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The Fashion Lounge; A Brief Report on Creating a Cross Departmental myCourse page

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Abstract

This project was established during the summer of 2012 with a partnership between Rachael Taylor (Fashion Lecturer) and Samantha Moss (Learning Technologist). The original brief was to create a myCourse template for the fashion unit pages which would develop a specified standard that all staff could adopt and provide a platform that was consistent, accessible and visual. The project was developed weekly in 1hr sessions, and through discussion, developed further to create a 'Fashion Homepage' to provide a space that pooled resources and services together. This in turn evolved into the creation of the 'Fashion Lounge' which aims to act as an interactive space to encourage student conversation, participation and collaboration.

Introduction

Within today's environment, where the availability of information is growing at an excessive rate, being able to find quality information is becoming a growing problem (Pink 2005). Enabling students to have access and knowledge on how to navigate and use the information they find has now become a necessity.

The first stage of building the myCourse unit template was to design what is termed 'information architecture'. This is an important consideration when designing the layout for information sources in reference to context, content, and users (Morville 2006). These concepts inspired the considerations made towards 'usability' and 'accessibility' thus ensuring the information was relevant to the course and easy to locate.

The second stage of design development came from additional literature research utilising the concept of Schön's theories around systems and social learning. As (Schön 1973: p. 57) stated "Our systems need to maintain their identity, and their ability to support the self-identity of those who belong to

them, but they must at the same time be capable of transforming themselves”. This concept was influential in framing the project and establishing the idea of creating interconnected social systems and building upon the interactivity established through the culture of sharing information via social networks.

The development of the Fashion Lounge and the research undertaken helped inspire the ethos of evolving the fashion department’s myCourse presence. The key focus of the page design was tailored so that all content and services relate to fashion students and their possible future goals. The initial concept was to create a place to pool information and connect services together, not only within ‘one place’ but within ‘one page’. The page was designed to focus on encouraging the use and awareness of available enterprise and employment opportunities and to build upon self-learning and autonomy. It was hoped that the page, together with utilising the opportunities specifically for fashion students, would help and improve communication across fashion departments. The consideration of the visual representation of information was another important factor towards user experience as the majority of a student’s time is spent using different devices to access information.

The key elements with the Fashion Lounge page have been designed to reach each fashion course and include the following:

SUBJECTS WITHIN PAGE	WHY CHOSEN?
Solent Fashion Success	Celebrating the talent within Solent on an on-going basis so making students aware of the opportunities available.
Industry News	Direct link to Worth Global Style Network (WGSN), links to Fashion Trends sites and a forum for the latest industry news. This aims to keep students up to date on what is happening within the fashion industry and to encourage them to share their thoughts.
Placement/Job Opportunities	Links to placement opportunities, including live projects and a forum where they can share experiences of interviews and placements.
Creative Enterprise and Entrepreneurship	Links directly to Solent Creatives, aiming to encourage students to use this service. Access to information on how to start your own business and a direct link to useful books within the library. A direct link to Re:So retail space and current events.

Competitions	A list of current and on-going competitions to inspire students to enter. This includes a forum to share conversations.
Events	Links to local and London based events. A forum has been included to encourage participation of attending exhibitions together and sharing reflections upon shows visited.
Professional and Personal Development	Linking the two qualities together, with information and services that can assist with the growth of these areas.
Fashion Resources	A book of links to quality and relevant websites within the areas of Fashion Photography, Design, Promotion, Sustainability, Digital Technology, Print, Styling and Theory. The idea is for all lecturers to share their top resources. This section also includes a direct link to specialist services at the Library, fact sheets and a direct link to the library catalogue.
Fashion Blog (Staff and Students)	To inspire and create a research and collaborative culture within the department.
<p>In one click students are able to immediately access information and services that are relevant and directly feed into Employability, Creative Enterprise, Personal and Professional Development within Fashion.</p> <p>Forums: Encourage peer to peer feedback and informal feedback from staff, offering reflections and advice.</p>	

Figure 1. Table showing why the different elements were selected for the Fashion Lounge.

Project Development and Creation of ‘The Fashion Lounge’

As the development of the page progressed we decided to add an interactive element so that students would be able to discuss and share their experiences within four selected areas; Industry News, Work Placements, Competitions and Events. This then extended into providing a place where staff from the different course disciplines within fashion, could share specialist knowledge and research for the benefit of students and other staff within the team. It provided an opportunity for students from different courses to converse, offer advice through their own experiences and share their reflections. The myCourse page also demonstrated to students that we are supporting them as it provided a platform offering resources and posting opportunities that cater to their needs now and potentially in

the future. Most importantly it was realised that it would bring the fashion team and students together as a community and would encourage participation, communication and collaboration.

At the start of the Autumn Term 2012 a staff meeting was held to gain feedback from the fashion team in order to develop the project further. The contributions from the team helped formulise and develop the concept of the Fashion Lounge's 'place' in relation to the current fashion provision on myCourse. The decision from the team was to name it 'The Fashion Lounge', thus extending the idea of it becoming a place to discuss, share and interact.

