

JISC BSCct
New College Swindon
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S: Speaker

B: Bryan Davis

St: Stephanie Warren

R: Ruth Drysdale (JISC)

Q: Question

B: I'm Bryan Davis, late Director of Curriculum at New College and the Project Director for this particular project, and Stephanie Warren here is still with New College and she's the project manager, so we're kind of a double act at the moment. This project was probably, I think, the most exciting project to be involved in, in my time at New College, because it actually got us out doing what the Government has been asking us to do, which was engaging with all sections of the community, all sections of industry, and also our partners, and so we came up with some very, very interesting results, which I hope, over the course of the next few minutes, we'll be able to share with you in a way that's meaningful.

So the project was using customer relationship management and other collaborative tools, business, community and enterprise, and we targeted mainly the Swindon area where the college is based. However, one of our partners, Ultra, was a company based, actually not far away from here, in Birmingham. So moving on... The project focus was really in the development of systems and business processes to empower the college or the further education institute or higher education institute, and the external partner interface. That was a key area that we were looking at, 'How do we capture and *talk* to our partners in a meaningful manner', because I don't know if you are familiar with FE; we tend to talk in, I just did it then, we tend to talk in abbreviations and acronyms and TLAs and lots of SLAs and SLNs and all sorts of things, and even the basic language of employer engagement meant nothing, absolutely nothing, to business. When we said, 'Actually it's sales', then they got it.

So we were there to facilitate collaboration through communities of practice, and we were setting up communities of practice - as I go through this presentation, you will see how we communities of practice emerged from our work - and also to enhance knowledge exchange from the sector into business and community, organisations, but most importantly *back* from them as to what it is that they want. There was quite a lot of institutional, I call it 'institutional arrogance' that they knew what they wanted and if they didn't want what we had to offer then we'd give it to them anyway. So it was quite an interesting conversation to have with colleagues to say, 'Actually, you've got to listen to what they want and then see if we can deliver it, rather than tell them what we've got and hope they will buy it.

So the specific project's aims really was to harness the possibilities of where to improve effective communication for a business and community engagement. I'll hand over to Stephanie in a moment, but I'll come back later on to talk you through the 'Ultra' case study. I had fantastic news from Ultra this morning, which is revolutionary, so I can share that with you; it's hot off the press.

So really, what is business and community engagement, Stephanie?

St: Okay, as Bryan says, I'm Stephanie Warren and I was the project manager for the project through New College. It was quite a challenging project for an FE college to take on in order for them to become involved with Business in the Community. It is a government initiative but I think they did struggle with it.

Okay, the community project. This particular project had started to run prior to the BCE bid actually being tendered, and it was somewhere where I could see that the way that the particular project manager at the time was running the project, was lacking in actually some of the skills that she needed in order to use their communication tools, that obviously were part of our remit for this project base. So we got together and I suppose in some ways it was a collaboration of two projects, which was actually really quite revolutionary for the college anyway, to work together in order for this community project to

take off. Obviously mine was to exercise some experimental work to see whether or not a blog would work with this particularly community.

What this was, in fact we bought the domain 'Let ME be Frank', and the capital 'ME' is actually really quite significant. To work with the DHI, Drugs and Homeless Initiative, in Swindon, there's a great deal I learnt from this personally in that I had no idea that there were people that were suffering quite so badly, trying to obviously be rehabilitated to get off drugs, and obviously the knock-on effect is that they were struggling to have a fixed abode. So I talked to them about what we could do in order for them to share their experiences as ex drug users and people that had lived on the streets, to contribute to a community project, as I say, which was being driven by some other members of the college. So we came up with Let 'ME' be Frank, because of the 'Ask Frank' initiatives of the government which the are people that were part of the this community project didn't feel gave a really true reflection of the experiences of rehabilitating through drugs.

Because of time I can't take you through this, but please make a note of the URL at the bottom; there is a lot on there that you'll see and a lot of people have fed in through blogs, either from other institutions that support these people from different funding sources, and also the people themselves; a lot of them have stayed anonymous, a lot haven't, but I just felt this was a really quite fascinating project.

Fairly obviously, the tool that was used is Wordpress and fairly obviously again, was blogs. The aim for this was to create a portal to share the communities, the information from both the community and from other information sources. We struggled with the podcast, we did actually supply some cameras and some oral recording devices to the members of the DHI, but they struggled to actually express themselves through that forum, so we actually got the written word from them, which as I say, was actually quite, well you'll see it on the website, was actually really quite a good export.

