# Eller College of Management

## The University of Arizona



*MIS 111 Freshman Honors Showcase*

**Voki.com, Personalize your Reality**

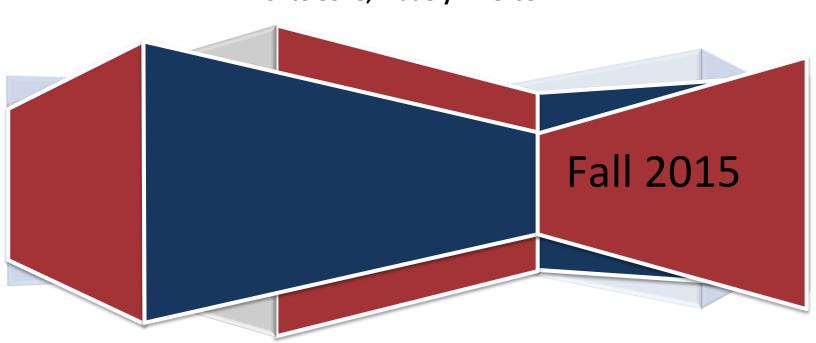**Team 27: Maxwell Parise, Adam Lang, Colin Monteleone, Madelyn Erekson**

Fall 2015

## Table of Contents

**Abstract**

Voki.com is a website and application that allows users to create custom avatars and bring them to life with their own voice. Individuals are able to transport their look, voice and dialogue to a virtual being and use it to model and teach, giving it great capability to change the way we learn and educate. The value for an education institution like the University is obvious as students would be able to learn with more interest and relation to the subject matter since Voki allows creators to bring people from the past and present in front of their eyes. Implementation of this educational tool will come at a relatively small price that the university will include in its educational fees. After being budgeted in, students will receive their account information upon entering the university so they can access the platform that certain classes will make use of. Voki comes with three components online. First, students are able to create and animate avatars that speak and look like whatever they desire. Next there is "Voki classroom" that allows teachers and professors alike to assign Voki related tasks through the website to those who are signed up online. This brings a classroom online, and works well within University policies in terms of privacy and student protection. Lastly "Voki Presenter" combines the effectiveness of PowerPoints and personal presentation with Voki avatars. Imagine now professors will be able to grade full presentations with student avatar, dialogue and course content all in one place. This cuts class time, allowing more space for learning about the subject such as Anthropology. This field is important to the report because this group interviewed Dr. Rowe about implementing this technology into his course, allowing him to bring professionals of his field to life and speak about relevant course work to his class in first person. The large appeal to Voki is the barriers it breaks down for persons with disabilities. In bringing no additional challenges to visual and listening challenges, the application will allow students with speech and hearing disabilities to create and comprehend coherent presentations for and from their peers and instructors. Voki also extends the classroom to the outside world, for students and instructors on leave for many days or weeks at a time perhaps for medical or family reasons. The application will let them create and receive assignments from the web and still bring that personal feel of being with the student or professor as they will be accompanied by their custom avatar. Aside from the main point of education to disperse information and learn material related to a major, Voki conceptually teaches creativity, both visually and aurally as students will be required to model themselves and individuals of their field of interest. It serves as a premier and innovative medium of learning to put a twist on the traditional classroom at the University of Arizona.

## I Introduction

At the University of Arizona, the importance of interactive learning practices is an integral belief that helps define how the Wildcat way is carried out by every graduate, undergraduate, and faculty member. Therefore, it is imperative that anyone with the opportunity, even a group of inexperienced, freshman, Pre-Business majors, utilizes and shares with his or her peers any innovation that can help to promote the interactive learning experience. We, the aforementioned freshmen, believe that we have been assigned an application for our MIS 111 Showcase Project, Voki, with enormous potential for making particular niches of our school a more interactive learning environment. Voki is an application, accessible through voki.com, which allows a user to create and customize avatars, simply type its desired speech, and share the final product with other users. Off the bat, this application's efficacy to the university is obvious. Voki reveals a new medium in which teachers can educate their students outside of the classroom; online students can learn American history from an avatar of Abraham Lincoln, classic literature from Don Quixote, or even ancient philosophy from Socrates. Moreover, Voki is a new mode in which students can perform class projects such as "virtual wax museums" for biographical assignments. However, the possibly functions of Voki are not limited to teacher-student interactions. The website can also be used to allow students to transfer information to classmates, professors to their fellow instructors, or University of Arizona officials to students and faculty; doing so will endorse our university's goal to make our campus a place where learning transcends classrooms, assignments are not limited to slideshows and essays, and is all together an interactive learning environment. Our group aims

to ensure this product's utilization in particular niches through advertisement and education in order to hold true to the mantra so important to how our University defines itself.

