

JISC
Northumbria Uni OPEN ICT
Northumbria University Students from
The School of Design
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L: Luke (student).

Jo: Jo (student).

J: James (student).

JK: Jacquie Kelly.

Q: Question from the Floor.

PL: Paul Lowe.

L: Hello everyone, I'm Luke, this is James and Jo and we're representing the School of Design from Northumbria today, and we'd like to spend a little bit of time talking about two of the projects we've done in the third year of our Degree. I think our focus is going to be on sharing our experiences with you, the tools that we used and the skills we used and how effective these skills and tools were in the project.

So in terms of the project, with Intel, and this was really made possible by Intel staff giving up their time in two locations, and these two locations were Portland in Oregon, and San Francisco. I just wanted to quickly run through a few of the outcomes that came from this project.

What I'm going to show you is three products, and these were products that were taken to Intel and presented at their Head Quarters in Portland. So first of all we've got Bamboo, and this was a laptop computer that looked at making computing completely wireless. Then we had Lightbox and this was a type of PC that was specifically for photographers, and what this device aimed to do was consolidating all the different processes a photographer goes through, into one device. Then lastly we've got Goji, and this was another tablet but this was looking at how to improve a hospital experience, for patients, whilst also increasing efficiency of the medical practice.

So onto the tools we used for this Intel project. First of all we've got Global Studio, which we're going to refer to as Plone, and this was a dedicated site in which we could upload our development and work over the course of the project, and this was really how we made contact with Intel. We also used

teleconferencing, so pretty much on a weekly basis we had teleconferencing and Skype with Intel, so we could go through our work and they would give us feedback on the direction that they thought the project should take.

Then I guess it's every day tools such as your Outlook account and stuff like that were really important, again, making contacts with tutors and just getting the information that you need to plan your project. So they were all pretty important but we thought Global Studio was probably the most appropriate one to look at. So that's what we're going to look at.

So as I was mentioning, the Plone is a dedicated site that we could upload our group's development to, and it's almost like a micro-social network in that creating an environment that was safe and secure for all that data to be put and viewed, so Intel could view our work. And what we particularly liked about the Global Studio is that when we were in the calls, you'll notice that we've circled the navigation bar and that was really effective at jumping between the different things we'd put on in previous weeks, because we almost went in with trying to get what we wanted to hear from Intel, but quite often we kind of would deviate off what we actually were talking about, so that was really good, just going back and talking maybe a little bit about what we did two weeks ago and why we sort of made this decision. So that was about being able to go quickly back and forth between what work we were presenting and what work we'd previously presented.

And another way we communicate with Intel on the Plone website was, there was a section that was dedicated to feedback, whilst we'd never really used this part of it or this feature that much, it was still important because it gave us the opportunity if we wanted to clarify anything with Intel then they could write what their feelings were towards the directions we'd made.

And as it was almost like a mini social network, we could upload our profiles and really sort of gain an understanding of not only the people we were working with outside of the University, but actually people on our course, so you could tell what skills that specific person had and sort of play on that fact, which may just make it so much easier. And I'm going to pass you over to Jo.

Jo: Hi, yes, so moving on... How did this project and Plone together, help us work with industry? So it's really good to get feedback from industry professionals. You can see up there, that's Nick Dudley who is a senior designer for Intel, so again, the feedback from him, gives real value to your project, it's different from previous projects where your client is your tutor or your peers. Here you've got a real life client, working on a project with you. You can see there, he's given us a bit of feedback, a bit of an action shot...! So it's sort of a critical assessment and it's all sector specific as well because he's a senior designer at Intel, who are a global consumer electronic giant in that field, he's obviously day to day working in that sector, and for him to give his feedback on our project added just so much value. And obviously, without Plone we wouldn't have been able to do that. I think he visited us twice throughout the project and Plone really enabled us to communicate with him, like Skype as well and teleconferencing, it really helped us get real industry feedback.

So, what were some of the challenge we faced with Plone?

J: Yes, so there are a number of things, different problems that we faced when we actually used the Plone website, and one of the main things that was really troublesome for a lot of the students was actually navigating to the different project folders. And as you can see on the slide, there's lots of, it's very text heavy, and to navigate through, we found a little bit difficult but... And there's another, one of the other points that we've had was that, a lot of the time in Design we see a lot of the iconography, a lot of branding, it's quite visually sensitive, so we spend quite a lot of time working on that, and then you have to upload it to this kind of interface. For example, here's just a brand logo of one of the teams, and you can see that all around it is this kind of, the Global Studio interface. And sometimes you can spend a lot of time working on the kind of graphical layout and you feel it kind of gets a little bit devalued by the layout but...

