Nothing Virtual About the Arguments: using new media to enable debating

Alfred Snider, Edwin W. Lawrence Professor of Forensics, University of Vermont

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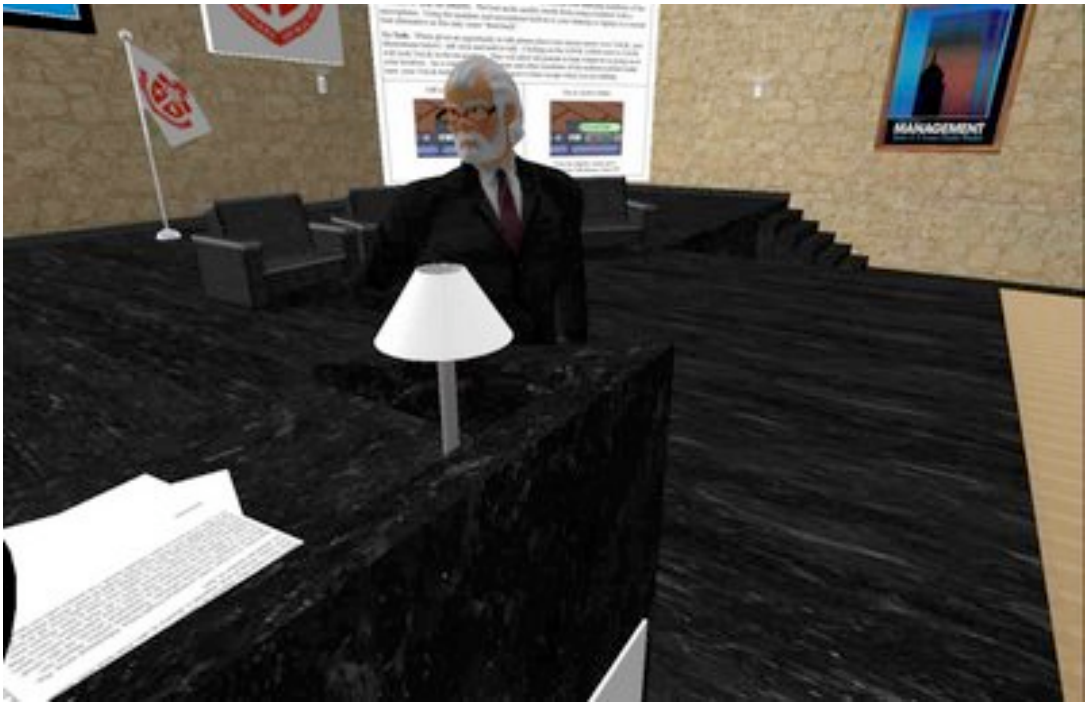
http://debate.uvm.edu - Alfred.snider@uvm.edu



The author in a virtual reality debate

I appreciate being invited here today. I have dedicated my life to promoting debate. One of the major problems is the barrier of distance. Were it possible to find a way to dissolve the distance between debating parties through technology we really could create a global debating community.

Today I will discuss the use of various forms of “new” and “old” media to determine how close we are to such a goal. I will discuss the design considerations, the varieties of media, and then discuss some examples of such efforts.

This is not a technical presentation but a pedagogical one. My assumption is that anyone deciding to use these methods will have a moderate amount of computer expertise or else access to assistance through school systems. None of the technical requirements here are very daunting or serious.

PART I: DESIGN

Debates that take place through these media needs to understand the limitations of each media and the situations that the speakers and audiences are in.

FORMAT

- Should be no more than an hour to facilitate audience engagement.
- Should not utilize cross-examination in some of the formats (streaming video, sequenced debates, etc.).
- Should utilize points of information only in some situations such as virtual reality.
- Should be adapted to debate formats students are already familiar with.
- Policy debate might be difficult because of the speed of delivery.

LIVE OR SEQUENCED

Live debates: a debate happens all at once

- Plus: immediate, dynamic, save for on-demand viewing.
- Minus: time zones, technical glitches, full attendance required, hard to gather an audience, coordination.

Sequenced debates: one speech at a time, period of days or weeks

- Plus: easy to arrange and implement, speeches can be redone, technical challenges less of a problem.
- Minus: not so dynamic, must be edited for people to watch, problem of follow-through.

JUDGING

- Regular contest judging: decision, critique.
- Audience judging: email, online poll
- Written ballot later.

AUDIENCE

- No audience, just for the participants
- Live audience on site
- Live audience remote
- On-demand viewing audience

PART TWO: VARIETIES

There is not just one kind of new media debate. Through the use of various media there are a number of possibilities.

TEXT DEBATE

- Exchange written documents as text files or emails.
- Word limit
- Time limit – must be sequenced

- Judges review final document set
- Tech: Standard email and document attachment, sound recorder http://www.hello-world.com/resource/record-win.php

SOUND DEBATES

- Live debates with debaters in multiple locations
- Sequenced debates with central depository
- Problems with listeners chiming in
- Tech: voice recording software, QuickTime, Skype, Windows Sound Recorder.

