Langdon College: How can an eBay store improve learning?

Summary

Langdon College is a specialist college with students with Down syndrome, autism, speech impediments and mental and physical disabilities. They set up an eBay store and printing business to give their students an insight into e-commerce and production. This project aimed to develop skills for independent living and working, such as the value of money, design and communication skills. It has also helped them to build self-esteem and confidence.

About Langdon College

Langdon College, based in Manchester, provides a diverse range of courses for up to 30 students with a range of learning disabilities on a residential or day student basis. Students are supported by staff who offer guidance, support and encouragement in their personal, social, emotional and academic development.

The challenge

In March 2011, Langdon College decided that they wanted to give the students an insight into e-commerce. Setting up an eBay store, run by the students was seen as a cost effective method of doing this. This gave all the students ranging in ability from Entry Level 1 students to Level 2 students, an opportunity to participate in different activities that would help to make sales in the eBay store.

The activity

The staff at the College came up with a number of different suggestions for the name and logo for the store. They wanted the students to take as much ownership as possible, so they gave the students the opportunity to vote for what their favourite logo and name would be for the store.

Setting up the eBay store cost very little. It originally only sold products donated by members of the public. This proved to be a cost effective way of running the store.
The students were involved in doing the initial collection and put together information leaflets and memos to send out to staff and parents about bringing donations in.

The College then gave the higher level learners the opportunity to take more responsibility for certain items that were going on the store. They picked three items each that they wanted to sell with deadlines of when to do it by.

Some of the students used the store to develop numeracy and financial skills as well as an understanding of the relationship between time and money. This was done by calculating the profit required to run the store whilst taking into account factors such as; number of items sold, prices of items, postage costs and wages per hour. This led to them to choose items that were of higher value and gave them an understanding what would sell on the store.

The lower level learners were responsible for sorting and checking that donations were in working order. They photographed the products using a photograph pod and cameras which had the added bonus of helping them learn about what makes a good and bad photograph. This also introduced independent living skills, encouraging them to make items that they wanted to sell to look better, for example, students washing and ironing clothes.

Students could make mistakes - if they listed something as £5 and it was only going to make £1, this was discussed and addressed as a learning activity. Also it gave them the opportunity to improve their literacy skills while writing the descriptions. All these tasks would help to increase their employability skills.

One of the students has been learning about graphic design using the latest technology and wants to pursue a career in this field after he leaves the College. He would never have been aware of this opportunity without these projects.

**The outcomes**

The aim of this project was to give the students a broader understanding of all aspects of a business. This task allowed them to improve their numeracy skills which will help the students in their future work placements. Some of the students who
were involved in the eBay store when it first started have gone on to work placements at other organisations which have centred on e-commerce.

The College built on the success of the eBay store by applying for funding from the Karten Network to set up a printing business. The printing business, LC Print, has now been running for 3 months. The Ian Karten Charitable Trust provided money for printing facilities so the students can produce canvasses, mugs, bags and t-shirts. All profits go back into the business to keep it going for future students. The eBay store is then used to sell the products from the printing business.

![Canvasses and flyers from the Karten suite workshop](image.jpg)

This ensures the there is a manageable workload which allows students time to develop a range of skills.

Recently a Salford Community Project has enabled the College and students to get involved with a pop-up charity shop based in Eccles. They have used some of the eBay stock which was not logistically viable to post on eBay and are selling it in the shop. This gives the students an opportunity to have experience of working in a retail outlet selling the things that they had been involved in collecting and putting together.
The impact

Everything that the students do relating to this project ties in with their learning. Each student has individual core targets; their participation in the eBay store and printing workshop is tied in with whatever their core targets are, for example, to work independently for 20 minutes, to work on their communication or their staying safe targets.

Their staying safe targets fit in within personal and social development. Safety is a big thing and this project puts the student into a workplace environment and gets them to think a little bit outside the box.

The targets tie into accredited units which allow the students to get an award, certificate or diploma at the end of it.

These two projects also give the students the opportunity to get into the habit of going to work before putting them into a community based work placement.

There are currently development plans for the printing side of things. The College wants to push and develop it so that so the business can start to make a profit. If the business becomes more profitable and the community becomes more aware of what it is doing then that will open up opportunities for the students. For example going to trade and craft fairs and getting involved in outdoor markets would get the students working more with the community and help to build their confidence.

David Foden, Tutor at Langdon College explains: “It gave the students the opportunity to improve their literacy skills and increase their employability skills as well.”

Students who have been involved with the eBay store have got work placements with an organisation called All Aboard which is a Jewish charity and have been working on their online shop through Amazon marketplace. This proves that the students are learning the skills that they need in order to become valuable members of the community.

The lessons learned

Setting up a store: The biggest thing to think about is the stock; how to acquire it and to make sure it is quality stock that can be sold. If it can’t be sold it doesn’t give the students any motivation. When something gets sold that they have photographed, listed, advertised and packaged up for posting, the reward and achievement that they get from that is brilliant. If someone is considering doing something similar it is important to get items in that will sell. Have a really good look at what is selling on eBay and try to obtain that range of items.

Setting up a printing business: It is important to make sure you are buying the correct printing equipment in advance. Talk to someone from the industry for advice about this. Also make sure that you know what products you want to sell from the
beginning, this will help to make appropriate purchasing decisions. It must be thought through properly.

Useful links

- Jisc RSC Northwest
- Langdon College
- eBay Store
- Karten Network
- All Aboard

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