

Revista Digital Universitaria: Facing the challenges of digital publishing in Mexico

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The main challenge of editing the *Revista Digital Universitaria*, a digital magazine of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), is finding out how to use the digital editing tools to produce a magazine that can show the whole scope of the university's activities. This is, in first place, a problem of joining many languages and many forms. But it also involves the difficulty of translating those languages into a new one, which will help to promote culture by taking advantage of digital editing. The overall goal is to devise a new kind of editor and a new kind of author that can think in digital terms.

The context

The *Revista Digital Universitaria* was born in the year 2000 under the promotion of the Dirección General de Cómputo Académico, as part of UNAM's large tradition of creation and production of cultural spaces and media to promote culture among the population. In fact, addressing the challenge of promoting culture is one of University's goals, which is why the institution has made use of magazines since 1949. The concept of culture, however, has been modified since that time, and today this notion includes not only the "knowledge about arts" or the diffusion of sciences, but also familiarity with the technical areas – such as computing and engineering – as well as the social studies and humanities.

From this concept arises the purpose of the *Revista Digital Universitaria*,

which includes being an inclusive and representative magazine for the entire university while following certain parameters concerning the student's education and refresher courses for teachers. The digital magazine tends not to commit to one single view of culture, publishing articles about arts, sciences, social studies and humanities. Furthermore, the magazine tends to develop and to investigate the latest tendencies in electronic editing. All this explains why one of the main problems of editing the *Revista Digital Universitaria* is joining many languages and many forms, those of specialized speeches in the academic world with the new language of the electronic publication.

The conception

So far, the magazine has gone through two different stages. Throughout the first, the main purpose was to *use* digital media, but not to understand it. This means that in the beginning, the editing guidelines of a traditional, paper magazine were applied to digital media. However, this resulted in some problems with the magazine's personality, both because it was comparable to paper magazines and also because it tended not to be a magazine of specialized investigations, but rather was specialized in "everything".

In 2003, a new editorial team took charge of the magazine and began to think carefully about how to answer these three main questions:

- What were the goals and duties for a digital magazine that should be representative of the whole university?
- How should the magazine's personality be defined without guidelines for what kind of content will be included?
- What sort of editing guidelines must a digital magazine have?

Quickly, the answers began to appear. The magazine's goals and duties are: to create a space for innovation, development and production in digital editing, and to promote analysis, reflection and creation among the university by means of digital resources.

Therefore, the foremost idea was and still is to make digital editing the main focus of the magazine. Indeed, the magazine must be the workshop of digital editing at the university. From the same idea should emerge the nature of the magazine, which is defined by its articles. The atelier ought to spread the innovation of the Internet resources for editing processes such as hypertext, graphics, images, audio, digital and multimedia objects.

The challenge

From this arose one basic challenge of finding out who the authors, designers, editors and programmers would be, seeing as there were no digital editors in Mexico in 2003 and, in general, we didn't have a proper culture of digital publishing. In fact, we needed authors, designers and programmers who could think in digital terms. Finding these people remains our principal job because the magazine has a pedagogical role as it promotes the use of new technologies in the university as well as in Mexico. First of all, we want to set the problem in these terms: our authors, editors, designers and programmers must develop the necessary abilities for thinking and writing in multiple languages and formats. However, when we talk about multiple languages and formats we are referring to a writing problem, on one hand, and to an alternative for promoting culture on the other.

Many Languages

a) Different Styles of Writing

To settle the problem, we need to pay attention to the fact that the sciences, humanities and social studies use different writing styles. Scholars of both the humanities and the social sciences employ similar, lineal forms of writing. However, the humanities use a particular speech, one that is narrative and objective. The sciences and arts, on the other hand, use a writing style which is both non-narrative and non-lineal, and allows for shifting and multidirectional readings.

b) The Iconography Code

Generally speaking, humanities, arts and sciences have an iconographic code, which is easier to detect than those of social studies and the computing development area, which are different. While arts and humanities share the same graphic sphere, science uses the results of its own investigations to build its iconographic elements. Thus, while science finds its icons from within its own objects of study, on the contrary, arts and humanities must create their own icons. Some examples of this can be seen in covers of the magazine which deal with topics as various as neurophysiology, genetics, astronomy, Mayan culture, and Kantian ethics, which takes its icons from the game “serpientes y escaleras”.

The Cultural Promotion Problem

The chief objective of promoting culture is to connect general audiences with specialized knowledge. Science has been the major creator, and has formed the heart, of cultural promotion.

What we understand by promotion is the communication of ideas on a general level aimed at non-specialized audiences. This means that we need to translate the specialized speech of the different academic languages into something that can be understood by many.

As a result of our work at the *Revista Digital Universitaria*, we have found that digital editing can generate reading and meaning processes, beginning from digital rewriting that exploits the relationships between graphic, forms and words, and becomes a tool that serves to promote knowledge.

Digital editing and the new author

What we have done can be described as an attempt to solve the problem of having articles whose narratives and iconographies are clearly different and distant, as well as to overcome the traditional language of promotion which seems to diminish content’s “depth”. We found that digital editing helps to introduce and integrate many levels of language in one text, to invest it with meaning for those who could not otherwise understand. The use of images

and graphic forms follows the same logic in order to generate many levels of understanding for one topic, by means of graphic language or through a dialogue between words and forms. The intention here is to overcome the difficulties and contradictions of both the different writings and the language of *promotion*, by using digital tools and resources which allow the introduction of texts within the texts, or of images that can be read as texts and texts that become images.

The final aim is to create a new kind of author for digital publications or at least for publications like the *Revista Digital Universitaria*. This author would be capable of thinking in digital terms and skillful enough to generate mazes, maps, hieroglyphics, *caligramas* (shape poetry) and instructions in different time sequences. The main purpose would be to get rid of the distance between the dissimilar speeches of the sciences, arts, social studies and humanities, to construct a new narrative which goes beyond the limits of language.

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