

Google Launches Free Tool To Let You Run Your Own Online Courses

By Jeff Dunn on September 11, 2012

Sensing the excitement from online education tools like edX, Google has just unveiled a (very beta) version of its own course building software. If you've ever wanted to run your own online courses, this might be worth your time.

Google's new Course Builder software [code.google.com/p/course-builder/] comes on the heels of a massively popular online Google class 'Power Searching With Google' [www.powersearchingwithgoogle.com/] hosted by Google's Director of Research, Peter Norvig.

Why They Did It

Norvig shared a bit more information about the impetus for creating the online course and the power searching course, saying it "was a strong success and also generated some technology that we thought would be useful to share with the world," says Norvig. "We feel that by sharing the code that we've generated, we can impact more people in the education space. There is a lot of experimentation going on in the industry at this point, and we felt that contributing an open source project would be a beneficial starting point that could help everyone."

It's interesting that Google is trying to do something completely new rather than help build edX or an already established tool. That being said, the more the merrier as we all benefit when the mega-tech-giants like Google get involved.

The Details From Google

From Peter Norvig, Director of Research

In July, Research at Google ran a large open online course, *Power Searching with Google*, taught by search expert, Dan Russell. The course was successful, with 155,000 registered students. Through this experiment, we learned that Google technologies can help bring education to a global audience. So we packaged up the technology we used to build Power Searching and are providing it as an open source project called Course Builder. We want to make this technology available so that others can experiment with online learning.

The Course Builder open source project is an experimental early step for us in the world of online education. It is a snapshot of an approach we found useful and an indication of our future direction. We hope to continue development along these lines, but we wanted to make this limited code base available now, to see what early adopters will do with it, and to explore the future of learning technology. We will be hosting a community building event in the upcoming months to help more people get started using this software. edX shares in the open source

vision for online learning platforms, and Google and the edX team are in discussions about open standards and technology sharing for course platforms.

We are excited that Stanford University, Indiana University, UC San Diego, Saylor.org, LearningByGivingFoundation.org, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL), and a group of universities in Spain led by Universia, CRUE, and Banco Santander-Universidades are considering how this experimental technology might work for some of their online courses. Sebastian Thrun at Udacity welcomes this new option for instructors who would like to create an online class, while Daphne Koller at Coursera notes that the educational landscape is changing and it is exciting to see new avenues for teaching and learning emerge. We believe Google's preliminary efforts here may be useful to those looking to scale online education through the cloud.

Along with releasing the experimental open source code, we've provided documentation and forums for anyone to learn how to develop and deploy an online course like Power Searching. In addition, over the next two weeks we will provide educators the opportunity to connect with the Google team working on the code via Google Hangouts. For access to the code, documentation, user forum, and information about the Hangouts, visit the Course Builder Open Source Project Page {code.google.com/p/course-builder/}. To see what is possible with the Course Builder technology register for Google's next version of Power Searching. We invite you to explore this brave new world of online learning with us.