## II Product Assessment

When made use of to its full extent, Voki has tremendous amount of value for the classrooms of the University of Arizona. The value proposition of Voki is best articulated by three main points: its propensity for technological integration, its emphasis on creativity, and its sheer inimitability. One of the product's most remarkable features is its fluidity that can be attributed to it being an online program. As a website, Voki can be easily accessed from any device with internet connection, allowing individuals to submit Voki projects, teachers to share lessons, and students to teach each other students outside the one-hour class period and the confines of the classroom. Secondly, Voki presentations should almost always require a certain degree of creativity to create. In addition to interactive learning, the University of Arizona strives to encourage the production of alumni with the ability to think creatively which is almost essential to using Voki. Transcending the university, upon polling 1,709 CEOs, Kevin Kruse (2012), a writer for Forbes, determined that 61% of the interviewed CEOs believed that creativity is an essential quality in a "future-proof" employee (Kruse). The study affirms the importance of creating creative college students. Lastly, Voki is a very unique method of presenting information. The product's uniqueness allows it to exceed the monotony of PowerPoints and Word documents, and thus keep students interactive and excite them to work. Furthermore, the students of any classroom have varying levels of expertise in the aforesaid, common methods of presenting information, so Voki's distinctiveness and lack of

popularity would present a level playing field to grade students on the taught material opposed

to technological prowess.  Given its online accessibility, encouragement of creativity, and

uniqueness, Voki is a very valuable product.

Currently, Voki is implemented in a vast array of educational facets ranging from

kindergarten to college. Voki's existing markets are any educators who aim to employ online

presentation software among others, citing Voki's propensity to be used as communication

software or in the professional workplace. According to the product's website, [www.voki.com](www.voki.com),

the price structure of Voki is divided into four packages: a free standard Voki account, Voki

Classroom ($29.95/year), Voki Presenter ($29.95/year), and Voki Classroom ($49.95/year).

These three packages all have fifteen-day free trials, thirty-day money back guarantees, and the

ability to adjust the payment method from anywhere from a monthly basis to once every two

years. There also come price benefits when bought in two year packages, saving an extra

$10.00 when purchased for this time period.

Voki's business strategy and structure are all aimed at incenting users to maximize the

application's potential, which involves paid memberships. Since no third party advertisers are

apparent on Voki's many pages, it can be seen that the company that owns them, Oddcast,

does not aim to gain income from posting ads (Oddcast Media Technology). Moreover, Voki

makes a profit with the help of its three revenue sources: Voki Classroom, Voki Presenter, and

the Voki Classroom and Presenter Bundle. Using their website as reference, Voki avoids users

from only utilizing the free Voki account since the company places a variety of limitations to

incent users to buy a more profitable product. Though free, the standard Voki account limits

the user to only giving their avatar a one-minute audio message, provides no privacy settings, and provides no Voki-organized teacher-student online interaction. The most expensive option, the Voki Classroom and Presenter Bundle, allows for students to have unlimited audio message lengths, access to premium Voki characters, and privacy settings, while teachers gain the ability to manage classes and assignments online, to create, share, comment on, and play Voki presentations, and to gain access to pre-created Common Core lessons. For a cheaper price, Voki Classroom and Voki Presenter, have some of the same features as the Voki Classroom and Presenter Bundle. Voki Classroom is more focused on managing students' Voki projects since teachers are unable to even create presentations, and Voki Presenter is primarily presentation software since it inhibits teachers from viewing their students work. The goal of this service variability and price equality is to emphasize the flaws of the two thirty dollar a year options in order to make the Voki Classroom and Presenter Bundle more appealing.  Additionally, the products available for purchase provide premium avatars, the option for teachers to enroll students, and unlimited email support. All in all, Voki aims to mostly profit off of the Voki Classroom and Presenter Bundle by highlighting the downfalls of its variants, while effective providing cost options for those who cannot afford the bundle as well as emphasis Voki as a whole's utility.

