

**Headline findings:****THE VISITOR-RESIDENT PRINCIPLE**

Many students of all ages do not see the point of creating a 'digital identity' and are wary of the privacy implications. They visit the web and often use services in a sophisticated manner but choose not to become resident by leaving a digital identity behind when they log-off. This accounts for why many students do not engage with Web2.0 style services. Lack of engagement is not an age- or skill-based distinction.

**INSTITUTION AS A CATALYST**

Adult learners would benefit from being shown how new services can be adopted as part of their learning. The institution needs to guide the usage of these services rather than trying to own them.

**TECH USAGE IS CONTEXTUAL**

Many of the students we piloted with had a 'traditional' approach to learning which did not include social communication. Despite the fact that a significant minority used social networking and communication services they often did not see these technologies as relevant to their learning strategies.

**STUDENTS, NOT TECHNOLOGY,  
ARE THE BRIDGE**

Complex legal factors and the lack of use of aggregation techniques means that it is not always practical to embed third party and institutional services. It is more cost effective to invite students to use external services rather than to feed content through them. Institutions need to keep up to date with the developing opportunities on the web but do not necessarily need to grapple with new services at a technical level.

**ISTHMUS:****Bridging the divide between institutional elearning provision and the wider web****Main piloting group**

- Adult lifelong distance students on Moodle-based courses
- Around 700 students per term on 35 short 10 week, part-time, arts and humanities courses (Philosophy, Art History, Literature etc)
- Mean age mid-forties. Modal group 55-64. Majority with an undergraduate degree or higher qualification

**User Engagement**

- What do our students choose to engage with online and (more importantly) why? What online facilities do they discount?
- Online Surveys: October 07 and November 08
- 11 f2f/phone interviews: Autumn 2007

**Headlines from user engagement**

- Students' existing mature strategy to learning already developed, but in a 'pen and paper' generally non-cooperative style.
- Many comfortable with online technology and with trying new services
- Technology only incorporated into their overall strategy when it will make it more efficient
- Generally low uptake of Web2.0 type services, but pockets of activity:
  - » 6% have their own blog,
  - » 16% regularly use a social networking site (many in the 35-64 age bracket)
  - » 20% use a social networking site occasionally
  - » 20% regularly use communication tools such as MSN or Skype
- Some feel 'bereft' when the course finishes and they are removed from our system
- Real concerns about privacy and identity theft
- Aggregation services only used very rarely

**Approach: 4 distinct pilots****1. PERSISTENT COMMUNITY**

Provision of an online space which our students could join as their courses ended so that they didn't lose contact with each other.

The pilot first ran in autumn 2007 and has been promoted to the students each term since then.

- » Facebook chosen for its social networking capabilities rather than its ability to replicate the functionality of the course.
- » Around 2400 students made aware of the group of which 280 have joined so far.
- » Around 10% of members go on to join smaller, more active groups eg book groups and philosophy discussion groups.

**2. FURTHER COMMUNICATION**

Provision of an AV and text chat option for students so that they could communicate informally during their course.

The pilot initially ran on four courses in summer 2008 and then expanded across all of our courses (between 30-35 depending on uptake) in autumn 2008 and spring 2009.

- » Used the open source 'Covcell' (<http://www.covcell.org>) project which is embedded in Moodle. (Web based services either too complex or too insecure.)
- » Unstable, with limited functionality.
- » Our students do not see informal communication as part of the learning process.

**3. PERSISTENT IDENTITY**

Provision of access to course materials and forums after the official end date of each course when students would normally be removed from administrative systems. Keeping students' profiles on our system so that those taking multiple courses over time could see a 'trail' of their contributions.

The pilot initially ran on four courses in summer 2008 and has now rolled out across all of our short courses.

- » This pilot was underpinned by using the new 'portal' system from Moodle.
- » Around 30% of students revisit their 'frozen' courses.

**4. NEW MEDIA LITERACY**

Providing 'learning support' information alongside technical support to demonstrate the benefits (in the context of learning) of using certain Web2.0 type services.

The need for this pilot became apparent as the project evolved and therefore it did not run until autumn 2008.

- » Initial data indicates that around 50% of students visit the specially-built site which will be updated and expanded as part of our overall course delivery strategy.
- » Site is live on the web: <http://onlinesupport.conted.ox.ac.uk>