The small business, as Bryan mentioned, we have some news hot off the press about the small business 'Ultra.com', and the aims for this particular element of the project, and this was our ultimate case study, was to create a

mechanism to share this product and promote this product through particularly targeted markets, and to add a real value to the business. The business itself, I don't know whether you can see it from where you are, promotes a variety of shaving products for men and the gentleman that owns the company, unfortunately he couldn't be with us today, he was due to join us, the managing director of Ultra, but he has said that this has actually had quite a massive impact on his business, which Bryan will go through now.

B: Right, dead exciting this... (Laughter). Right, so how did I find this guy to begin with? Swindon there's quite a few, quite a lot of them. I knew him through Linked In and so was able to, we were able to canvas the business community through Linked In. We came up with this particular individual and his company, an online company that sells shaving products, natural shaving products, they are Halal actually so they are very natural, no meat products in them, no chemicals or things that would offend the Muslim community. So we came up with a concept and we were thinking about, 'How can we work this? How can we generate business? How is this going to add value? What is value?' and so I asked him, 'What is value?' and he said, 'Money. On the bottom line, that's value for me. Not interested in anything else, I want customers and I want to be able to get customers through the door.' And so we said, 'Well, you need to look at advertising and we need to look at, what else? Education of the customer.' And so we came up with this concept, probably been patented by somebody else, but 'edutising', the product benefits. This was a *staggering* outcome; 48% of the people who viewed the 'edutising' part of this website went on to buy, and so the conversion rate was 48% of that page. Now, for a normal metric, 2% is good, 2% of visitors to your site buy, but 48%, and it's validated through Google Analytics, so we are able to track, he was able to track people coming through the website. So what is edutising? Well I'm hoping this link will work and I'll show you... Okay, this is his Facebook site so we, not only put the link on his website but we also were driving very targeted marketing through his Facebook website as well. 27 million people potentially online at any one time...

(Audio plays: "Sometimes in life there's only a short window of opportunity to get what you want..."). Sorry... It's a buffer thing. These are students at college who made this... "Revolutionary natural shaving cream and moisturiser in one. There's no need even to use water; less time shaving, less mess" - There are a whole lot of subliminal messages going on in here on how to use the product. And of course, the Lynx effect comes in as well. "Ultra, for men..." (Laughter).

Okay, very tacky, it was deliberately made that way because he wanted, the Managing Director wanted 'they Lynx effect', which, you wear this and you get girls, it's as simple as that really. 48% conversion rate, 48% of the people that viewed that went on to buy.

Now, the exciting news that I heard this morning is, Facebook have just announced that they will allow organisations to have e-shops through Facebook, and Ultra is one of the first e-shops, so you can go to Facebook and buy this product through this e-shop. So that's very exciting for us. But the click-through rate before this, from the people that viewed his Facebook site was 58% and he did run a targeted marketing campaign, he was looking at guys, men, between 18 and 28, high disposable incomes, no children, fast cars and that sort of thing; 58% conversion. So this was hard evidence that this edutising approach that we developed, this tacky video, actually works. So he was made up with it and it's a really, really positive outcome from this project which I hope you'll agree is staggering. If it's repeatable with other companies, I think we've generated something really quite special.

Now back to Stephanie.

St: Okay. This was the slightly more challenging element of the project, the training providers. I don't know if you're all familiar with the style of contractual arrangements. The training providers in through an FE college, they will provide training to people in the workplace and they use the FE college in order to process any of the qualifications that are required for their clients. For that, we charge them anything from 10% to 30% of whatever their income is, which sounds like it works quite well, but the competitive

nature of training providers within the sector is phenomenal. So the aims were to see whether or not the training providers used a CRM and how many of them, well how they used it.

We wanted to determine good practise and obviously set up another community of practise among the training providers to encourage sharing good practice. However, to gather that sort of information, they were rather hostile to share how they used their CRM system and we found that rather difficult to explain to them, 'Well it is actually a project and we're only trying to gather information in order for us to do some sort of theoretical outcome,' but they actually saw this as a little bit of a business 'snooping', perhaps, and were very reluctant to share the information on the CRM and whether they've got any revolutionary ideas on how to use it, and therefore they were very reluctant to share good practise. So we therefore thought we'd change it around and we started offering them some training and effective use of CRM systems, and they suddenly didn't have time. So this was quite a, you know, the successes of the other two strands of the project seem to be exponential, they were continuing and gathering momentum, whereas this one, I kept on coming up against a brick wall. So I don't know whether there were other experiences in the other projects, but two out of three isn't bad, but this one, I did struggle with.

