

Case study: TED-Ed

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Overview

TED-Ed, a spin-off from the TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) not-for-profit conferences¹, is a free educational website for young people aged 8-18, featuring a series of videos and tools to create custom lessons. Its tagline is "Lessons Worth Sharing" – a variation on TED's "Ideas Worth Spreading". TED-Ed lessons are short 3-10 minute, often-animated videos with commentaries from educators, addressing questions such as "How do tornadoes form?" and "Where do good ideas come from?" TED-Ed also provides tools for anyone to create lessons around any TED Talk, TED-Ed video or YouTube video, the best of which are promoted on the TED-Ed website. Other initiatives include TED-Ed Clubs, enabling students to collaborate to make their own TED style talks. Since TED-Ed was launched in 2012, more than 85,000 lessons have been created.

TED-Ed website homepage

The screenshot shows the TED-Ed website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'Lessons', 'Series', 'Community', and 'Clubs'. Below this is a search bar and a 'Create a Lesson' button. The main content area displays a grid of video thumbnails, each with a title, a brief description, and the number of views. A sidebar on the left allows filtering by content category, including 'All', 'The Arts', 'Business & Economics', 'Design, Engineering & Technology', 'Health', 'Literature & Language', 'Mathematics', 'Philosophy & Religion', 'Psychology', 'Science & Technology', 'Social Studies', 'Teaching & Education', and 'Thinking & Learning'.

Category	Title	Views	Duration
All	How do Tornadoes form?	25,451	4:12
	Jack Death	25,643	4:13
	How Do You Know You're Real?	348,430	3:03
	Getting Under Our Skin	112,042	5:19
Science & Technology	The secret lives of baby fish	25,151	4:00
	What causes antibiotic resistance?	15,450	4:35
	What's hidden among the tallest trees on Earth?	35,623	4:47
	The nudles' quest for ocean domination	21,091	4:55
Out of This World	What light can teach us about the universe	81,720	4:07
	The coelacanth: A living fossil of a fish	40,856	4:17
	How does a barometer work?	44,585	2:48
	Under the hood: The chemistry of cars	30,610	4:34

[Source: TED-Ed]

¹ TED Conferences are owned by the not-for-profit Sapling Foundation.

Background and context

Until recently education remained the preserve of classroom-based institutions, i.e. schools, colleges and universities. Students mainly used the internet as a research tool, increasingly using online resources such as Wikipedia and YouTube instead of printed encyclopaedias and textbooks. Increasingly, schools and universities have posted audio and video recordings of lessons onto websites and platforms such as Apple's iTunesU (which offers over 50,000 free lectures from local colleges and elite universities). But in the last few years, there has been a surge of investment and innovation in online education. The main area of growth has been around online teaching, ranging from simple lessons, such as those provided by TED-Ed and Khan Academy, to structured programmes, some providing accreditation, from dedicated service providers such as EdX (a partnership between Harvard and MIT) and Coursera, a US venture-capital backed for-profit enterprise.

Content strategy

TED-Ed's mission is "to capture and amplify the voices of great educators around the world"² and is an extension of TED's purpose of spreading great ideas. The primary target is schoolchildren and students aged between 8-18 years old.

At its core, TED-Ed's strategy has three elements:

- To develop something similar to TED talks tailored for young people and designed to stimulate curiosity and promote learning
- To provide educators with a toolkit to create bespoke lessons specifically targeted to the curriculum they teach
- To create a platform which enables the best lessons to be shared amongst a much wider audience

In March 2012, the TED-Ed website went live with 12 animated videos. Since then the TED-Ed video library has grown to more than 85,000 lessons, usually no more than 5-6 minutes in length, which can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. In addition to a short video, each lesson includes additional features to stimulate thinking and learning, such as multiple-choice questions, open answer questions, "dig deeper" materials, and custom discussion ideas. Lessons cover a wide range of subjects, from basic skills (e.g. Thinking and Learning) to school curricula (e.g. Mathematics, Geography, Literature) to social and cultural issues (e.g. Health, Religion). Most address a specific topic, ranging from basic questions such as "How do we smell?" to more advanced ideas such as "The fundamentals of space-time". Users can distribute lessons and track their impact on the world, a class, or an individual student. Lessons are accessible through the TED-Ed website at www.ed.ted.com as well as on YouTube and YouTube for Schools.

TED-Ed Originals

TED-ED Originals are lessons created for TED-Ed by educators and professional animators in conjunction with the TED-Ed team. Subjects are selected from ideas submitted by experts and educators, who then collaborate with professional animators to develop a script and produce animated lessons. Content for the Think, Dig Deeper, and Discuss sections is also created through this process. Typically, it takes 1-2 months to develop a lesson and another 6-8 weeks to create the animated film.

² <https://www.facebook.com/TEDEducation>

TED-Ed Original, produced collaboration with CERN

The beginning of the universe, for beginners - Tom Whyntie



444,249
Video Views

1,434
Questions
Answered

Let's Begin...

How did the universe begin -- and how is it expanding? CERN physicist Tom Whyntie shows how cosmologists and particle physicists explore these questions by replicating the heat, energy, and activity of the first few seconds of our universe, from right after the Big Bang.