As previously mentioned, Voki is a branch owned by the private company Oddcast. Oddcast is a media technology company that has produces a variety of technologies including: 2D and 3D character design software, audio recognition and production innovations, widgets, and many other applications (Oddcast Media Technology). The Voki branch, which is an obvious product of the technologies developed by their father company, has a central office of

operations in New York. On the whole, Voki is a company devoted to prime customer service (evident because any user can to give feedback Voki and paid users have unlimited email support), frugally allocating funds (using free social media websites to advertise like Facebook), and utilizing minimal third-party advertisers (only advertising other Oddcast companies).

For our group, there are various product characteristics that are particularly viable in our attempt to integrate the technology in to the University of Arizona. The most important features of any application that will be assimilated into any scholastic environment are online accessibility, interactivity between students and teachers, and sufficient customer service. Online accessibility is particularly important in the $21^{st}$ century because it allows students to complete assignments outside the confines of a classroom and it gives the ability to teachers to grade, assign, and run assignments through plagiarism detection websites like turnitin.com. Since Voki is a vendor hosted website, it meets this criterion. Teacher-student interactivity is not only an important part of the university's goal but also allows students to ask teachers questions and teachers to give advice to students online, with two of the four packages presented by Voki providing this option. Good customer service is imperative to the life of a student because from personal experiences, due to scheduling conflicts, the majority of essay and online project submissions take place on the day of the deadline or even an hour before the project is due. If a technological dilemma were encountered in those situations, consequences could be severe, therefore speedy, effective customer service is important, which Voki provides to the three paid account options. Another important characteristic of any application is its best mode of access. For Voki, in-website actions can be performed on computers, smart phones, tablets, or anything else with the ability to access the Internet.

However, from personal experience, computers are the easiest and most efficient way to use

Voki.

## III Proposed Instructional Activity

The beauty of Voki lies within the realm of its universality. Simply put, anyone and

everyone could benefit from incorporating our application into their classes curriculum. This

makes it so that the market for Voki is defined by anyone who is open for making their classes'

environment more effective. Once included into a classroom the opportunities are limitless.

This ranges from assisting the teacher from an instructional standpoint to assisting a student

from a learning standpoint. Conveniently, this allows the application to be used in both an

upper division and lower division class. If used correctly, Voki could completely change the way

that an instructor stylistically taught his class. This is because what makes an instructor

successful is how they present information to their students. Any instructor can teach his

courses content to the class; but the instructor who engages his students into wanting to learn

about the course is the one who will get better results. This is where Voki comes in. Voki allows

an instructor to not only inform his students, but to do it in a way where it is interactive and

enjoyable. Examples of this include using Voki to present information for the instructor, to also

having the student utilize Voki in showing their instructor how much they really grasp what

they are being taught. Ideally, Voki would be most useful to a student in the form of project use

or in class activities. However, the application is not limited to this sort of incorporation.

To give a more direct example of how Voki could be used, imagine the application being

used in a creative writing department. The instructor could utilize Voki by creating an avatar to

go with a story they have written for an example to their class. In return, the class could obtain

a more comprehensible understanding of what their instructor is looking for. From a teacher's

outlook on giving projects, they could use Voki in almost every project they assign. For every

story that a student wrote, they could attach the assignment of creating an avatar/s to go along

with it. This would force the student to get even more creative than they already had to, which

is the goal when trying to get a student more engaged with an assignment. This is because

when the student is creating a story with imaginary characters, Voki would allow them to

actually put a face to those characters. Consequently, this would help the student delve deeper

into getting to know the character they just created, which would make the story that much

more realistic. All of this extra comprehension would happen without the student even realizing

it, simply because creating the avatar would naturally cause the student to know their story

closer. Not to mention that creating a character solely off of one's imagination would be

entertaining to say the least.

