City of Bath College: Using YouTube and Facebook to deliver exceptional e-learning for music students

Summary

The music team at City of Bath College have utilised Facebook and YouTube to create social networking for their students. This has had a direct and positive impact on e-learning and has been so popular with the students that the College has seen a 100% success rate for assignments completed. This is the first time that the College has seen such a high success rate for its music courses.

All courses have now moved from a grade 2 to a grade 1 standard and their use of Google Docs has enabled a real collaborative community, which is constantly thriving and seeing real success.

About City of Bath College

Students of all ages choose City of Bath College for its diverse range of courses and student population along with the excellent facilities and supportive learning environment. With a thriving programme for international students and courses ranging from entry level to Higher Education, we offer something for everyone. Alongside academic qualifications such as A Levels and GCSEs, you can pick from a wide range of full time and part time vocational programmes, teaching you practical trade skills from introductory to advanced level. Some students join an Apprenticeship programme allowing them to earn while they continue to study and learn a new trade. Others simply choose to take up a new hobby or craft just for fun in one of our part time recreational courses.

The challenge

The music team at City of Bath College realised that a whole community of musicians existed on YouTube and Facebook and these communities were networking and promoting themselves extensively. The music team also found that they had some difficulty contacting their students using mobile phones and wanted to find another way to improve communications for their students.
The College decided to conduct usability research into student online trends focusing on the technology they liked to access and use. The study found determined that around 99% of their students used Facebook, with some 70% using mobile devices.

The research results prompted the music team to try and facilitate the development of an online presence through Facebook and YouTube, which culminated in the music department requesting a trial period at the College to evaluate whether it would be embraced by students.

To try and enhance the course and overall experience at the College the music department also wanted to invest time into new concepts and activities and blend these into the courses to enrich and equip the students with really valuable life skills.

The activity

The music team put all the students into groups on Facebook, providing an opportunity to share and collaborate with each other on their work and the course as a whole. Over the summer period staff have enabled activities, gigs and musical collaborations to continue; students are enthused to pursue their music because it is not just about their course – but part of their lives.

One of the many bands using Facebook as part of their music course at City of Bath College

“You are creating that community in place ahead of time, so students who meet on open days can have a chance to meet their peers and start networking and collaborating before the course has even started” – Clive Stocker

“It creates a more collegiate atmosphere, it’s almost like we are behaving like a university would do, where the students are creating more bonds between each other and networking more with other musicians on the course” – Mark Smithers
In order to create a more realistic environment for the music courses, the music team decided to develop a record label called BA1 Records. Students would not only develop their technical skills, but also see first-hand the processes involved in the operation of a record company.

“One of my students has a contract in London to help a company with their promotion of online events, which is great – so there are a lot of transferable skills the students have through their development of using web 2.0 technology” – Clive Stocker

One of the fantastic activities the College has introduced is an end of year album, released on iTunes and available worldwide. This gives the opportunity for music students to work towards a qualification and provides a real-life opportunity to be a part of something which is industry-related. Successful tracks are selected by the students themselves using the Track Factor website developed by Clive Stocker. The actual music samples are embedded from another website called SoundCloud, which enables music to be easily distributed.

The end of year album ‘Dubplates 2010’ is available to buy on iTunes

The main idea behind Track Factor is that students can access the website and vote on tracks, with the results being updated in real time into a Google Docs spreadsheet. The best 10 tracks are picked and then the music team organise industry experts and musical professionals to attend the College to determine the top 8 tracks. This process is called Dubplate and it is a professional A&R process, where industry professionals visit the college to offer their expert knowledge.
A screenshot of the Track Factor website, which utilises embedded audio from the SonicCloud website

“The students see the College as a gateway into the music industry because of the way we operate like a mini record label, using the same techniques and systems as in the real world, students are gaining a unique and valued perspective through real-life activities” – Max Weedon

The whole process of how music is performed and produced is covered in great detail, this includes:

- How an album is created
- How an album is mastered and produced
- Copyright application
- Music history and culture
- The process for getting tracks into iTunes
- Album design
- Promotional activity through social networking and websites

Google Docs have also become an important tool for staff and students, the music team utilises Google Docs to collaborate with students and share resources, all through the web.

In order to help develop the student’s musical training, Clive has also developed a website called Sonic Flaws. This enables the students to listen to tracks that have flaws, which helps to train their ears, but also a resource that can be accessed in their own time.

In order to ensure a teaching environment is maintained, staff have 2 profiles on Facebook, one for their professional working life and the other their own private profile. This is an important factor to ensure that students see the lecturers in a professional capacity within the social networking environment.

**The outcomes**

One of the key aspects in the success of the music courses has without doubt been the integration of Facebook and YouTube, which has been embraced to such an extent that overall attendance has increased by 9%.

www.Jiscrsc.ac.uk/case-studies
Example of students utilising video content through YouTube

“We don’t think that Facebook or social networks will take over from teaching practice, but they are a great supplement, it is about meeting the students on their own terms” – Max Weedon

“Facebook has in some cases drawn the students back into the courses, because it is enabling a really great collaborative and supportive environment” – Clive Stocker

Students have enjoyed developing their own profiles on Facebook and YouTube and are learning how to promote themselves in a modern and pioneering way.

