

Course Genie & e-cat: Synergies and opportunities

This document outlines similarities and differences between e-cat and the Course Genie application from Horizon Wimba.

Course Genie

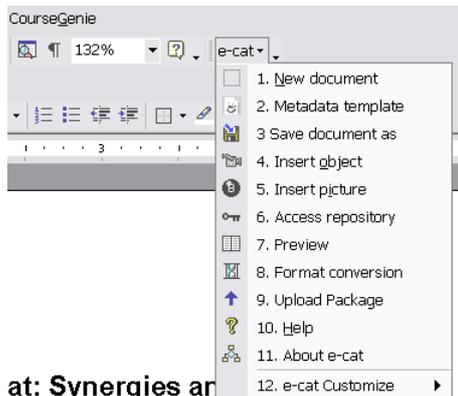
Course Genie, when installed, uses the familiar MS Word application and adds extra functionality from a new toolbar and facilities accessed from the MS Word menu system.

In essence, Course Genie utilises formatting and application of styles applied to a Word document. The Course Genie macro (program) then converts the Word document (linear and based on pages) to an HTML compliant series of linked web pages. The user has control over the output options to obtain generic html or, for output to be embedded within a Content management System (CMS), standards compliance to SCORM and IMS together with destination choice (predominantly Blackboard or WebCT). For CMS output, the resulting output is as a single ZIP file which includes an XML manifest describing how the material should be “unpacked” in the form of a SCORM compliant package, or module, to be used as course content. SCORM modules can be added to the Home Page, other folders, and learning modules within Blackboard and WebCT. It is possible to include the potential for user interaction in the generated web pages. These are in the form of web based multimedia (Flash, RealAudio, RealVideo, Windows Media & QuickTime) with accessibility information easily included. Pop-up information and Flashcards are also easily achieved. Quizzes and surveys can be generated with the usual range of question types (multi-choice, multi-response, text-entry, matching and gap-filling). Once the resource is put together in Word it is 'compiled' by Course Genie into a sequence of web pages with any assessment automatically conforming to WebCT and Blackboard requirements. The resultant single ZIP file when imported and unpacked, gives automatic generation of web based materials which can easily be included within a Blackboard/WebCT Learning module.

For anyone dealing with legacy learning materials in Word file format, Course Genie provides one of the easiest way to convert to materials which are much more amenable to a style of delivery which blends on-line with face to face support (Technology Enhanced Learning: TEL). Instead of being a Word “graveyard” in which module handouts are placed on-line “after the event” a more proactive approach can be achieved through this Word file conversion. By this means, task-based activities (on-line initiated, but not limited to that medium) may be interspersed with face to face contact so that students are encouraged to bring prepared materials when they meet.

e-cat

It is believed that e-cat and Course Genie have developed from the ideas generated by the same programming teams when the products first began development. However, these paths have diverged with e-cat now fulfilling a quite different purpose. Currently marketed by KaiNao (<http://www.kainao.co.uk/>), e-cat and Course Genie can co-exist quite easily and both are based on addition of extra functionality within MS Word.



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The primary purpose of e-cat is also to generate SCORM/IMS compliant output which might be imported into CMS. Indeed, there are so many similarities that both programs perform very similar functions at a basic level. The ZIP archive output includes an XML manifest which indicates internal structure and content. If it were to be imported and unpacked, it too would automatically generate web based materials, which could be added to the Home Page, other folders, and learning modules within Blackboard and WebCT. All objects embedded in the original Word document become externally hyperlinked media.

The major difference associated with e-cat is that it has been designed to create materials which would allow inclusion of metadata and be subsequently placed in a searchable digital repository. There is, thus, assumed to be an intermediate destination before deployment to a CMS.

The image displays four screenshots of the 'Metadata Template' dialog box, arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each window has a title bar with 'Metadata Template' and standard window controls. The tabs are: General, Educational, Author Details, and Technical.

- Top-left (General tab):** Contains fields for 'Title', 'Description', and 'Keywords (separated by a comma)'. Buttons include 'Clear', 'Advanced...', 'Save Template', 'Cancel', 'Help', and 'Wizard'.
- Top-right (Educational tab):** Contains dropdown menus for 'Resource type', 'Curriculum Area', 'Curriculum Level', and 'Difficulty'. Includes a numeric field for 'Notional Learning Time (minutes)' and a dropdown for 'Language of Resource'. Buttons include 'Prerequisite Requirements', 'Clear', 'Advanced...', 'Save Template', 'Cancel', 'Help', and 'Wizard'.
- Bottom-left (Author Details tab):** Contains fields for 'Author of resource (surname before first name e.g Jones A)', 'Name', 'Organisation', 'Email', 'Telephone', and 'Date of contribution'. Includes radio buttons for 'Cost' and 'Copyright' (Yes/No) and a text area for 'Description of copyright or other restrictions'. Buttons include 'Clear', 'Advanced...', 'Save Template', 'Cancel', 'Help', and 'Wizard'.
- Bottom-right (Technical tab):** Contains a 'Format' dropdown, a 'Requirements' list with 'New', 'Add', and 'Remove' buttons, and an 'Information' section with 'Label', 'Type' (Operating System/Web Browser), 'Name', 'Min. Version', and 'Max. Version' fields. Includes a 'Plugin/Player Requirement' section with 'Name of plugin/player' and 'Description of minimum requirements' fields, and a 'Duration of play in minutes' field. Buttons include 'Advanced...', 'Save Template', 'Cancel', 'Help', and 'Wizard'.

It is important to draw a distinction between a digital content repository and the Blackboard content delivery system or similar. These are presently quite different and, currently, there is little consideration within the Blackboard Vista CMS, of utilising any features associated with content sharing. A rudimentary system does exist but it is unaware of metadata, even if it were to be added, and it is reliant on a structured folder system, and file naming convention, which would be very inflexible.