Managing digital content at UNED (National Distance Education University of Spain)

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It all started with the “Open Access” movement and the Institutional Repository as the “green road” to it; we were investigating into that direction when we discovered Fedora. We created our Institutional repository, ”e-spacio UNED”, with Fedora and Fez as a web client, with the idea of offering our research community a mean to increase the dissemination of their works (very much “Open Access” stuff); but very soon we realized that our research and academic community had many other different needs and problems when managing their digital content (and that Fedora was able to give answers to that needs).

Our University generates an increasing volume and a diverse typology of digital objects from different Departments.

There is the Department that produces all the audio/video materials generated from the radio/TV programs, key component of the distance methodology of the University. They wanted a system to manage this content; this material is access restricted. And they wanted their own application and their own web portal to access it, not through the “Institutional repository” view.

Our University also offers virtual interactive classes through videoconference; it was a need to manage this kind of objects, again from their own application.

And the University has also a need to manage all the learning objects created in their e-learning system and OpenCourseware.

And they wanted a solution to support the digital publication of the university journals (some open access, some restricted).

And they wanted a system to manage and disseminate their publications, but not necessarily, again, through the Institutional repository, or at least, not only.
lose control and visibility as unit. And they have different needs, different contexts of use. And there is one common need: REUSE and INTEROPERABILITY.

So, what we did was to implement a technology framework that was able to offer our Institution a common uniform way to manage the different types of digital objects, and a system that allowed each unit to develop their own applications on top of that system, and a system that allows to reuse, in a transparent way, the same object in different contexts.

One interesting thing to mention is that we did not carry out an outreach or marketing campaign after the release of the "Institutional Open Access oriented Repository". What happened was that the technology we were using was just the right answer at the right moment to the problems of the different Departments generating digital content at our university. So it was they who contact us looking for a solution. And what we found out is that we did not only offer them the right technology but a vision, which in our opinion is very important. And we had to work with them with new metadata standards, and most important, we made them understand the importance of working with standards in terms of interoperability.

As you probably know, one of the problems to work with different services or units is to deal with different "cultures" and "this is my territory" attitude. With our solution, they understood that they could be in control of their own content but working in a federated way; it was just a matter of standards.

Finally, we would like to stress the need for our profession (librarians) to start assuming that things are really, profoundly and at the speed of light, changing for libraries and for the kind of services the research and academic community expect from us (while they still expect something from us) and that we need new skills and attitudes to respond, and we need it now or it will be never.