DMP OFFICE REVAMPS PARIS

Paris (Packetized Automatic Routing Integrated System) is a multimedia educational tool that was originally pioneered by Alex Bal of Image Arts, Judy Britnell of the Interpersonal Skills Learning Centre, Cathy McCarthy of the School of Social Work, Ron Rankine of the Rogers Centre, and Sandra Samuels of Geriatrics. All were instrumental in the development of the original project, which was conceived in May of 1992 as one of the city's first high speed broadband applications. It involved video, audio and text, and was originally designed to run on a 486 PC with 8Mg of RAM, a DVI video card to display video, an Mmotion card, and a Network card using IBM network technology that supported one gigabit per second fiber optic data network.

The project began when the Interpersonal Skills Learning Centre and the New Media Group of the Rogers Communications Centre approached Ryerson Faculty in various health care Departments about designing multimedia educational tools for the PC platform. The purpose of the project was to teach students (as well as health care professionals) the dynamics of human interaction, communication and interpersonal skills.

The premise of the project is based on a popular teaching method: simulation. Simulation is used in a variety of disciplines where "simulators" are brought into the classroom to act out or illustrate a medical or social problem. Students are asked to interact with them in an attempt to address the problem. This method allows students to gain valuable insight in a "hands on" fashion when dealing with people in crisis outside of an actual real life situation. Students are given the opportunity to practice their skills prior to handling authentic clients or patients. The Paris prototype was conceived with this teaching methodology in mind and was designed to be multidisciplinary, branching outside of the educational healthcare field, despite the fact that the video content deals with a health care scenario.

Paris is the case study of an 87-year-old man named Mr. Paris who has suffered a heart attack and is about to be released from the hospital. Before his release, a team of hospital staff including a nurse, doctor, dietician and a social worker meet with Mr. Paris to determine his preparedness for discharge. The project is composed of a series of simulations each concentrating on a particular problem involving interpersonal skills and communications issues. The video, which is displayed via a QuickTime platform with 1024x768 resolution, not only allows the student to witness the interviews, it provides an insight into what each person is thinking during the interview, showing how thoughts may actually differ from what is spoken aloud as well as various perspectives on the situation.

In the summer of last year, the Digital Media Projects Office (DMP) was offered the task of modernizing and revamping Paris. Wendy Freeman, Coordinator of the group and Instructional Designer, was asked to manage the project. She enlisted the expertise of Jeremy Littler, Multimedia Production Specialist, Mark Huras, Multimedia Author and Consultant, and Phil Pang, an RTA student. Pang had the enormous challenge of retrieving the original video content and re-editing it. This required looking at over one hundred hours of footage, selecting the best, digitizing it and cleaning up the video and audio to ensure maximum quality for the final edit. Jeremy and Mark were tasked with engineering the PC and Internet applications through which the video content would be carried.

Once the video was re-edited it was compressed to fit onto a CD-ROM. The interface was designed by Littler and engineered to work off the CD-ROM through a Windows platform. Paris can be run from any PC with the following minimum requirements: Pentium II 266, 128 mgs of RAM, any version of Windows, 1024x768 display, 65,000 colours, a sound card and QuickTime (version 3.0 or later). It can be run from the hardrive or directly from the CD-ROM. In addition, Paris contains a built in browser which can be used to access a database with information directly related to the project or any website with information related to the project.

According to Littler, this is what makes Paris revolutionary. He remarks that an embedded web browser is something that "I haven't seen anywhere else." It allows students to access a database on the web and participate in a group discussion with other students. It also allows students to submit answers in response to the video content and perform exercises related to the project in cooperation with other students, thereby creating a more collaborative learning process. The built-in browser permits the Paris project to remain dynamic, for although the CD-ROM itself remains static, the database can always be updated and refreshed when the need arises. Be that as it may, the CD-ROM is a stand-alone product and one need not have access to the web in order to benefit from it.

Jeremy Littler was responsible for designing the graphics and the interface as well as authoring the front-end code needed to run the project. Mark Huras was responsible for writing the back end Cold Fusion code for the database as well as the front-end Cold Fusion code. The finished product is now being used as a teaching aid.