

Joshua Crowley - 16321481
Rationale for Honours project

Title of Project

VisCom Designer Network - Our community exchange. (VDN)

Project Concept

The aim of this project is to design, build and implement a network that supports exchanges between internal groups such as students and staff, and external groups such as graduates and industry within UWS' Bachelor of Design (Visual Communication) course.

Summary

What if graduates could tell students about their individual challenges beyond the degree? What if students could exhibit personal work amongst their peers? What if staff members could blog industry news and related interests? What if industry bodies could get a sneak preview of new talent or a platform from which to challenge our students to contribute to the wider design community?

Fortunately, it isn't a matter of "what if"- these exchanges do happen in our design community at UWS and often it's due to an individual effort of passionate member of the course who seeds inspiration, encourages feedback or introduces challenges to the community. As such, the project wishes to identify these exchanges; explore their occurrence; research their effect and promote the occurrence of the exchanges and the values behind them in the design culture at UWS.

The creative component of this honours project will provide a forum that functions across a number of platforms (both online and offline) to encourage and foster a greater exchange that will connect students, staff, graduates and industry both locally and globally, as VisCom participants.

Through this network and the research process, there will be components that facilitate dialogue and exchanges in a online capacity such as a website or blogs and an offline capacity, through a strategic visual communication campaign. The intention behind these components is to resource VisCom participants with a framework for dialogue and tools for promotion. Having the hybrid network will help the individual effort that creates these already occurring exchanges go a lot further, in a way that recognizes and encourages that effort.

Currently the 4th year design studio the Rabbit Hole provides a strong precedent for the project as it and allows for rich exchanges amongst the 4th year group's students, staff and outside industry. It will be examined to help bring direction to the formation of the network. UWS Mail and vUWS are two other resources that have facilitated communication within the course and will be examined thoroughly as part of the research component of this project. Additionally, my own first hand experience of branding, launching and maintaining the student publication Degree° will assist me with producing the outcomes required for the project.

The project anticipates a wide spectrum of positive outcomes for me, since I know it will extend my knowledge on every skill I have developed over the past 3 years and plays to my passions for sharing and creativity. For the community and the course itself, the resources the project creates through the network have the potential to make a positive impact on the design culture at UWS and be supported for years to come.

Method

What specific examples of research methodologies would be appropriate for your project?

- Case study examination on several design networks (local and global) such as, We Are The Image Makers (WATIM), It's Nice That and the Indexhibit. The research I gather on these existing networks and the teams which run them will influence my direction.
- Focus Groups with users and operators of the site will be a huge major component of my research, acting as key input to the guide the development of the network.
- Literature search of the dynamics and effects of networks in academia as well as industry.

What method of analysis will you apply to your project?

- It's a live project, the network's launch and maintenance will provide a constant stream of data/feedback to analysis. The analysis will be reflective and reflexive, driven particularly by feedback from participants in the network and guided by an intensive research focus groups.

What methods of evaluation will you use to validate your research?

Evaluation will be based on a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods:

- Qualitative research methods will assist with evaluation, being expressed through focus groups and interviews that challenge my primarily findings and final design solutions.
- Quantitative research methods to be used include surveys, opinion polls, statistical data (page hits, google analytics etc) and non intrusive observational methods, such as bounce hits and link hits can help define the user experience on the site and provide an indication of the success of it's approach.
- Alpha and Beta modes may be used for any online version of the network to establish a public evaluation period.

What methods of production will you utilise to realise your project?

- A spectrum of Web skills will be required to implement the project/network. I will have to develop my understanding of back-end server work and also extend my ability with HTML/CSS, Flash and Javascript.
- I propose to use indexhibit as a core framework for the site, due to it's accessibility as an Content Management System (CMS) to contributors and options it provides for customization.
- Branding and building the site for a largely visually orientated audience will be a challenging and require providing unique and engaging aesthetics. These design solutions using skills I've picked up through my coursework and engagement with Adobe Creative Suites.
- Integration with other web services such as Facebook, HTML emails, Twitter, Flickr and Tumblr will provide a full spectrum integration for users and promote high accessibility for the general public/industry. So I will expand my social media literacy.

Rough Work Schedule

Holidays Nov 09 to Feb 10 - Primarily research, Goals and Aims devised.

Exegesis development and planning

Semester One 2010 - Interviews, Case studies, Branding, Website Build, Exegesis core writing.

Semester Two 2010 - Website Maintenance and progression. Reflection and Evaluation from focus groups and website usage data. Exegesis reflection.

Works Cited - Annotated Bibliography

We Are The Image Makers

By creating an online publication, Brad Eastman and Sarah Holmes are able to publish work by Australian designer and artist, strengthening the countries design culture and promoting upcoming designers and artists.

- Eastman,B. & Holmes,S. 2009, We Are the Image Makers, accessed 12 October 2009 <<http://www.watim.com/>>.

Indexhibit

Increasingly popular, Indexhibit is Content Management Software that grants a huge spectrum of customisation. Possible core software for a website.

- Vaska,J. & Eatock,D. 2009, Indexhibit, accessed 12 October 2009 <<http://www.indexhibit.org/>>.

It's Nice That

A UK based website, run by two lecturers that promotes good design and encourages discussion within the design community.

- Hudson,W. & Bec,A. 2009, Indexhibit, accessed 13 October 2009 <<http://www.itstnicethat.com/>>.

Tribal Leadership

A speech about leveraging natural groups to produce a thriving a organisation. It's expressive of the challenges the network faces, accommodating for a wide target audience.

- Logan,D 2009, TED, accessed 13 October 2009 <http://www.ted.com/talks/david_logan_on_tribal_leadership.html>

Additional Information for Honours Program

Professional Experience and Other studies

A designer network for Students, Staff and Graduates of UWS' Visual Communication course, which aims to connect it's participants with each other, useful information and industry both locally and globally.

Referees

Sarah Grieve - Modular Ideas - 9361 4666 - sarah@modularpeople.com

Samantha Edwards - UWS Academic - 9852 5539 - s.edwards@uws.edu.au

Julia Thomas - FBi Radio Station - 8332 2900 - julia@fbiradio.com

Employment History

Question.

How can this project best foster a dynamic network amongst students, staff and graduates from the Visual Communication (VisCom) course at the University of Western Sydney (UWS), that strengthens the design culture of the community, welcomes local and global industry and adds to the outcomes of the course?