Incorporating assessment criteria for Voki would be difficult frankly because the

benefits of the application are intangible. This does not make the application any less valuable

to the class, just more difficult to measure if the student chose to actually use the application to

prosper their work. The wealth in using the application lies in how it would benefit each

student on an individual level in how they would understand their own work in a more in-depth

manner. Therefore, it would be hard to see how much it benefitted the assignment because

they would create the avatar before they ever wrote their piece. Hypothetically, one could

incorporate a grade regarding the student's use of the application by how realistic the avatar

looked. The instructor could look at the character made by the student and see if it truly fit the

character they described in their story. This would evaluate the student's effort on the assignment, which should have a direct correlation to what grade they receive.

The instructional outcome of adding this product to a class would reside in how it would make the students learn the content effectively. By adding Voki to a class, the instructor would have more tools in which he could use to supply his students with knowledge. The more resources a teacher has means the more ways that they can help their students if they don't understand a lesson the first time around. In turn, the students would collect a more thorough understanding of everything they are being taught. This is what draws in users of Voki because it is hard to find effective ways of expressing content, so Voki is a viable solution to that problem. Since the teachers would have more ways of explaining material, the students would have a greater grasp of that material. This would make it so that the students would be able to perform more strongly on any assignment given to them. Students would retain the benefits as well because they are the ones making the avatars. Nonetheless, they don't have to try and remember how Voki helped them because it helped them in such an integrated way. When one doesn't have to try and remember something it becomes effortless, and effortless learning is ideal if it gets the same results across as learning that needs more effort.

The professor that was interviewed is Dr. Michael Rowe of the Anthropology department. His class, "Patterns in Prehistory" was an ideal class to pitch the product for because it does not teach a suitable amount of information about the anthropologists and significant members in the field. Using our application, voki.com, archeologists and professionals in the area of anthropology will be able to be modeled and given a voice to teach their significance in what would feel like a first person setting. Dr. Rowe would have the

comfort and security to teach the necessary information and be able to deliver a consistent

presentation with a multimodal medium. Having a moving visual would improve the attention

spans of his students and give them more interest in learning the material.

The anthropology department is an excellent candidate for the application for the ability

to model professionals of the field. Students would be able to learn about famous archeologists

and persons with key discoveries by research and more conceptually through the design of

their Voki profiles. After having created the influential individual, the student will have learned

the essential information through process instead of lecture, and have the person in the future

to reference with key information. The application to our professor's department invaluable,

but can also be applied to other subjects and still be equally as affective.

Integration of the application into the class would be seamless. An instructor wouldn't

need to come up with a complex way of incorporating because on its own it fits into the

curriculum. All the teacher would have to do is add making an avatar on Voki to any writing

assignment they already planned on giving and it would instantly complement that activity. This

makes the app more appealing to anyone interested in Voki because they get the results of

enhancing their class, while not having to go too far out of their way to change the way they

already structure their teaching style.

**IV Feasibility**

Voki.com holds high value in its ease of use. Students in Dr. Rowe's class will be able to

use the product with virtually any computer that was manufactured in the past ten years. The

requirements to run the application are to have internet access and the ability to read and click

on elements of the page. Windows and Mac operating systems have web browsers preinstalled

so that individuals have the immediate capability to browse the web. In regarding the Voki website, customers who have problems implementing the tools like Voki and the presentation application that is offered will have access to free guides that walk the user through the steps. The help document is a .pdf file which is unanimously compatible with most systems and is divided into many sections that feature the basic functions like logging in to the website to more unfamiliar categories like the editing of presentations and setting up a visual figure. A student will first need to set up an account, review the help guides to create either Voki characters or presentations, and utilize compatible files for uploading images to presentations (JPG or JPEG for visual, WMA, PCM, MP3, WAV for audio) in order to have a successful user experience.