VIDEO DEBATES

Live Debates:

- Camera, computer, encoder
- Connection, server, distribution (to web page or direct to player)
- Tech: QuickTime Broadcaster, Skype video phone, Windows Media, RealProducer.

Sequenced Debates:

- Camera, computer, uploading
- Storage, editing, web distribution
- Tech: Vimeo video sharing service, video editing software.

VIRTUAL REALITY DEBATES

- Example of using SecondLife – a virtual world
- Find virtual space to debate in
- Debaters create avatars, test out the space
- Voice through headset
- Can use cross-examination and points of information
- Audience can chat silently during the debate
- Audience gathers for the debate, watches & listens
- Judges can retire, discuss, return to the main room
- Can video and archive for on-demand viewing

PART THREE: EXAMPLES:

VERMONT-ESU

First international online debate. Using QuickTime Broadcaster this debate between the University of Vermont and the English Speaking Union's UK All Stars took place on 14 March 2000. At each site there was a large projection screen to show the relatively grainy images. Thousands watched the debate (mostly due to ESU's promotion). Short video about this event is available at http://www.uvm.edu/~debate/watch/VTUKDC.rm .

WODC

The World Online Debating Championships.

This event is now going on. It is an example of text debating.
"Debatewise is proud to announce the first ever World Online Debating Championships (or the WODC for short). This will be a debating competition like no other, you can debate from the comfort of your chair, you can participate anywhere that has internet access, you'll have full 24 hours to perfect your arguments and can collaborate with other people, no matter where they are in the world."
http://www.debatewise.com/wodc

IPPF

The International Public Policy Forum

This is an example of text debating that becomes live debating and is webcast. This is an excellent contest for high school students, costs nothing and offers some large rewards. Teams debate through exchanged text files judged by university debaters and lawyers. They advance through elimination rounds and the top eight teams come to New York City for the final live debate judged by a distinguished panel of experts. The winner gets $10,000 and there are other generous cash awards as well.
Facebook page
http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/pages/International-Public-Policy-Forum/211483875322?ref=ts
Video Channel
http://www.youtube.com/ippforum
Main website
http://www.nppf.net/

ST. JOHN'S-VERMONT

Steve Llano of St. John's University in New York City and the University of Vermont planned a debate in a complete virtual reality. It was held in SecondLife. St. John's has a classroom and auditorium space that was used for the debate. The debate took place with a completely full room and many trying to get in. For a first time technical event, it went off very smoothly. SecondLife is only for those eighteen and older. However, there is a teen second life.
The promo for the event is at
http://debatevideoblog.blogspot.com/2009/02/debating-in-second-life.html
Video of the debate is at
http://debatevideoblog.blogspot.com/2009/02/watch-first-debate-in-virtual-reality.html
A discussion of the debate is at
http://globaldebateblog.blogspot.com/2009/02/second-life-debate-succeeds.html

CONCLUSION

There are many different ways in which we can use new media to dissolve the barriers of distance and engage in educational, competitive and increasingly public debates. The challenge is to match modalities up with capacities and needs to make this a satisfying experience. I believe it can and will be done.

Previous Articles and Events

Snider, Alfred, "Debate Central on the Internet," National Town Hall Meeting, Speech Communication Association Convention, New Orleans, November 1994.

Snider, Alfred, "Netiquette for debaters," The Speaker (Journal of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha Forensic Honorary Society), Spring, 1996.

Snider, Alfred, World's first Internet distance debate, UVM vs. Cornell University, December 23, 1999. Viewed by people globally via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, Web cast, Final Round (Emory vs. Michigan State), National Debate Tournament, March 2000, from Kansas City, MO, via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, World's first web cast of a competitive tournament debate, Final Round (Michigan State vs. West Georgia), Cross Examination Debate Association national tournament, March 2000, from Overland Park, KS, via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, World's first international distance debate, UVM vs. English-Speaking Union (London, UK), March 14, 2000. Viewed by over 8000 computers globally via UVM's streaming video capability and cooperation with LiveTX.com in Europe. Sponsored by Andersen Consulting, Burson-Marsteller, Apple, and PeoplesForum.com. Article in CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, March 31, 2000, p. A51.

Snider, Alfred, "Internet Debating: A New Age Dawns," *The Rostrum*, June 2000.

Snider, Alfred, Web cast, Final round events from National Forensic League national tournament, Portland, OR, June 2000, via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, "Internet Debating: the USA Perspective," at International Debate Education Association Conference 2000 (Debate and Argumentation: Opening Minds, Borders, and Societies), Budapest Hungary, October 6-8, 2000.

