Thursday, 16 May 2013

1:15

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What is becoming more and more alarming is the reduced amount of contact time and increased class room numbers with the same amount of content to deliver.

Graphic deign is very much a tutor intensive learning environment. By this I mean that the students have more tutoring time than say a student studying business or law, as the graphic design student requires a continuing amount of feedback and cannot be taught the practical side of design in a lecture type theatre scenario.

With ever increasing budgetary restraints the learning environment for the graphic design student is being pressurized to sit in the same mound as other education programmes that operate on a more financial economical basis.

thinking&doing:

Enhancing the Learning and Teaching of Graphic Design through the use of Digital Technologies

David Sinfield
Auckland University of Technology

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Thursday, 16 May 2013

0:25

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Q.So how can we keep our standards of excellence and still provide the level of learning under these conditions.

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A. We have to re evaluate how we teach and adjust our way of contact with the students.
In short we have to teach smarter if we are wanting to maintain the high teaching standards.

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answer:

We have to re-evaluate how we teach

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2:40

In early 2012 we started this project of how to establish ways of delivering content, marking, and improving on the learning environment for the student. The project involved Graphic Design Staff working as a team to introduce new technologies in learning and teaching. These technologies focused on the use of Digitiser Monitors and other hardware/software for both in-class instruction, and for the preparation of re-useable resources (e.g 'technical lectures' on topics relating to their course). This will enable teaching material to be available to students for independent learning in online and downloadable formats, and will enable teaching staff to concentrate on developing the programme, while allowing students to develop as independent, engaged learners.

There are 3 main parts to this project

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1. The use of digital drawing monitors. (These are the Wacom Cintiq monitors normally used for architecture/engineering but not usually in the graphic design field). This part of the project was handled by our tutors that teach drawing and illustration, with further exploration into photographic retouching, and other hand skills such as calligraphy etc will happen this year.

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2. A series of recorded downloadable lectures in downloadable format. (This will also aid in the production of producing technical type tutorials and publishing these online that are often spoken about in the lecture series but cannot always be totally captured in notes by the students.) This is an ongoing process of writing and recording a series of lectures that can be referred to by the students in an on-line facility. This can be quite a time consuming process but will reap benefits in the future.

[CLICK]
3. An interactive ePortfolio website (An area for sharing ideas outside of the classroom environment)

Now due to time restraints in this presentation I shall focus on the third item as it has the biggest impact on this project.

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One of the purposes of this project was to engage in out-of-class communications that would enhance the learning and teaching. This was seen as engaging with an on-line ePortfolio area that was specifically tailored for the students so they could communicate with each other and the tutor of the class. There was also the need for the students to up-load their designs they work on, to gain critique from their peers and tutors whilst away from class. This would have several benefits as feedback could be given outside of class making the precious time in class much more fulfilling and productive. It also creates a healthy collaborative design community.

To this end several existing ePortfolio platforms were considered and some indeed have been tested and used. Social media sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, Wordpress, Twitter, Blogged, etc. Public sites such as these although good in content and functionality did cause several concerns from both tutors and students alike. These concerns consisted with issues such as, copyright and placing images in the public domain would then open areas of ownership. The type of files and sizes were also a consideration and did not want to be inhibited in any way.

It is worth noting that once you publish a photograph or an image on a sight such as Facebook this image is no longer the property of the author and becomes the property of the site where it sits. Other concerns were raised by the students in terms of the progression of the students working designs and these progressions would not want to sit in the public domain and be viewed as this would possibly cause an unjustly analysis of their designs.
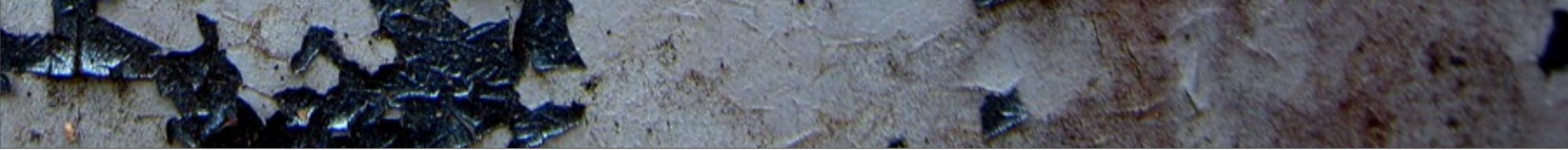
There has also become a level of mistrust with existing social media sites such as Facebook and we are seeing students opting out of using sites like these.