If a student is asked for example by the professor to complete an online presentation about a significant anthropologic discovery in history, Voki will be a simple and effective tool with little room for failure. The individual will complete an account to gain access to both the digital design platform for characters, and presentation software that is compatible with voice over audio and Voki characters. These presentations can be then sent to a professor as a specific link that will bring the presentation up on a webpage. The instructor will be able to evaluate the content based on what the student presents and includes in his slides, and evaluate a vocal presentation by observing the personalized Voki avatar's dialogue. This platform that Voki offers which combines presentation software comparable to Microsoft Powerpoint, and personalized student narration with the corresponding avatar morphs the two main aspects of group presentations so that time is saved in class to learn material instead of sit through peers' presentations. The instructor will have the ability to go back and replay what he

may have misheard and have an exact idea of what the student put into the project once it is finalized and shared.

To make the transition into this learning software easier, Voki.com should be visited and an account should be made by clicking "register" in the top right corner, so that users will have access to the .pdf tutorials for Voki classroom and Voki Presenter to clarify any confusions. We recommend that students be exposed to the technology with a demonstration by the professor to visualize the navigation of the site. Voki.com by itself does a great job with color coordination and distinct tabs corresponding to either Voki, Voki classroom, or Voki presenter, so that students and professors alike can know where they are operating within the website. If the website's resources do not help the student or professor learn the material, first and third parties have made tutorial videos that cover how to make avatars and operate the presentation software (Voki). Voki's all-inclusive website contains the tools and instructional materials necessary to use and learn the product so that students and professors do not have make any downloads or search elsewhere for tutorials.

The Voki avatar portion of the essay is a free service, but can only be used to create and give voice to avatars that stand on their own. If a professor would like to use Voki presentation, or Voki Classroom to have students interact with pre made presentations, it comes with a small cost. Yearly subscriptions of either one or two year subscriptions are available. For one year subscriptions for either product the cost is $29.95, and for two year subscriptions for either product the price is $49.95. If one would like to use both products there is a bundle option for a deal of $49.95/year or $89.95/two years (Voki). Voki is friendly to its prospective users, allowing them to try each tool including the bundle for free for 15 days. This may be useful

when branching the product out to other professors and students who are skeptical, as no cost will come from using the website and they can try out this new interactive method of learning.

For large universities such as the University of Arizona, the price of a yearlong subscription will be no problem as student tuition and other sources of revenue cover university costs. The university will either have to create another learning fee or incorporate the cost of the program into their budget. The small price compared to other university expenses makes it a small adjustment for including Voki services into the classroom. Since one account would be an unorganized amount of projects and avatars, the university would have to assign departments or individual professors their own accounts, which makes the product more expensive but helps keep the process of using Voki personal when students are only interacting with their department or professor. With the fee included for students, login information will be provided along with other information for incoming students such as student ID number. No additional costs will come from the upgrading of computers to be able to run the software since any computer built in the last decade will have the ability to run internet browsers.

Websites are reliable as long as the internet is connected and the site is not down due to its hosting provider. However, if Voki needs to stop running its business for any reasons, the student or professor will not be able to use the tool since it is run entirely online. So long as this event does not happen or if the user is away from internet connection, access will be available at all times of the day and week to edit and create Voki avatars and presentations. If the rare event occurs that Voki goes out of business, traditional teaching methods based around in person presentations and the dispersing of information must be used. There is no way to incorporate this product without being able to access it online, but it should not be a major

setback for the product offers an alternative method of creating assignments and teaching, not

a necessary one. Gizmodo.com is a similar product that allows their customers to create avatars

and insert them into movie clips, but does not feature the classroom adaptations like

presentation technology that Voki has. It is a type of learning method that may soon sprout

other competitors online, but as of now Voki is the primary way to flip in person teaching with

avatars.

Voki when used by a university will have many students' and professors' personal

information, including name and email. The depth of sensitive information does not go far as

the only elements needed to sign up are name and verification that one is above the age of

thirteen. Based on their terms and conditions, Voki states that they do not personally release

any information about their customers, but do use the data to analyze sales demographics and

user activity to improve their product (Voki). Educational record is not compromised in respect

to FERPA since the information collected by Voki is not released, but is only analyzed by the

company (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). The terms and conditions also state that

use of intellectual property is only subject to the public when sent to the company, but Voki will

not infringe on the material circulated among the online classrooms and student submissions.