Jo: Yes, just to point out that if you're more of an academic background, so you're not studying something as visually sensitive as we are, it would be absolutely fine because you'd be uploading text-rich stuff rather than visually rich things. So that sort of negative was definitely specific to Design.

J: So, as designers, how can we use these tools effectively to communicate with clients and within our own groups? So because one of the most obvious things was the distance between us, working with Intel, obviously a great opportunity, but they were based in Oregon and San Francisco, so Plone really enabled us to share vast quantities of data across this distance, also, because confidentiality is something that's so important to a global client such as Intel. And it was really important that we were using a really secure site, so every student was given their own log-in and password and it really reinforced that it was a really secure site, so any kind of sensitive data was completely kept out of the way.

L: The next project we'd like to talk a bit about is a project we did with Motorola. And the theme of this brief was around entertainment and gaming on the go, and this was aimed at a business user. This project also collaborated with Honkig University in South Korea, as well, Motorola was in South Korea, so it gives you an idea of the scale that the project we were running, as James was saying, is really challenging to get across ideas and your thoughts to people who are so many thousands of miles away.

So if we quickly look at a project. This was Motorola and this project looked at how a creative environment innovates ideas and response to change in business demands, so Motorola responded to that in that it was a tablet in which you could create your own artwork, so it would be like a, almost like a source of creativity where a business user could use this tablet to create a piece of artwork and send it to their colleagues, so it'd be almost like a break from the norm. And I'll pass you now onto Jo.

Jo: Yes. So moving on to the Motorola project, as Luke said, the brief was to produce a mobile game and entertainment device, and that's the product there (on the slide), called MotoArt, which is a digital canvas, as he said. For this project the main communication tools we used were Vimeo, which is a video hosting site; that was to upload the final deliverable of the project, a short video about the product that we need to collaborate on; Wordpress, which is sort of a replacement for Plone, and in this project we used a different software for that. Wordpress is like an Open Source online webspace, and then again, we used our Outlook emails to communicate with tutors, not so much to communicate with the other students in Korea or any of the lecturers or clients, that was mainly done with Skype. Quite heavily, we used the instant messaging with Skype as well, so you can see each other but we weren't really speaking much because of the language barrier, so it was more written.

So what were the benefits of Wordpress? One of the main things was, you can really take ownership of your space on Wordpress. As you can see there, the group is called 'Bamboo' so they've sort of put their brand up there and they've really owned that, and there's the links down the side to visually fit in with their logo and branding, so you've really got a visual identity here, which is quite different to what you saw on Plone.

Another thing to point out about Wordpress, which was a really big benefit for us, it was like had strong similarities to social networking sites. The page on the left is a screenshot of when you send a message on Facebook, and you can see at the bottom left, three icons; that's what we use to upload photographs or videos and send that in a message, and then if you look on the right, that's the interface you can see when you're uploading in Wordpress, and you can see there are many similarities there so it was kind of intuitive. Like, being students, we've all got social networking sites, whether it be Facebook or Bebo, probably not MySpace so much, but they all operate on a similar interface. And that's just another example of that, that's some more on Facebook, and this was the sort of like the blogging of our work there. You can see similarities, you just head whose work it is and then

it links underneath, so it was intuitive to use, just from prior experience of using social networking sites.

And finally, the interface on Wordpress is quite universal and used iconography such as that, whereas Plone is quite text heavy, you've got the folder tabs at the top, to navigate, but with this it was all sort of universal so it was good with the language barrier, just for simplicity really.

L: Some of the challenges with Motorola were just things like the language barrier, and although the South Koreans' English was very good, it was more, I guess, when we were talking through maybe talking in a colloquial manner, sometimes it was very difficult for them to understand, not so much the English but actually our accents... (Laughter). It was different things that they would pick up on, they would just have a giggle and it'd be like, 'What are you laughing at?' But once we sussed that out, it was fine.

Yes, so the language wasn't a problem, it was more of a challenge, but it was quite a nice challenge because we really got to know a different culture. And as well, particularly with the South Korean one, all the calls were very early on in the morning so that was kind of, that had a few problems, but it was quite good because you knew you had to have your work done by the night before, which doesn't normally happen. But it was good in that respect.

To summarise, I think these weren't really challenges, they were more just like hurdles to get over, and that was part of the fun, I thought. I guess everyone has a slightly different view on these things.

