

VLEs are not just for objects, they are for learning as well!

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SLIDE 02: VLEs are not just for objects, they are for learning as well!

Welcome to this presentation everyone. Today I'm explaining how we the West Midlands Regional Support Centre have used a VLE in the past few years to engage with and inspire our customers across the region. We have fully exploited the toolset of a VLE by running short 2 hour workshops to full 5 day conferences, all online. More recently we have been incorporating live webcasts into these VLE presentations with excellent results. Above all we are trying to showcase the full interactive potential of a VLE by promoting an (inter)active learning pedagogy.

SLIDE 03 : What is a VLE?

I'll begin by very briefly describing a VLE

What is a VLE, a course management system :

A VLE is:

Used to manage the delivery of online learning materials and assessment. Includes curriculum mapping and monitoring of the learner's progress. On completion, updates the student profile with details of activities undertaken. Uses web browser technology. A VLE links to administrative systems, both in-house and external. Ref: <http://excellence.qia.org.uk>

More information on Moodle /VLE's at: <http://wiki.rscwmsystems.org.uk/index.php/moodle>

SLIDE 04: Exemplar 01 – mini Moodle

The 3 week online course is used to orientate newcomers to the Moodle VLE. The whole course is facilitated by our curriculum advisors and is active learning in practice, by showcasing the main activity tools in Moodle. Essentially the lecturers experience the VLE as a student would.

This course is very successful and has been running for a number of years now. Originally it was 5 weeks. We also archive the entire course and give it to Colleges to run from their own establishments. This is where we (RSC WM) began with promoting active (read constructivist) methods of using a VLE.

SLIDE 05: Exemplar 02 – 5 day conference in 2007

In 2007 we organised and ran a 5 day conference entirely online using Moodle. It was very successful with nearly 100 delegates registering. The event was designed to be more of a buffet experience, whereby delegates dipped in and out of sessions during the week.

We tried to replicate the f2f experience of attending a conference. We included asynchronous and synchronous presentations (Instant Presenter, epop, and Wimba) a virtual café, a virtual exhibition area, competitions, chat rooms, workshops, a daily round up podcast and a dedicated team member on hand all day each day.

We created a very rich interactive area, excellent feedback, tho' too many clashing sessions, and the café & exhibition rooms were not utilised. Use too many different video hosting sites/CODECS and some delegates were not used to the Moodle interface were main problems. Many important lessons learned, but on the whole a very worthwhile and enjoyable experience by all. It whetted our appetite for more! A conference such as this needs two people organising it (six months planning), one with a good knowledge of Moodle to set up the area to ensure consistency/quality.

Around spring/summer of 2007 I was also attending the Models of best practice web workshops run by Helen Walmsley. <http://crusldi1.staffs.ac.uk/bestpracticemodels>

My experiences in Helen's active online workshops + the 2007 online conference provided inspiration and confidence to run my own.

SLIDE 06: Exemplar 03 – online workshops

During the autumn of 2007 I created and ran three online workshops using Moodle. Drawing from my previous experiences I created these short workshops and invited delegates to attend these free events. The example above is the final one. I took feedback from each one and refined each one to improve the delivery. Common characteristics were:

- A guest expert from the academic community to help me facilitate the workshop
- Strong orientation assistance and help

- An ice breaker introduction in a chat room
- A short video introduction by me – hosted externally – see an example here :

<http://www.esnips.com/doc/30a72268-c4c5-46cb-85fd-5e9e11623917/blended-learning-introduction>

- Lots of case study type resources to explore and discuss
- Use the forums as pseudo chat rooms (which did confuse some)
- A quiz and evaluation form

Generally well received, but again there were some new to Moodle who were totally overwhelmed by the whole experience. Some issues with firewalls blocking multimedia resources.

SLIDE 07: Exemplar 04 – 3 day online event

During the spring of 2008 our learning advisor Matt Gallon created and ran a three day online event, taking inspiration from the successful 2007 conference format. The event was populated with activities, resources and live presentations. Around this point in time we as a team were experimenting heavily with a new webcasting tool dimdim.com. This free tool could be run from within Moodle or as an external link. All RSCs had use of Instant Presenter webcasting tool, but we were having good results with dimdim, and preferred this tool.

