

Ambrose Digital Streaming Video

Small-Scale Collection With Some Notable Titles

25 April 2017

Ambrose Digital is a small streaming video collection comprised of content created in house and by other producers. Reasonable cost and some popular niche titles may make the product desirable to some libraries.

Method

One reviewer spent more than ten hours working with the database and asking a sales representative questions. In addition, a survey asking librarians about their experience with streaming video products received 54 responses and relevant feedback about Ambrose Digital is referenced in the review.

Preview

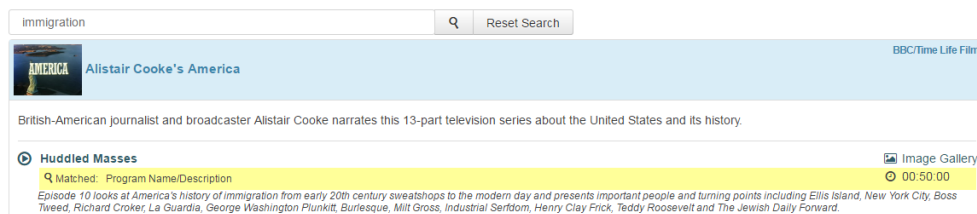
- **Content**

Ambrose Digital provides access to roughly 1,000 streaming videos and clips on a variety of topics, with an emphasis on science, history and drama. In fact, the most notable part of the collection is the complete BBC television adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Ambrose is the exclusive distributor for this set of 37 classic works from the 1970s and 80s. Another highlight from the BBC is the similarly classic 1970s multi-part documentary *The Ascent of Man*, which chronicles the evolution of humanity.

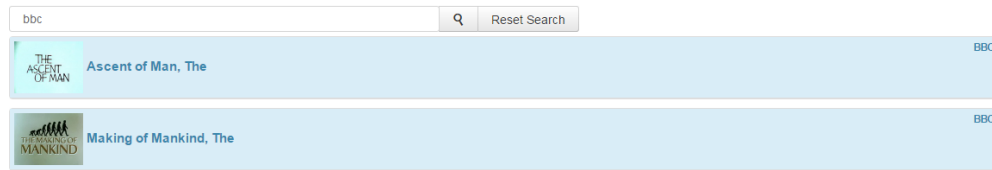
More than half of the films in the collection have a copyright date of 2008 or newer and only a handful of titles, such as the classics mentioned earlier, are older than 2000. Yet despite the relatively recent production dates, the collection comes across as a bit dated. In addition, some of the content appears geared towards a lower grade level than some college libraries may find appropriate. This impression is reinforced by the product's simple web presence and staid production technique, which reminds one of old fashioned made-for-education productions.

- **Interface**

The Ambrose interface is simple and a little clunky, with all of the videos in a long list organized alphabetically by series title. Basic search functionality is supported, seemingly by title, producer and brief descriptions of the videos.



However, during testing this reviewer encountered some oddities with search results. For example, a search for BBC didn't return the Shakespeare films, even though the BBC is in the title in addition to being the producer. Indeed, a search for 'bbc' returns only two series even though the BBC produced eighteen in the collection.



Results lists appear to be sorted in alphabetical order by series title and sorting by relevance is not possible. Phrase searching is also unsupported. That being the case, even an exact title search for the program “When the Water Tap Runs Dry” returns the program in question at the bottom of a long list of results.

All in all, the small size of the collection means that the interface is serviceable if not especially user friendly. As more films are added to the collection, the product would be substantially improved by enhanced search and browse functionality.

- Accessibility

All of the videos in the collection are closed captioned with standard captions running along the bottom of the player. According to the WAVE accessibility checker, Ambrose also scores well on other accessibility aspects. Two problematic areas, according to WAVE, involve missing form labels and contrast errors.

- Features

Ambrose provides citations in eight different formats. Unfortunately the citations have substantial errors. Here's an example of an MLA citation for the first episode of *The Living Planet* series:

'The Living Planet.' 1984. © 1984 BBC. Mar 07, 2017 16:07 <http://videos.ambrosevideo.com/?LP>.

The more significant errors include: missing episode title, using quotes instead of italics for the series title, duplicate publication dates, an unnecessary copyright symbol and incorrect date of access information. Further, Ambrose isn't listed as a container as required in MLA 8.

Other features of the product work better than the citation generator. One example is that content produced since 2012 is available in high definition, with an option to change definition if bandwidth is a concern. In practice, the video quality of newer productions is superb. At the same time, older BBC productions have been remastered, although at 40 years they still show their age even with high-quality video.

Ambrose provides direct links and dynamic embed codes. As with other streaming video products, embedding video in external pages, including Canvas course sites, can be problematic when combined with proxy authentication.

Lastly, the reviewer tested the product on both iOS and Android mobile devices. The site is responsively designed, but didn't scale properly on small screens during testing. However, basic searching and browsing was possible, and videos played seamlessly.

- **Support**
Technical support is available via phone and email. Respondents to CCL-EAR's streaming video survey gave Ambrose high marks for responsiveness to requests for support.
- **Cost and terms of use**
Ambrose content is available via several pricing models. Institutions can either subscribe annually or purchase content in perpetuity, and both options can be for all or part of their catalog. Pricing is fixed regardless of institution size, meaning the various options will likely seem inexpensive for larger colleges and high for smaller ones. Institutions that opt to purchase content outright will be pleased to know that there isn't a platform hosting fee.

Conclusion

The scope of the Ambrose Digital collection is sufficiently limited that libraries looking to add substantial streaming content will prefer the field's larger players. Yet some content highlights and reasonable pricing (for larger institutions) make the product worth a closer look from libraries with a specific interest in the available topics. Improved search functionality and enhancing supported features (e.g. citation generation) may increase appeal.

Other Reviews

Enis, M. (2015). On demand. *Library Journal*, 140(17), 45-49. Retrieved from <http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2015/10/academic-libraries/on-demand-academic-media/#>

Recommendation to CCL-EAR Committee: No Further Review