The feedback we did get, which I think is fairly obvious, their customer relationship management was used for client information only; well I knew that without the survey really. Again, another output, as I said, was that they were very, very reluctant to share good practice, they didn't want to give away their competitive advantage, many of the training providers have actually, during the two years of this project, have actually closed, I think they've gone under because business is so competitive. And they also assumed that their knowledge of the CRM practise was better than ours, which I've actually found a little bit worrying. So this wasn't one of our stronger outputs for this particular part of the project. However, we did get some results, albeit some of the more negative...

So I'm going to hand over to Bryan because these were some of the outcomes with the college and probably more what you were going to instigate before you moved on?

B: Okay, the support given to gather staff skills through the survey was one thing, and what we try to use this as a vehicle for was to look at what we needed in the college, what skill set we needed to be able to deliver a good BSE outcome. Sale skills, particularly important, okay, even a business development manager, if they are a salesperson, and the answer is 'No, I'm a consultant' and there was a huge antipathy to the selling of the skills of the product they are offering, by the staff, they didn't see that it was their role. So there was a large skill issue. There was also this new awareness of internal skills where you are going through TQS at the time, which is the Training Quality Standard, it was very important in every sense, but basically it was too look at, it was aimed at looking at generating new business for the college, and we didn't have the skills set, so it kind of relates to this. But, what we were able to do, because we were talking to so many businesses at the time, we were able to use that as market research and we find that we were able to generate full cost programmes that were specific to business needs. And the way I articulated this to the staff was, 'Stop thinking about qualifications and start thinking about 'bits' of qualifications. We can chop these qualifications up.' So when the QCF, the Qualification Credit Framework went live in early, this year actually, we were able to generate quite a large portfolio aimed at businesses, and the reason we knew what the businesses wanted was that we'd been asking them, last year, as part of this project. And an awareness through staff development and use of web 2 type technologies, and we were able to build a confidence within the business community and also the community project areas, that we knew what we were talking about, specific areas, podcasting being one of them, and were able to point to the ability of the college to generate these podcasts in a way that was useful to all sorts of individuals.

So I think that's about it. Are there any questions?

Q: (19:32) TQS?

B: No, we didn't get TQS, and that was, one of the reasons was that the sales process, the process of delivery of income into the college wasn't well supported and understood by the academic staff.

S: Any more questions? Sorry, that was a bit of an abrupt ending... That's about it. Ruth?

R: I'm Ruth Drysdale from the JISC and we're running a lifelong learning workforce development programme, and one of the projects in Gloucester have been developing a shell framework, so sort of the HE equivalent, I think, of the credit framework in that they've got the sort of processes in place to be able to offer different sized learning modules that can aggregate up to a higher qualification. I was just wondering whether you've got any links with any HEs in your area to sort of extend on any work that you might do if maybe they were feeding into HE opportunities.

B: There is... We don't have any specific links because we are very much looking at this from our own sector perspective, but the key issue that we came across when they were talking to businesses was that they didn't care about qualifications; the only reason qualifications were of any relevance was if they were funded, but the opportunity cost of pushing somebody through a qualification was quite high. Let me give you an example; for instance, a Level 4, Level 5 in Management would be particularly applicable to a middle manager, and when you went and described to a managing director of a company, especially a small company that wants a Level 5 full qualification, he said, 'Well actually, I don't want that bit or that bit or that bit, all I want them to be able to do is to manage their time properly, be able to do a project and interpret a strategic plan.' And so when QCF came along, what we were able to do was say, 'Well, we can take these three units and sell

those to you and then the individual can come along to the college in their own time and do it' and that was a very, very seductive message to the sector. It was absolutely not what we wanted, we wanted full qualifications because that's how we were funded, but to be able to generate these small programmes which were part of the overall qualification...

