Research Support Games Day #2: Roll20 Demonstration

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Time: 5 minutes

<mark>SLIDE 1 (Presentation Title)</mark>

Introduction

(roughly 1 minute)

Who am I? – <mark>SLIDE 2 (Personal Introduction)</mark>

- Cataloguer and repository manager for a fairly small university (roughly 16,000 students)
- Professional interest in Open Access, resource description and discovery, and digital archiving.
- Personal interest in various kinds of boardgames and roleplaying games (e.g. Dungeons and Dragons).

What is Roll20? – <mark>SLIDE 3 (Roll20 Homepage)</mark>

- Online platform, primarily offering a virtual tabletop for roleplaying games.
- I use it frequently to play games with friends.

Why am I talking about it?

- There are a lot of excellent physical games for research support already in existence, but the lockdown and planning this online event highlighted how few digitised or born-digital games there are for this purpose.
- Roll20 is a popular and well-supported platform that could potentially cater for the digitisation of games, or perhaps even for new born-digital games.

What will I cover in 5 minutes?

- Basic functionality
- Pros and Cons

Basic Functionality

(roughly 2 minutes)

Game instances – <mark>SLIDE 4 (List of Game Instances for Active User Account)</mark>

- Essentially a personal environment for the owner (games-master or "GM") and anyone they choose to invite.
- Example: created four game instances for the "RGU Publications Team" account (i.e. my work account).
- Not necessarily tied to a specific "game", but can pre-populate a game instance using assets from the "Marketplace".

Pages – <mark>SLIDE 5 (Pages in a Game Instance)</mark>

- Each game instance has one or more "pages" – screens that can be displayed to players.
- The GM determines which page is visible to players at any given time, and can move people between pages – even having one player looking at a different page to another player.

- Pages can display images and text. Players can add their own text or drawings, but only the GM can upload images.
- The GM can also make certain images into "tokens" – objects that the players can move around the page themselves.

Sidebar – <mark>SLIDE 6 (Game Instance Sidebar)</mark>

- Various tabs for different things, including handouts, chat log, asset library and card decks.
- Handouts include "character sheets" (used for allowing players to control specific tokens) and regular handouts, which can be text or images. The GM controls which handouts appear in the sidebar for players.
- Chat log can be used to roll dice as well as sending messages.
- Asset library provides a quick way for GMs to add saved images to their pages or handouts.
- Card decks include standard playing cards by default, but can also create entirely custom card decks. A deck of cards can be shuffled, dealt and then – when finished – removed from play.

Pros and Cons

(roughly 2 minutes)

Pros – <mark>SLIDE 7 (Pros and Cons)</mark>

- Flexible functionality can support many different game mechanics (dice, cards, counters, etc.).
- Game host has a lot of control over what players can see (e.g. split players into teams with separate game boards, and control the visibility of handouts so that they are only shown when relevant).
- Free to create an account, create new game instances or join existing ones.

Cons

- Every player must have a separate account – Roll20 do not prohibit account sharing, but has inherent risks.
- Doesn't support PDFs very well – have to convert PDFs into image files before uploading.
- Difficult to share game content with others. Can share assets, but time-consuming for each GM to create the game on Roll20.

(Finish – <mark>SLIDE 8 (Links and Credits)</mark>)