Official grades for the university will not be accessible to the website, only the individual and

unofficial grades given on the website with Voki Teach. A teacher may give a student feedback

and grading on an assignment like a presentation, but these grades are not linked to the

university, and must be entered in again to the academic system to become official, which Voki

does not have access to. The university could pair our application with the university websites

of D2L Blackboard with the custom hyperlinks one can create when publishing an avatar or

presentation, and then attach it to a post on the corresponding website so that students can access the information through voki.com. Voki is powerful, but is simply another medium that professors can use to teach and use for assignments, and can be utilized but have no official connection with the university's system, D2L or Blackboard which contain actual grades and official student information.

Users with motor disabilities may need assistance when using computers in order to use the mouse and keyboard. If a student cannot see very well or is blind, they may need someone to aid them to listen to the student's desires about what they want the avatar to be, or what their presentation will say. This disability however is not any different from attending a class in person, since vision is also needed to observe information and demonstrations by professors, and using Voki would require the same amount of aid as someone who is simply attending a class period or doing an assignment. The app does not raise any more barriers to learning if someone has a disability than in person learning already does. Using computers, navigating the web, reading course material and listening to professors are all implemented in the traditional classroom setting and requirements to complete assignments. Voki adds no extra physical or mental tasks to these learning requirements, and would not require additional aid that individuals with disabilities already obtain. In fact, Voki may eliminate any challenges of people with speaking and listening disabilities because the application allows you to type text that has subtitles. Now someone who is impaired will be able to give a full coherent presentation, or understand that of their classmates and instructor by reading their text.

**V Next Steps**

Although Voki is an educational tool that has potential to be beneficial to the anthropology department at the University of Arizona, it cannot be implemented without taking the necessary first steps any project would need to be successful. The students that are placed into classes that utilize Voki must be surveyed to gauge not only their willingness to use this technology in their studies, but to confirm the notion that this technology would be beneficial to their educational development. Another foundational step of implementing this technology would be informative sessions for the faculty to thoroughly understand how to use it in their environment. The instructors will need to be informed about the cost and possible benefits of Voki as well as its accessibility to ensure students would be able to effectively use it. The next step to setting the University up for success when using this product is issuing instructors a Voki 'expert' (or simply an undergraduate student competent in using Voki) that could provide more hands-on training. This expert would be available to professors after they have been presented with informational sessions regarding this technology, should they choose to implement it in their courses. They would also be available to the student's when issued their first assignment that requires Voki, to make the transition into using this technology as smooth as possible for both the students and instructors.

**VI Conclusion**

Voki is a simple and effective way to transport reality into a digital medium. Students have been accustomed to the method of teachers lecturing about George Washington in history for example, and now we can learn from the man himself. Picture students interested in his realistic avatar telling stories of his childhood and later the battles of the Revolutionary War.

The first person delivery capability is possible to teach through the eyes of significant

individuals and the student. Time and energy delivering slideshows by a whole class is cut out of

the learning equation, operating with more time and resources to present and review course

material. With all satisfactions met legally and bringing no further issues for people with

disabilities, the University of Arizona should adopt the interactive tool of Voki.com with the

incorporation of an additional student fee to take a new dimension of learning into the

classroom.

Bibliography

"Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)." Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

(FERPA). Department of Education, 26 June 2015. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.

Kruse, Kevin. "Top 4 Traits of "Future Proof" Employees, According to 1,709 CEOs." Forbes.

Forbes Magazine, 26 Dec. 2012. Web. 8 Dec. 2015.

"Oddcast Media Technology." Oddcast. Oddcast Inc., n.d. Web. 16 Dec. 2015.

"Voki." Voki Home. Oddcast Inc., n.d. Web. 16 Dec. 2015.

**Appendix A: Faculty Feedback**

Dr. Rowe stated that he is interested in using our application, Voki, for it has benefit in teaching the class supplemental information from the stance of notable figures in the field of anthropology. He struggles with students learning materials only for the test, and would like to bring a conceptual method of understanding to individuals and discoveries in history. Dr. Rowe was excited about its possible utility in the classroom, liked the presentation as well as the product, and is going to try and find a place for it in his futur curriculum.