aninteractive
eportfoliowebsite

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So what are the benefits

On each brief the students are asked to provide a work book that they have worked on which shows their thinking processes and research on how they developed the final design. This is a process that doesn't necessarily work in practice as the students often produce this after they have finnish their project, in other words they are fudging it.

This is a vital process in developing their designs as the student needs to be able to show the tutor the progression of their designs. By producing these interim progressions through the on line process this will make for better designs and should also aid in the final marking of these projects as the tutor will not be faced with box loads of books to have to mark. It will also help in giving vital feedback to students throughout the project brief. So it can be said that a continual critiquing process takes place.

So basically we want to take away a lot of the paper and get the students to be more interactive with their project and tutors earlier on.

whatare thebenefits?

Online feedback from peers and tutors

Up-to-date notes

Reduced marking

Independent learning

The ability to see all the work collectively (as a group or individual)

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Mahara
To this end we looked at what was on offer within the university.

In the beginning of this project we looked at Maraha and it was trialled by the group of students and tutors, but seemed complicated in its functionality and usage for the graphic design students and staff alike. Within the graphic design department we deal mainly with image-based content which didn't really suit the layout of Mahara.

A trial period of three weeks was established but it was becoming frustrating to use and was discarded by the students soon after.
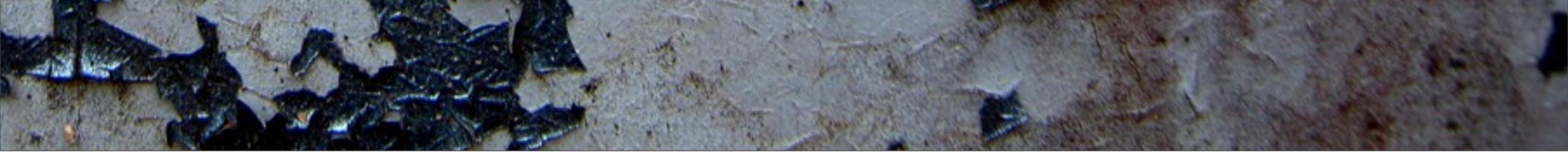
This was incredibly difficult and the students just didn't engage with this, which made our task much more difficult and frustrating.

(In short; *You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink.)*

This was an interesting exercise as the students are used to easy functionality / visuallisation and if faced with a complicated process will choose not to engage, as was the case here. Interestingly I had two students on exchange from Holland in my class and they where aware of Mahara as it had also been introduced in their school. The same level of frustration came from them.

mahara

Mahara is an open source electronic portfolio, blogging and social networking tool. It provides users with blogging tools, a file repository, resume builder and the innovative views framework, which allows users to lay out their portfolio using a drag and drop interface

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So one size just doesn't fit all and sites like Mahara may be fine for some people and programmes, but for students dealing with visual content and wanting to upload their images this just is not suitable.

In light of these findings it was established that we would need to tailor make a specific ePortfolio site, as nothing 'off the shelf' would do.
Therefore an ePortfolio/Blog area was specifically designed for the graphic design students within the Graphic Design department at AUT. Careful consideration and consulting took place with the students and staff, and through this it was established there was certain criteria needed whilst still maintaining the deliverables of that paper. This was a good opportunity to establish exactly what was required in terms of functionality.

onesize
dosesn'tfitall:
A moodle based ePortfolio platform for Graphic Design students

So what was required from this ePortfolio site?

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So what did the students want from this ePortfolio site?