During the design phase of the Fashion Lounge we obtained some informal input from students in relation to getting feedback on their needs and to understanding the challenges faced using a virtual learning environment like myCourse. The Fashion Lounge is currently within the development phase and will officially be launched in January 2013. It is expected that the link to the Fashion Lounge will be on all fashion units and the use will be monitored by Samantha and myself so that we can provide an opportunity for the page to grow and develop. The concept behind this page is that it will evolve through contribution and use so it organically shapes into an interactive space that will encourage conversation, collaboration and build a community that turns knowledge into action. (Brown 2012)

Cross Department Collaboration

The working partnership with Samantha Moss has been extremely beneficial with Sam sharing her specialist knowledge and a direct understanding of usability, which helped realise our aims. This project developed through combining our different perspectives and experience so we were able to connect our thinking together.

The Next Phase

In looking forward, the Fashion Lounge aims to act as an umbrella site within the fashion department, allowing each fashion course access to the opportunities and knowledge across the departments. The current myCourse Course homepages are a general information point for each course with links to external social networks to act as a communication point outside of university. The differentiation of The Fashion Lounge is to fuse the two together thus creating a space that co-exists as a platform to learn, communicate and share. The focus is towards building a community of knowledge that is not static but where content is interactive. The interactivity element will need encouragement which aims

to be achieved through linking students with current live projects and events happening at Southampton Solent University. This is shown in the information architectural plan in figure below:

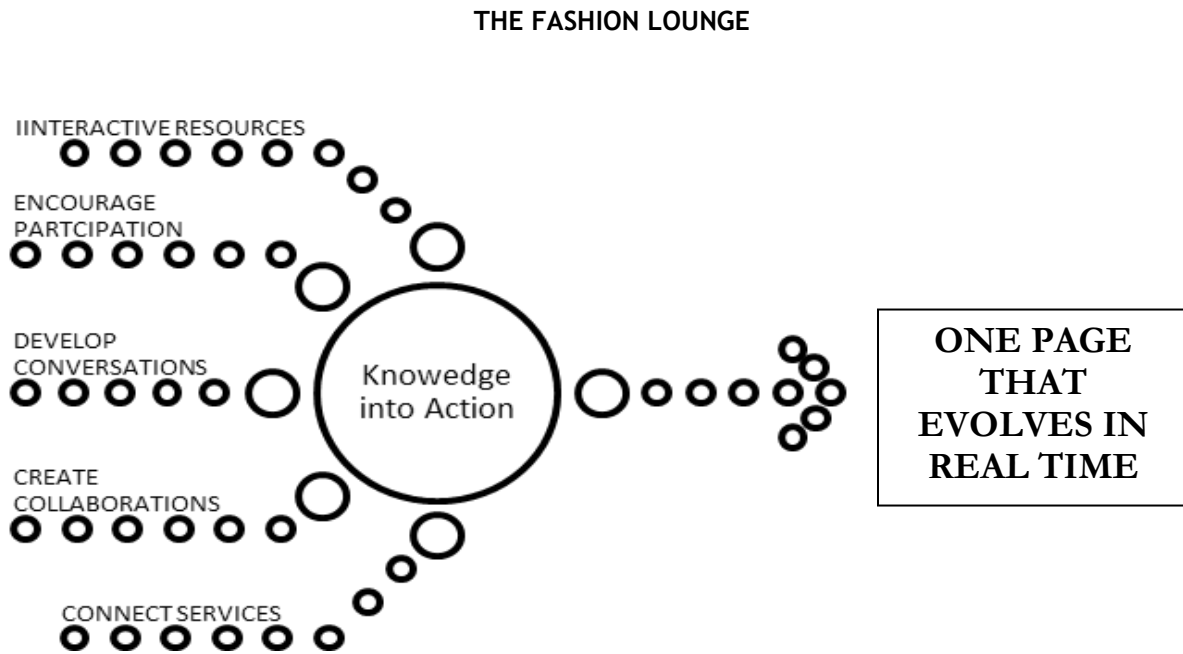


Figure 2. Information Architecture Plan of the Fashion Lounge Page.

The screenshot shows the myCourse Virtual Learning Environment interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Home, myPortfolio, Library, succeed @ solent, and Help & Support. A search bar and an 'Explore Virtual Campus' button are also present. The main content area is titled 'The Fashion Lounge' and features a grid of staff member profiles, including Programme Leader Philip Clarke, Course Leader Maria Sargao, and several Tutors. A central text block describes the lounge as an interactive space for sharing resources and participating in conversations. Below this, there is a video player showing a fashion design presentation. The interface also includes a sidebar with navigation options like 'The Fashion Lounge' (Introduction, Solent's Fashion Success!, etc.), 'Online users', 'My private files', and 'Settings'.

Figure 3. Screen grab of the Fashion Lounge myCourse page

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