Snider, Alfred, “Videoblog Debating: the next phase,” International Conference on Argumentation, Rhetoric, Debate and the Pedagogy of Empowerment, November 24-26 2006, Koper, Slovenia.

Snider, Alfred, Web cast, Final round events from National Forensic League national tournament, Las Vegas, June 2008, via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, Web cast, Final round events from National Forensic League national tournament, Birmingham, Alabama, June 2009, via UVM's streaming video capability.

Snider, Alfred, “Internet debating: technical solutions for the early 21st Century,” *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*, 2008.

Software

QuickTime
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/

QuickTime Broadcaster
http://www.apple.com/quicktime/broadcaster/

RealProducer
http://www.realnetworks.com/products/producer/

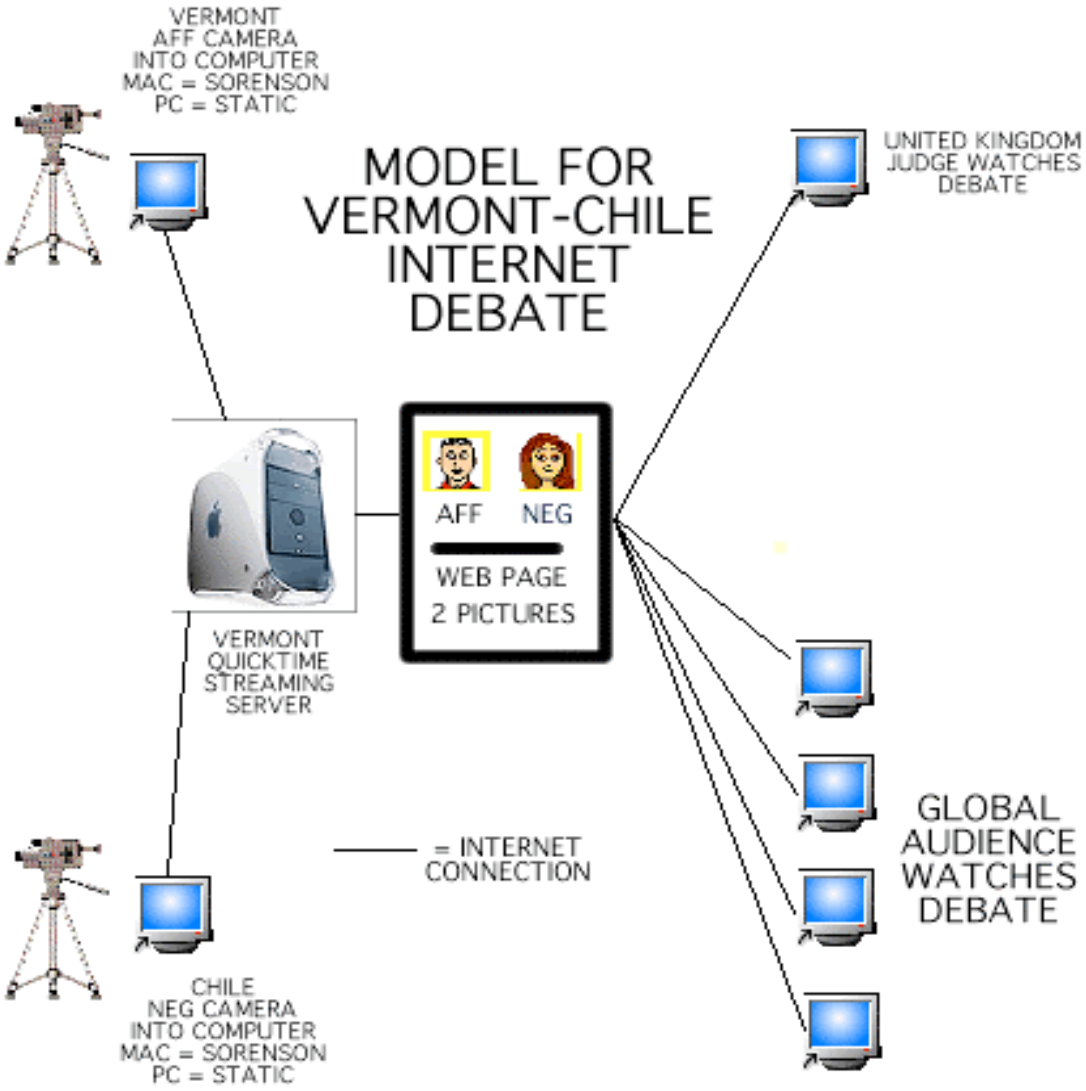
SecondLife
http://secondlife.com/

Skype
http://www.skype.com/download/skype/macosx/

Teen Second Life
http://teen.secondlife.com/whatis

Vimeo
http://www.vimeo.com/

Windows Media
http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windowsmedia/forpros/broadcast.aspx



Model of a live streaming video debate from 2004