- The students wanted an area where they could easily up-load their images without the need to resize or compress them. This was a major factor, as the students wanted the size of their image to maintain its originality as this was often seen as having detail that needed to be seen at its original size. Some of their images are dealing with intricate typography and needs to be seen in an un-pixelated manner.

- The ability to also upload moving image files or animated gif files easily.

- Working in a safe environment that they control.

- The students wanted an exclusive area that was only for that particular class with anonymity to other classes and indeed the general public. This was one of the problems that Mahara had. Mahara works on the students that are enrolled on a particular paper. This has caused problems in the past as there can be several components to a single paper and quite a number of students on it and not necessarily just your group.

- An area where their up-loaded images could be shared with peer and tutor critiquing.

- To be able to give comments on the work.

- The students wanted this area to be fun and user friendly.

- A user-friendly area that was simple in its aesthetics and functionality. This basically means stripping out the content that isn't going to be used by these particular type of students

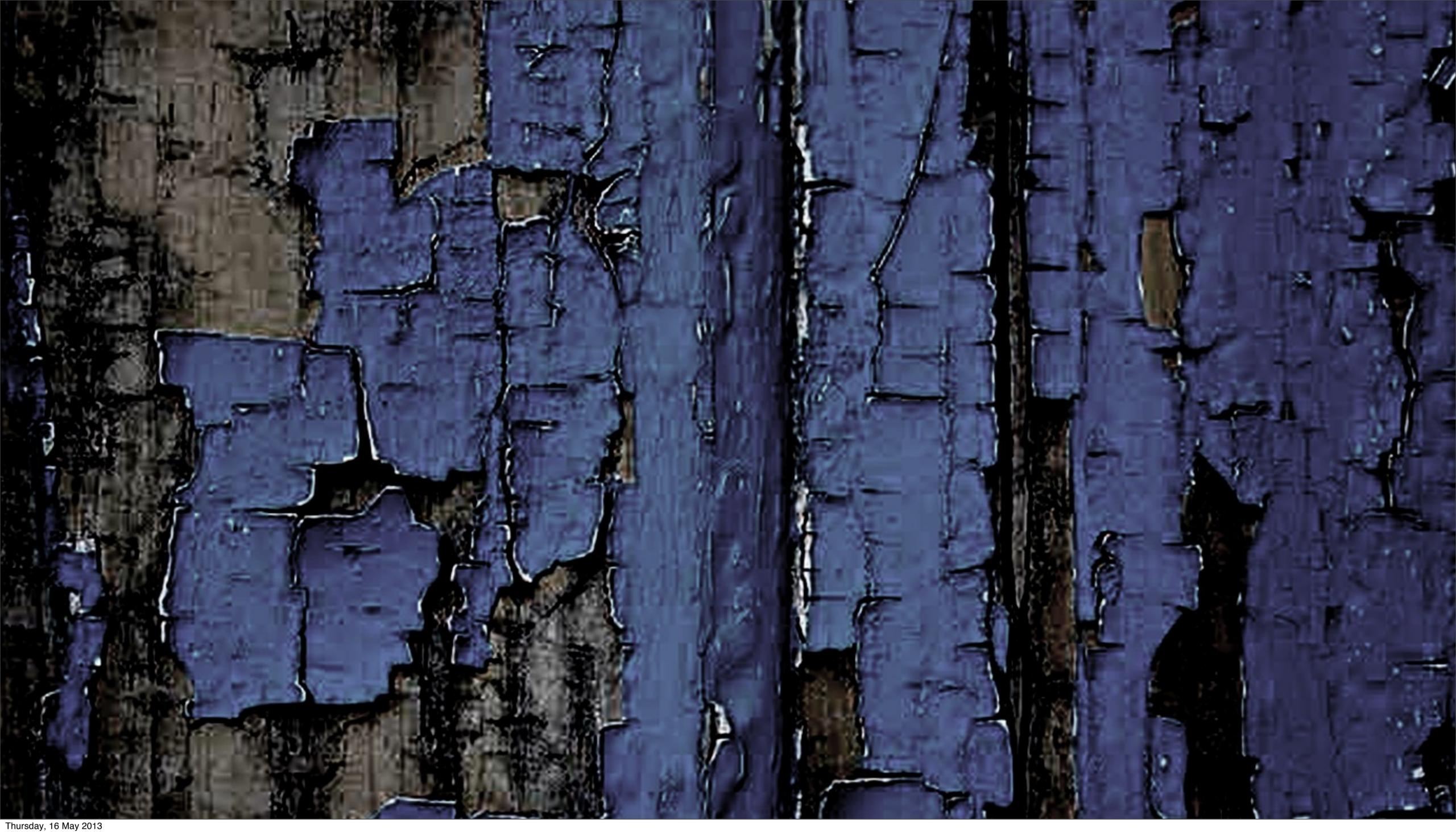## What did the students want from this ePortfolio site?

