

Breaking the ICE

Over the last couple of months we've been breaking the ICE. That is, we have been taking the big, complex [Integrated Content Environment](#) and making it easier to use just parts of it.

It's hard not to notice that the only place where full-blown ICE is used much is at USQ, in that environment we have a hundred plus users, and growing steadily, but the external teams we've tried to get using ICE have all been slow to adopt it.

I have been thinking a lot about why this is.

- It's too hard to install and set up, including the server-side components. (We're working on making it easier, bit by bit).
- People don't perceive a need for HTML and PDF versions of their documents (although many do, and there are some [supporters out there](#)).
- At USQ our academic staff are used to creating book-length distance-ready course content and we push hard for flexible delivery, so people do want HTML and PDF versions of content. Other places there's not the same culture.

There's lots more work to do, but we have made good progress on the following:

1. A server-based version of ICE – nothing to install locally except a toolbar / template for your word processor. It will keep all your files under version control and let you build books, and courses using the same web interface as the current version.
2. A few other ways to make good HTML from a desktop word processor without having ICE take over all your files and your life:
 - a. A command line version of ICE you could build into another application.
 - b. We are now testing a toolbar-button that will let you make good quality XHTML from your word processor and post it straight to an atompub enabled blogging site without having to use ICE. You still need to download ICE, but you don't have to run it as a webserver (Windows only so far – other platforms coming as Sam sorts out how). More on this in the very near future.
 - c. An ICE web conversion service that other applications will be able to use. See the [demos page](#):
 - We're working at USQ on building this into Moodle. Instead of delivering Word documents lecturers will be able to use the ICE template upload to Moodle and get HTML and PDF versions automatically. ([Peter Albion – are you listening?](#) Using Zotero you'll be able to write documents with proper reference management and publish them in both HTML and PDF at the click of a button. Isn't that better than dealing with DreamWeaver?)
 - Other integrations with the OpenJournal system, Microsoft Content Management System, Sharepoint, and various repositories are also planned – bringing ICE to new audiences.
 - d. And following from (b) and (c) we'll be building a toolbar that can call a remote ICE web service - nothing to install but a word processor plugin.