Watch

Think

Dig Deeper

Discuss

Customize This Lesson

119

Create and share a new lesson based on this one.

About TED-Ed Originals

TED-Ed Original lessons feature the words and ideas of educators brought to life by professional animators. Are you an educator or animator interested in creating a TED-Ed original?

[Nominate yourself here](#)

Meet The Creators



Cathy Kwan
Producer



Connie Chan
Composer



Dan Abdo
Director



Jason Patterson
Director



Joey McCormick
Animator



Mike Luzzi
Animator



R.J. Glass
Editor



Tom Whyntie
Educator

Share



[Source: TED-Ed]

TED-Ed Selects

Teachers, parents and students (or anyone else) can create customised lessons using TED-Ed tools. These can be based on an existing TED-Ed lesson, TED talk or YouTube video. Once created, lessons can be submitted to TED-Ed and the best are selected and promoted on the website under the TED-Ed Select moniker.

TED-Ed Select, produced by the University of Cambridge

How many lightbulbs?



65,995
Video Views

1,119
Questions
Answered

Let's Begin...

A look at sustainable energy and what we use our energy for.



Watch

Think

Dig Deeper

...And Finally

Customize This Lesson

191

Create and share a new lesson based on this one.

About TED-Ed Selects

TED-Ed Selects are exceptional, user-created lessons that are carefully selected by volunteer teachers and TED-Ed staff.

Meet The Creators



Neil Payne
Lesson
Creator



Cambridge University
Video Source

Share



[Source: TED-Ed]

TED-Ed Clubs

TED-Ed Clubs are students aged between 8-18 years old, who want to create their own TED style talks. With the help of an adult facilitator, groups of 5-50 students can collaborate to identify an idea they want to discuss, learn how to frame and present it and finally create a short film, which they upload onto the TED-Ed YouTube channel. The best are selected by TED-ED for promotion on the TED-Ed website. The focus is on helping young people to develop the team working, story-telling and communication skills.

Contribution to Public Service Objectives

PSO₄ - Education

TED-Ed provides a wide selection of material, covering a range of topics from elements of school curricula to broader social and cultural issues, primarily aimed at students aged 8-18 years old.

Main Ted-Ed subjects

Subjects	Sub-topics
The Arts	Visual arts; Performing arts; Value of the arts
Business & Economics	
Design, Engineering, Technology	
Health	Growth & development; Medical conditions; Consumer health; Public health; Nutrition; Physical fitness
Literature & Language	Speaking; Literature; Linguistics; Writing/Composition
Psychology	History, Approaches & Methods; Cognition & learning; Motivation & emotion; Developmental psychology, Personality, Psychological disorders & treatment, Social psychology
Teaching & Education	
Thinking & Learning	

[Source: Ted-Ed]

The combination of short videos and additional teaching materials provides teachers with ready-made lessons around a variety of topics. The educational material available from Ted-Ed covers topics as diverse as “How heavy is air?”, “What gives a dollar bill its value?” and “How to build a fictional world”.

TED-Ed Original and Select lessons are intelligently structured and produced to a high standard (virtually broadcast TV quality). However, the majority of lessons on the TED-Ed website appear to be aimed at school children at the younger end of the target age range, and some of the simpler animations may grate on older teenagers. However, TED-Ed’s lesson editor enables educators, teachers and students to create lessons specifically customised to their own requirements.

The key advantage of online resources such as TED-Ed is that they enable students to interact with the material in a way that is impossible with any other medium. For example, TED-Ed lessons’ “Think” section allows students to consider and answer specific multiple-choice and open answer questions, with instant feedback on the former. The “Dig Deeper” section enables educators to provide additional

information as well as links to relevant resources for further study. The “Discuss” section provides a platform for students to share ideas.

Business model and revenue

All TED-Ed resources are freely available online for anyone to use.

TED-Ed is owned by TED, the not-for-profit conference series. TED makes money through TEDGlobal and TED conference ticket sales, sponsorships, licensing fees and other revenue streams. In addition, TED also raises money through a number of partnerships with selected organisations and through donations. Profits are ploughed back into initiatives such as TED-Ed, the community-driven TEDx programme, TED Prize and TED-Ed fellowships. Much of the work is carried out by unpaid volunteers.

Chris Anderson, TED’s curator, has told TED attendees to “think of TED as a social enterprise, and think about yourselves as investors.”³

In 2012, TED generated \$45 million from its activities.

Summary

TED-Ed is a service to create lessons around online videos. It is primarily aimed at educators, providing them with templates to include educational videos in their teaching. Lessons can then be shared, modified and reused. The customisability offered by TED-Ed, and the ability to share customised lessons, distinguishes it from simple educational videos, and makes it a resource not possible offline. As of yet TED-Ed does not seem to have gained much traction in UK schools, so we cannot claim there is an impact on education generally, but it offers a suggestion of what the internet could be used for in the classroom.

³ <http://upstart.bizjournals.com/money/loot/2013/02/26/ted-generates-ideas-plus-45m.html?page=all>

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