Hybridisation of Social Networking and Learning Environments

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Topics

• Background to UH
• Project Drivers
  – Behavioural
  – Institutional
• Vision
• Initial Implementation
• Subsequent work
• Conclusions
Background to UH

MLE: StudyNet

- Developed in-house
- Launched 2000-2001
- Currently 30,000+ live accounts, ~20,000 unique user logins per day (term-time mean average)

Project: UHEvolution
(UHTalent/UHExcel strand)

- Provision of (some) facilities to Alumni, Businesses & Applicants
- 250,000 new accounts by 2011
- Email address for life

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Drivers

Behavioural - Students

• Experience of technology increasing
  – Expectations of Web advancing

• Social Networks major part of life for many
  – Use interspersed with M/VLE accesses

• Comfortable being Content Producers
  – Gives a sense of empowerment

• Expectation of personalised experience
Drivers

Institutional

• Engagement beyond graduation
• Provide opportunities for marketing courses
  – Build developmental ‘Loyalty’
• Grant Business access to Students / Students access to Business

One possible institutional life-cycle
Vision

User Benefits

- Knowledge Transfer
  - Students <-> Business
- Employability
  - People <-> jobs
- Develop contacts
- Find possible friends
- Restrictions on access may prevent future repercussions
Vision
Institutional Benefits

- Engagement prior to enrolment
- Maintain up-to-date records of Alumni
- Improve links with businesses
  - Create collaborative projects
  - Generate placements for students
  - Spin-out research and products
- Marketing of Short Courses and other training
Vision
Why not just use Facebook, Blogger, Flickr, ...

• Excellent systems, already in use
  – But who owns the data?
  – All users access subsets of same information

• Institutional control allows:
  – Public & Personal personae
  – Data Protection/IP assurances
  – Integration with e-Portfolio

• Institutional Information available:
  – Fellow course members, modules studied, assignment info., etc.
  – Email accounts, work placements, club memberships, etc.
Vision
The ‘Socialised’ MLE – in brief

All about content…

- Created through blogs, forums, profile updates, photo and video libraries, essays, project work, wikis, CPD, PDP, (remixed) course content, etc. etc.

And where it ends up…

- Flows to / from the individual through profile matching, group & course affiliation, contacts, PLE settings, etc. etc.

People-centric

(icons from Wikimedia Commons)
Initial Implementation
Phase-1 Rollout

• Centred on e-Portfolio functions
  – Driven by usage of StudyNet
• ‘Externalising’ some existing features
  – e.g. Blogs
• Available to existing staff and students, and new Alumni from September 2008
  – then, phased roll-out to older alumni
Subsequent Work

- Student video portal (staff version already in StudyNet)
- Photo albums
- Curriculum Vitae generation
- People matching
- Investigation of OpenSocial integration
  - Possible inclusion of Facebook-like apps.
- Import/Export tools for Facebook, Flickr, etc.
Considerations

• Legal implications over:
  – Data Protection
  – User Interactions and Accountabilities
    • Users below age of Majority (Applicants at ~17)

• Competition from ‘Outside’
  – Need to provide a ‘hook’ (such as e-Portfolio)

• Licensing of subscribed materials
Conclusions

• Opportunity for beneficial outcomes
  – Though some caveats exist
• ‘Hooks’ needed to encourage sustained use
• Focus on the user experience
• Gradual roll-out essential
• Key part of strategic development at UH.
Further Information

Presentation around Topic - ALT-C 2008, Sept. 2008:
“Enhancing learner experience of managed learning environments through a dramatic expansion of the user type and the integration of social networking technologies” – A. Oliver & I. Glover.

StudyNet Open Demo:
http://www.studynet.herts.ac.uk/open_index.html

LTDU Website (Team Info, Projects, Magazines, etc.):
http://www.studynet.herts.ac.uk/ltdu
Thank You!

Questions?