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It was also important that the tutors using this also had a say in how this site would function.

- The need to easily see the images and associate them against the students profile picture and name as well as seeing them as a group in their entirety.

- To be able to comment on the images and see all comments from students and tutors together.

- The ability to send email from this area without having to exit into another programme.

- The uploading of finished projects and work works (PDF files) so marking is that much easier without the need of ploughing through extensive paper work.

- Being able to critique work, give feedback and to grade work on line and send comments and notes back as a PDF file. This will help in the process of making the grading and comments much simpler whilst giving the students better feedback and quicker.

- When files have been up loaded a date stamp against the file as to keep a record of when the student handed the work in. This is most important if there is a deadline associated with the hand in of a project.

- Contact details of the students so easily contact can take place.

- A area within the site so resources can be up-loaded, such as the mini lecture series of moving image files associated with their project to help aid in the learning process.

- A news section for quick notes such as a bulletin board.

- The ability for the tutor to have editing access to this area so that items can be changed or indeed added if required. This feature has been especially useful when specific situations spring up which often happens.

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ImageBlog vs Mahara

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This is a Moodle based site specifically designed for the Graphic Design students needs as opposed to the university supported Mahara ePortfolio platform. This was also a contentious step as I was going away from the recommended and supported site of Mahara into unknown territory. To begin with, this was very much an experimental period and a lot of the pages were continually modified and added as we progressed. To this end I worked with a small group of third year students so that any problems could be changed rather than escalated if it was a larger group. We worked our way through this and towards the end of their graduating year we had pretty much set out what we wanted to achieve.

imageblog**vs**mahara

How to get students interacting with university based ePortfolio platforms

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Please don't let me discourage you from using Mahara it may be perfect for your needs.

Being part of a faculty that has an array of differing educational programmes and students, there is always going to be differing needs required by programme and students alike. This is always going to be a challenging requirement especially when trying to accommodate a resource area that suits all. It has been made evident that the student's requirements for areas such as these will require a different approach and style as well as functionality.

So one-disciplines requirements will be completely different from another. So why would we expect one ePortfolio site to suit all? By the pure nature of the differing students and the way they think has to be taken into consideration when embarking on such a resource as this ePortfolio site. Graphic design students think in images, colour, shapes and form not in numbers, forms of written texts. Therefore the comparison between these different students needs another approach to construction and functionality.

At the start of this research project and the experimentation of existing ePortfolio sites it soon became apparent that students will not willingly engage with areas such as these if is too difficult to use, they simple give up which, is totally the opposite to good learning and teaching and what we are trying to establish.

In the faculty that I teach this will range from engineers, computer sciences, visual artists, chemists and business students. So one-disciplines requirements will be completely different from one to the other. So why would we expect one ePortfolio site to suit all? By the pure nature of the differing students and the way they think has to be taken into consideration when embarking on such a resource as this ePortfolio site. Graphic design students think in images, colour, shapes and form not in numbers, forms of written texts. Therefore the comparison between these different students needs another approach to construction and functionality. At the start of this research project and the experimentation of existing ePortfolio sites it soon became apparent that students will not willingly engage with areas such as these if is too difficult to use, they simple give up which, is totally the opposite to good learning and teaching and what we are trying to establish.

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