at the UAB.
3. Inclusion of new contents and updates of the current contents.

4. Results

As proven on other occasions (Perona, J.J., Barbeito, M.L. and Fajula, A., 2007), the actions developed throughout these years of work have enabled the group to achieve the following goals:

1. To turn the online application for radio advertising creativity into a key teaching resources within the context of the ECTS methodology, in that it facilitates independent learning, both individually and in groups, and it fosters students' creative, analytical and reflexive skills. Ever since it was launched, *Publiradio.net* has received more than 7,000 hits, a highly satisfactory figure for such a specific website.
2. To make this platform become an instrument that fosters continuous assessment of students in the different radio courses taught in the Faculty of Communications Studies at the UAB, especially in the Bachelor's Degree in Advertising and Public Relations. The statistics show that the students entered the Publiradio.net website more often when they were preparing a practice, a test or a theoretical exercise.
3. To turn the application into a useful complement for the radio courses and other courses on related topics. The results show that the students continue to use the plat-

form when performing practices in which they have to develop radio advertising products in other courses. This shows the transversal appropriateness of *Publiradio.net* and encourages students to have a holistic vision of the degree programme.

4. To facilitate independent learning among students in which they have to manage their time. The platform enables them to access the basic resources for performing their practices at any time and from any place.

5. To improve students' perception of radio advertising. Once the course is over, the majority of students claim that their opinion of radio advertising products have changed and that «they love the radio». This can help to break the view of radio as a complementary, second-rate advertising medium (Barbeito, M.L. and Fajula, A., 2005).

6. To optimise the demands for teaching innovation imposed by the digital environment, which structures the theoretical-practical learning of the degrees offered in the Faculty of Communications Studies of the UAB in the realm of radio communication.

5. Conclusions

With the development of this project, we have managed to get students to manage much of their own learning process in that they are the ones who end up deciding how to make use of all of the resources put at their disposal as a complement to the teacher-led classes. With the online application, students are offered the possibility of interacting with a tool that, once optimised, enables them to choose, listen to, download and manipulate a given sound effect or musical snippet to make a jingle, analyse the most representative voices in Spanish and Catalan radio advertising, listen to and analyse advertisements from the past, experiment with creative ways of conveying radio advertising contents, getting to know the results of the most recent studies on radio advertising or link up with all the institutions, research groups, sound studios, and the link that are involved in radio advertising.

Likewise, *Publiradio.net* is yet further proof of the growth that, thanks to technological convergence and especially the consolidation of internet as a platform for disseminating and inferring text, sound, visual and audiovisual contents, the initiatives aimed at fostering education in audiovisual communication are experiencing (Oliva, M., 2006). The radio, which has traditionally been used in different ways both inside and outside the classroom, has been shown to be a powerful complementary and reinforcing instrument for teaching and learning, is precisely leading the set of experiences that have been developed in different countries, which go far beyond its instructive and educational potential.

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Interesting links
· Website of the project: http://www.publiradio.net [2008]

Keywords
ECTS credits, radio advertising, creativity, online.

Financing

Supplementary materials on the CD-ROM
Demonstration of the *PUBLIRADIO* website: virtual tour of the news section, news archive, who's who, research and teaching, links and press room.

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Presentation of the working group

Publiradio is a university research group formed in 2002 and made up of five professors from the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the UAB. It specialises in researching radio advertising, and ever since it was founded, it works to get better recognition of the radio as an advertising medium.

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