“You can’t fight against the tide, web 2.0 and cloud computing is here, you can’t take the mobile phones off students, it’s already here” – Max Weedon

Facebook is also helping staff to keep track of their students, as they can monitor their activity streams, which helps monitor attendance and see if there are any students who have not been contributing to activities; they can contact that student without the need to approach them in lectures in front of their peers.

Facebook additionally works very well for alumni purposes as staff have access to data for students who have left the College. The groups are still active so students can still use these groups to keep in contact and continue to network even though they have left. Another advantage for the college is that they can also see if students have had success through getting a record deal or finding work experience or employment.

“It’s a really good motivator for both students and staff, we are finding that they are using what they have learnt at the College and applying this for their future endeavors” – Clive stocker

In terms of Ofsted reporting, Facebook has very detailed activity streams, where you can pull data from and add into a Google Doc, which can be used to evidence feedback and communication. This saves printing out paper, reduces the need for storage and removes the need for students to fill in paper copies to submit back to the lecturers.
The music team have seen not only an improvement in the quality of work being produced by the students, but also a real community spirit forged between students, friends and people from all over the world all wanting to share and be a part of a continually growing network. In fact City of Bath College has the second biggest YouTube presence in the UK and one of the richest college-based musical resources available.

The Music team also add all the links to documentation and resources via Google Docs through Facebook threads, which is a good way of enabling the students to easily access information without printing out lots of paper and is a much more approachable environment for the students to distribute resources than their Moodle site.

Previously when a student handed in their work, it would only be seen by the lecturer; now the student’s work is heard and seen by all their peers through YouTube. The advantage of the different music channels is that they are continually expanding and growing with musical content, for example the pop channel has over 2 new tracks per day and has over 800 videos in total.

In addition, Google docs can be made public to everyone; it is a collaborative tool and can be accessed and amended by other people and the document is stored online. This has added benefits:

- Documents do not fill up valuable server space at the college
- You don’t need installed software on the computers to run Google Docs
- More space is freed up on computers
- As documents can be shared and collaborated on, there is no need to replicate documents for each student
- Improves time management as data collected from forms is instantly updated in real time into documents
- Complex coding languages are no longer needed for the collection of data through
forms as Google Docs seamlessly does this for you – using smart copy and paste functionality.

**The impact**

The music team is providing the students with a model that relates to what they want to do and what they want to achieve. This provides a unique opportunity for the students to develop their musical abilities and impacts in a positive way on their life even when they leave the College. Through social networking the students have access to a seamless and dynamic set of systems using modern web technology using web 2.0.

"For the first time all our courses are over-subscribed and competition to get a place has increased dramatically because of our investment into social networking" – Max Weedon.

All the web 2.0 systems and websites are free to use and only require an investment of time, but like anything they don’t build themselves. So it is a testament to the music team at City of Bath College that they have succeeded in exceeding expectations and deliver an approach to teaching and learning that is refreshing and not restricted to standard forms.
Gabrielle Aplin is a student from City of Bath College who is already gaining success. Her YouTube profile has been viewed by over 2 million people, a staggering amount. Gabrielle is touring and writing her own material and it may only be a matter of time before she is signed to a label.

City of Bath student Gabrielle Aplin’s YouTube channel has been viewed by over 2 million people

Another important factor for the college is that by using web 2.0 technology-based websites the college is cutting its carbon footprint and streamlining its delivery of content. This is because all the information is stored online, within a cloud-type environment, which does not rely on downloading software as it is used within the browser. This means that servers are not used and populated with quite so much data. It is also not necessary to print out documents as so much can be shared so easily and completed on-screen.

Student feedback

“The popular music course at the city of bath college has changed the way I look at music. I now not only see the various fields of expertise first hand (programming, live and studio recording, producing, composing, event organising, band managing and personal training) but I get to do practical work on improving the areas I feel I need to. I'm given enough freedom on the course as to not feel I'm being pushed in a direction not suited to my style or personality and I'm guided by teachers who are passionate about music themselves and who are all musicians or have experience in the music business. This gives the course a fast pace which is preparing me for the "real world" in a way I don't think other courses can offer.” - Luke Denning - City of Bath College music student

“Take the time to make sure staff are properly trained in using the tools” – Max Weedon
“Students all have mobile devices, which are a great tool for finding resources through the internet, we should encourage using these devices within the classrooms.” – Clive Stocker

“I think training on a regular basis is really important because software and online is continually being updated” – Mark

“Take a step forward and doing something different, use Google Docs to add a document online and start collaborating with that document” – Clive Stocker

“Anything you do to make your work more accessible and adding feedback is more likely to provide the opportunity for students to learn and develop their skills” – Clive stocker

“Think about how is it going to be of benefit to the student, you have to make it student centered” – Robert Wilson

Students performing at the Cheltenham unsigned acts event
Useful links

City of Bath College
City of Bath College YouTube channel
Dubplate factor
Trackfactor
Sonic Flaws
SoundCloud
Music production channel
Gabrielle Aplin on YouTube
Tutorial videos from the music department

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