And another example would be, we did some work with a company called Rexroth Bosch, who were very much a heavy duty IT company, and they wanted some networking training. What we were able to offer them was N+, because that's how we were funded. What actually they wanted was N+ 'light' and so we were able to offer N+ Light to them in quite a lucrative way and then bring their staff in to complete their N+, so we also got double fund... Essentially, it was full cost plus funding as well. So it was the ability, and this is why QCF was so powerful, and you'll find in HE it's the same, if you can deliver what it is that the organisation wants in terms of specific outcomes, you can then aggregate it up into a fundable unit. And that was a very powerful lesson from this particular project.

R: So quite a few projects sort of are trying to do that taster approach to sort of get them into the, the foot in the door and get them to try out. So did you have, did the individual...? And another thing that people have said is that the individuals value the qualification... And so they would...

B: And this was the issue, it was, here is us, we get funded for qualifications, here is a business, they're not interested in the full qualification, what they want is the outcome of specific modules to mean specific objective requirements for the business, and here's the individual who wants the full qualification. Why do they want that? Because it includes a pay packet. And so there's all sorts of, you know... So to be able to chunk it down was a very seductive message and made the sale a lot easier.

R: And did you get many students carrying on and...

B: Absolutely. Stephanie actually sold the Rexroth Bosch one, and they all came back, so it was very positive.

Q: My question is about sustainability really. From the previous workshop and from this workshop, you can see that the projects have really been championed by people that are very passionate about what it is they want to do, but in terms of coming to the end of the project, in terms of perhaps one or two of those champions moving on, wherever you go, how does the project maintain that enthusiasm and find new champions or continuation strategies?

B: The issue, the answer to that is very complex and very simple. The answer is very straightforwardly, don't look at it as a project in isolation, and that's what we didn't do. So we took this money that JISC were kind enough to give us on this project, the project was - and I know I shouldn't say this with JISC in the room (laughter) - the project actually, to this college, was secondary; it was the ability to learn from the projects and embed the processes that the project was generating, into the team. So that happened, and one of the things that came out of this project was a thing called 'Training Passport', and this training passport allowed you to buy units of training, so you could buy a passport for, say, a thousand pounds, and you'd get £1,500 worth of training, and that sat in the business development section. So they were able to see the benefits immediately because they started to get more and more throughput and the processes that this particular project, this particular project was very powerful in embedding these new ideas and seeing immediate benefit from them. So it is sustainable, but whether it lasts, Stephanie might know. I don't know, but it should do.

Q: If we take for example then, the trainee passports, how many trainee passports have been utilised, and has anybody used the whole of their training passport?

St: Can I just step in there because it's about 4 or 5 months now since you've been involved in this particular project? We've got a business services division in college, and so me, with my academic hat, there are some actual business specialists in New College that, as you said, the business development managers are part of. As a result of some of the skills audits that we did, there has been much more engagement between the skills that are embedded into the academic staff, with this business services section of the college, which I've supported and driven, and what we have done, as Bryan said, we've picked out modules of academia, or academic qualifications and promoted them through this passport. And to answer what you're saying, this was launched during the summer months, so it's actually quite late on in this year, momentum has been pretty good so far, I think a couple of local companies, again, it's not a project that I'm highly involved in at the moment, but I don't need to be because we have a business services manager who's driving this now. There's a new website, there's a new set of, as Bryan says, the pick and mix of qualifications, and the passport itself, I know, has been picked up by five local companies; don't ask me to name them but they are, it's definitely happening and I had a conversation about three weeks ago about it, when we first went back to college. But that was as a result of the skills audit where we actually used the information from, you know, how could we use the skills within the college to sell to local businesses?

S: One final question then break for lunch.

Q: Going back to CRM, you as a college using the CRM system...?

St: Yes we are, but that's another story.

Q: Do you use a CRM system?

St: We do. However, from my experience of CRM systems, the one that we decided in the end, although I did an evaluation process with this project,

which CRM system I recommended wasn't taken ahead. In the early part of the project, two years ago, I recommended that we took on Sugar because it had a lot of the, and Bryan was with me at that point, it had a lot of the other add-ons and plug-ins that we required. But we had a new database for student enrolment and we were encouraged to use the plug-in from the EBS system that we use. Yes, say no more... It's now been recognised that the CRM is not fit for purpose and they are now moving into using Sugar.

So some good came out of the recommendations from this project, even the soft outcomes, which we haven't included in the presentation, so they are now pursuing the use of Sugar because the limitations of the EBS plug-in but sometimes you have to try something to know it doesn't work, don't you?