Again Matthew utilised expertise from around the JISC services and academic community to create a rich and engaging event where delegates were encouraged to participate in forum driven discussions, live webcasts, a glossary tool and other Moodle activities.

This and other events were left “open” for delegates to come back and revisit the event to reflect upon the sessions and resources.

SLIDE 08: Exemplar 05 – 3 day conference in 2008

In 2008 we organised and ran another “conference” entirely online using Moodle. It was even more successful than 2007 with nearly 150 delegates registering.

This time we pared down the sessions to ensure we did not have any clashes, and there was an even spread of topics across roles. Again we did not theme the event as such, but ensured we had some cutting edge technologies to showcase. Lessons learned from previous online events were implemented here, such as;

- Ensuring all sessions were 100% accessible, with multiple formats of presentation materials available to access.
- Ice breakers, designated day to day support, podcast roundups, competitions

- No clashing sessions
- Lots of interaction
- Comprehensive delegate notes on how to navigate around Moodle
- Removing a keynote, and replacing that with a plenary reflecting upon the 3 days

One of the great successes of this event was to invite Martin Dougiamas into a live dimdim presentation. We set up the webcast & Martin presented from Australia. The webcast lasted for approximately an hour and was well received with few technical hitches. Again we were very impressed with this free webcasting tool, and delegates responded by their enthusiasm with their attendance at these live webcasts.

It seemed that this format of an online buffet style event covering an eclectic range of e-learning technologies running both low tech asynchronous sessions (forums + Powerpoint presentations) and high tech synchronous (webcasts + shared slides and chat rooms) was proving popular.

Again we experienced issues with novices not understanding the Moodle interface, and College firewalls blocking streaming multimedia content, even though we had warned delegates to check these resources beforehand. Again ensuring alternative content for each session helped combat this recurring problem.

Following loosely the Salmon 5 stage model of high levels of support and scaffolding (upfront) with delegates was paramount. Ensuring that help documents, email, phones, skype, and forums, were all monitored to help delegates was paramount.

Opening up the conference a few days before official launch helped us and the delegates to orientate themselves. The simple evaluation form was used to gather important qualitative and quantitative data. Again, mostly very positive.

SLIDE 09: Exemplar 06 – 1 day HE event 2008

I utilised previous experiences & format of running online workshops to design a 1 day event. Trying to move away from the word conference as it's a comparison people take too literally.

This event was run in conjunction with RSC East Midlands + the Higher Education Academy, He in HE support. This event was run to replace a cancelled f2f event.

Again a combination of asynchronous and synchronous "presentations" with supporting resources. Very similar to my short workshops.

During this event we decided to run 2 live dimdim sessions and 1 live Instant Presenter sessions. Two out of the three ran. Issues with booking and setting up IP session, due to licence issues. Dimdim went fine. Secondly dimdim session was cancelled due to presenters PC in Scotland breaking just before the session. Confusion reigned, but we had additional resources, and used the forum to alert delegates in real time.

Made a mistake by running the live Instant Presenter sessions back to back, very wrong. Last “ask the expert” session poorly attended, but whole day counted as a success by delegate evaluation. Luckily we had some sort of contingency plans.

SLIDE 10: Reflections

Next online conference following similar format

Two of us planning it, using Google docs to collaborate

Much more testing of course planned including user centred design principles

Recommendations;

- Consistent interface following web design principles
- Learn instructional design principles
- Effective planning,
- Early & often testing,
- team work,
- above all run very interactive sessions.

SLIDE 11: References

- <http://staffordshireuniversity.pbwiki.com/Collaborative+working+online>
- <http://crusldi1.staffs.ac.uk/bestpracticemodels>
- http://wiki.rscwmsystems.org.uk/index.php/Synchronous_webcasting_tools
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- <http://www2.napier.ac.uk/transform/index.htm>
- <http://wiki.rscwmsystems.org.uk/index.php/moodle>
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Webcasting>
- <http://www.dimdim.com/>
- http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=176809 (dimdim Moodle plugin)
- <http://kev-brace.blogspot.com/2008/08/dimdim-ups-features-o.html>

SLIDE 12: Contact details

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