

LionShare Faculty/Staff Focus Group

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INTRODUCTION

As a step in the assessment of the September 2004 Alpha “developer” release of LionShare 0.4, a focus group was held with eight faculty members and two staff members, any of whom would likely be potential users of the software. About half of these individuals trace their involvement back to the predecessor of LionShare, the 2001-2003 Virtual Image User Study (VIUS).

PARTICIPANTS

The eight faculty member participants represented the following fields of study: agricultural sciences, art, English, information sciences and technology, theatre, and visual arts. The two staff members were from Penn State's Facilities Engineering Institute. (That is a service unit within the College of Engineering that provides facility engineering expertise to ten agencies within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.)

PROCEDURE

A member of the LionShare programming and development staff gave a brief demonstration of the Alpha release. The focus groups were moderated by a member of the LionShare project team and audiotaped. Two other members of the LionShare team, including the project director, were present to answer questions

MAJOR ISSUES

Using a focus group protocol for structured discussion, the moderator asked participants to talk about how they would be likely to use LionShare, to discuss features they saw as useful or problematic in the demo, and to offer specific, real feedback on the Alpha release. The main issues raised were the following.

What is different and better about LionShare in comparison to other P2P technologies or Google?

The participants see particular value in LionShare's persistence (due to peer-server versus pure P2P architecture), its security, and its more refined search abilities (e.g., compared to Google, which uses AI to search everything on the Web). LionShare is seen as being more targeted, able to yield superior images and more metadata, and so forth. Multi-level sharing (e.g., the ability to decide to share with the public at large or with some privately defined group) is seen as another important plus.

Comments about thumbnail images.

There were positive comments about the thumbnail image previews already built into this version. There were suggestions to keep and strengthen this thumbnail capability, such as, "Can we see them at various points in the search?"

Copyright and intellectual property considerations

From the earliest conversations during LionShare's predecessor (the VIUS project), copyright, fair use, and related matters have always surfaced near the top of the list of user concerns. For example, in both VIUS and LionShare surveys, more than half the users have stressed concerns in this area. Again, in this focus group, there were several questions and comments on these topics.

It would be incorrect to say that the participants see LionShare's handling of intellectual property dimensions a perfect solution; they do not necessarily believe that there *is* a perfect solution. Nonetheless, there was consensus that philosophically, LionShare's middle-ground approach to collaboration, sharing, and access control is the right one. In essence, the participants seemed comfortable with LionShare's approach to file sharing, built on a trust fabric among targeted communities, and access control. It would be possible to make

the system either more **or** less restrictive, of course. The sense is that LionShare is getting it about right by finding a reasonable balance and that ultimately, users are responsible. Participants recognize that LionShare doesn't make it impossible for individuals to behave improperly. But comments suggest that it does provide tools that are as good as or better than what are available elsewhere for most sharing of intellectual property (for example, metadata that identifies who shared a file) and features (authorization and access control) that make it difficult – though again, not impossible – to “do the wrong thing,” as someone noted. Observing that “this isn't rights management,” another participant noted, “this is fine.”

Watermarks or similar notes

There was some discussion about whether LionShare should add a tool enabling users to add a watermark or similar ownership note on images. This is a reasonable feature to consider. However, the consensus was that this is not necessary, since PhotoShop and other packages do it already pretty easily, and that on balance adding this feature probably would create more problems than it would solve (e.g., by possibly corrupting files). In any case, this solution only would apply to image files. The idea really gets back to the issues discussed immediately above about finding a middle road on ownership, fair use, intellectual property, trust, collaboration, and the like.

Expiration date

There was a request for a feature that allows contributors to set an expiration date for shared files. This would be useful, especially, for situations like course examinations.

File size and file types

There was a positive comment that the fact that LionShare allows anything in terms of file types and file sizes is important and on target.

Properties of the peer server

There was a request to provide more information about peer-server properties (e.g., domain identification and which are online), and also an option about which to select (or deselect).

Non-higher education institution users

There were several comments noting the need for LionShare's authentication to support and allow use by people not affiliated with a university or college (for example, with a colleague at an opera, or a small museum). It should be easy for one individual to make this work technically – that is, say there is one person

in a small organization who doesn't have ready access to IT support.

Interest in continuing to participate, to beta test, or to help build specific communities of users.

At the conclusion of the focus group, most participants expressed interest in continuing to be involved in various ways. Overall, interest was high and the reaction to the demo was strong and positive. One participant commented, "I want it now!"

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