Jo: Yes, so they are the challenges. We mentioned we liked this navigation history here, on Plone, and there wasn't really that in Wordpress, it was more that everything was uploading in chronological order so you'd have a piece of work, say it was some sketches or something a bit more visual, visually rich, you would upload that and it would just appear in chronological order, there was no sort of going into sub-folders, as such. I suppose you don't really need it, but it would have been good to have something like that on the Wordpress. In a way, that fact that it was all chronological was also quite

good, in the time difference, because it sort of facilitated the sharing it across the different time zones, because you just put it up there, it's in chronological order, so it sort of mapped out what you were doing and the overseas students could see the time that we'd done it because the time would come up next to it. So although it's a bit of a negative that we don't have it, it's maybe not needed s much. But you do have to be quite, like, have a good grip on your project, where you are and where your peers are, to sort of navigate through the Wordpress, whereas Plone is, as you can see, the links there, it's easy to sort of go back to specific dates. So you had to have a good grasp of your project to navigate with Wordpress, but it was fine and I think the chronological part was good.

J: Okay, so again, how, as designers, can we use these tools effectively to communicate with the Motorola staff and also our peers on the other side of the world in Korea? So to embed and upload videos was fantastic, really easy to use because you just log on and very easily it would bring up your computer navigation, you just go through your files and upload the different videos, or PDF links or different kinds of stuff. So Wordpress really helped us to share a wide variety of different media, whether that be just from JPEGs all the way to Flash video files, so everything was enabled to be uploaded to the site. And also the use of universal iconography, and on the other side, it was really easy then to download.

As we've mentioned before, the ownership of the site was fantastic because, being such a visually rich discipline to kind of have that option to really customise and showcase your work for what it really is meant to be was one of the most important things. And so to summarise it, it was probably the better of the two for a Design discipline. Thank you very much.

(Applause).

JK: We do have time for a couple of questions...

Q: Is that presentation going to be available online? Anybody?

JK: Yes, we're going to make all the presentations available online. And if you do want to know more about the project in the School of Design at Northumbria, it's all been published in the booklet that's on the stand, just outside here. So you can see more of the work that the students have produced in their yearlong module. Yes, Paul?

PL: What was really interesting about that was that you seemed to learn more about project management and managing complex projects than the actual design itself. Do you feel like that was a key skill that you brought out of this whole engagement really? It seems like you have a lot of autonomy in running that, so have you had some more insights on how important that was in the process for you?

Jo: Definitely. Project management involvement had to be really tight. The Intel project was all about sort of, it was 12 weeks or so, or a bit longer? Yes, longer than 12 weeks, whereas the Motorola project was between 4 and 6 weeks, it was supposed to be 6 weeks but we basically did it in 4, so it was good to do the longer one and a shorter one and have to project manage both of them. I think the fact that you've got everything that you've done, on this site, you can kind of look back and learn from your mistakes, or you didn't possibly manage it very well, so you've got it all there and you can navigate through everything, seeing what you did on what date, and you think 'Maybe I should have done that a bit earlier' so for the second project, Motorola, I think we all had a better grasp of what we needed to do when and how to best communicate that. I think you've got everything sorted in your head and you are communicating miles away, so you tend to take for granted that you have the knowledge of what's happening in your project and they have know idea, and you have to be prepared and to create visually, explain everything. Especially with Intel, we could appreciate that they didn't have, well, they did have a lot of time for us, but obviously we're not as

important as real industry, so if something is visually explained, that's really quick, so I think that's something we've tried to encapsulate...

J: And also working with industry, it gives you the kind of knowledge of what's presented and where, what kind of structure, you know, what's recognised as industry standard, which was fantastic as well. And also as Jo said, when you're working across a language barrier, across distance, the representation of your work has to be so clear and precise, and you have to be really concise in your thinking, because trying to convey quite a complex design concept or how you're going to tackle a problem to someone who doesn't speak your language was quite a challenge. When you come away from it with a real sense of how to convey a problem in its essence, its simplest form, which I personally felt was fantastic.

L: I think as well, while we were running these projects, it wasn't just our main focus, we had several projects running at the same time, so it was not only project management but also actually balancing between the projects. For instance, when we were doing Intel, we did an RSA design competition, but we also did another project with Diageo, which was a drinks manufacturer. So it was really about balancing some of the workload, not only the project management.

Jo: Yes, it is good to have that online record of how you manage a project, really good to go back to seeing the mistakes, and maybe not everyone has a mistake... (Laughter). But quite often, seeing your mistakes and how you can better yourself next time you manage a project.

(Applause).

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