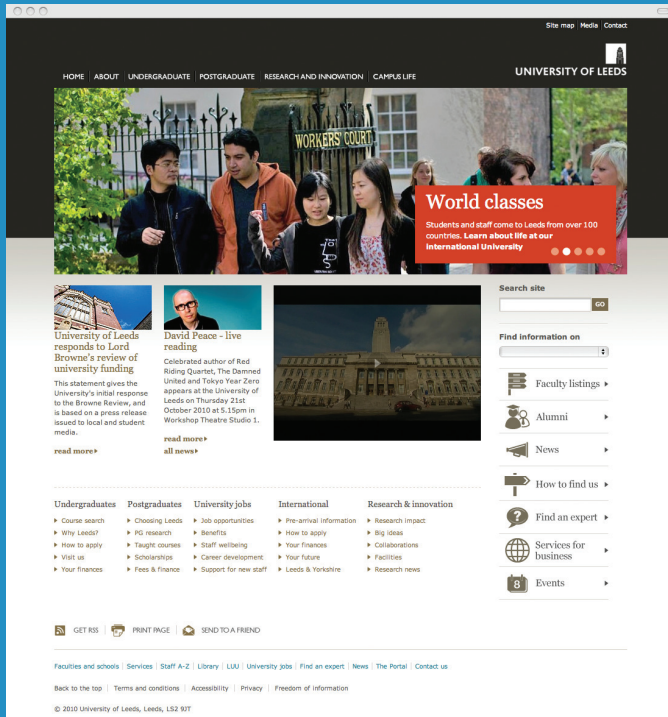


Case Study

Building the “Killer CourseFinder” to help drive student recruitment at the University of Leeds



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Summary

In 2009, the University of Leeds embarked on the development of a new 'Killer CourseFinder Application' for managing the content of hundreds of academic courses using the Jadu web content management system.

This now provides an intuitive, flexible and powerful system and a key student recruitment tool for the University of Leeds. Faculties can now take ownership of their course information, whilst prospective students can easily navigate the myriad of course options available to them using an elegant User Interface.

Background

The University of Leeds provides over 1600 courses across Undergraduate and Postgraduate with the University's Coursefinder frequently providing the first point of contact for a prospective student. It is therefore critical that the experience is straight-forward and memorable. However, to deliver this memorable experience, a number of challenges needed to be addressed including the following.

- > **Course Information updating -**
Updating course information, which is carried out annually by faculties and departments, had become a challenge, creating a large workload for the Central Communications Team which consisted of a small team of editors.
- > **Course Search Effectiveness -**
Feedback from prospective student focus groups had also highlighted the need to make significant improvements in the effectiveness of course search.
- > **Inconsistent user interface and restrictive usage -**
The previous system had been built using Microsoft Access, which was limited in its abilities to support search, navigation and multiple users and resulted in an inconsistent user interface which was increasingly restrictive in the service provided.

Developing the way ahead

A business case was developed to progress with a complete rebuild of the application by the University's web team. The business case was based on two main factors. Firstly, the user benefits that would be created and secondly the increased efficiency and effectiveness that would be delivered from the content management API, workflow and versioning withing the Jadu CMS.

The framework adopted for the requirements specification was based on the concept that the University of Leeds Coursefinder application would be built as a system that integrates with the corporate system "Banner", a back office student management system provided by Sungard Higher Education. This holds the core catalogue data, keeping data which does not change such as UCAS code and programme title, separate. This was fundamental to enabling greater flexibility for editors and users as it allowed extra information to be added and maintained by departments, rather than continuing to rely on a small team of centralised editors.

The 'Killer CourseFinder' – harnessing the power of content management

The CourseFinder application now being used by the University of Leeds, was built by the University's web team as a module for the Jadu Content Management system, which is also used to drive the University's corporate site. Paul Stanton, web developer at the University of Leeds identified the potential to develop the CourseFinder module whilst working on the corporate project.

"It became clear to me that we could build CourseFinder as a custom module within the CMS and offload the burden of content management to the corporate CMS without reinventing the wheel by building yet another standalone corporate system. One of the main reasons why we chose Jadu was the workflow facilities."

The University of Leeds has nine faculties and a number of departments and schools. The University selected the Jadu and the Jadu CMS system because of its strong focus on core content management principles, in particular workflow, versioning and user access control. Each faculty has its own profile of course information that requires management and updating. This means that a customised approach needs to be taken to workflow to suit particular needs. This approach is supported by Jadu CMS which is also used to control access to the CourseFinder system and provide content versioning.

As well as utilising the Jadu CMS built-in functionality, Leeds also made use of the powerful Jadu API. The Jadu API allows developers to access all CMS data and add standard CMS features such as versioning and categorisation to new modules. Jadu also provide a RESTful interface, the MyJadu API, to the CMS which allows developers, even those unfamiliar with Jadu and CMS in general, to access and use web site content.

Outcomes and Benefits

Before the introduction of the new CourseFinder application, users of the previous system has been inconsistent in their usage. This profile has now changed and all Faculties and Departments now utilise the new system. The outcome for students is that they can all now get a much more comprehensive view of the courses provided at the University of Leeds. Students now have an easy to use user front end that gives a cross faculty search using key words. UCAS Extra has also recently been introduced which provides access to an additional 200 courses advertised separately to vacancies.

Staff have also benefited and now have a single system with which they are comfortable to manage content and are not reliant on the central communications team for editing with each faculty having a different workflow managed by Jadu CMS.

"CourseFinder has helped academics and support staff gain more control over how their courses are publicised online. Information is more up to date, Jadu's workflows mean there is a quality assurance process and, as part of our CMS, it's easier to track how people are searching and using the information." Hannah Love, Senior Communications Manager, Marketing.

Next steps

The current development of the 'Killer CourseFinder' is the first stage in a programme which sees many innovations to come. Usage continues to increase with an average of 100,000 key word searches a month since launch reaching a peak of 250,000 a month between November and January.

"CourseFinder gives us a great platform for the future – having this information in a structured and managed system means we can look at sharing the content across other sites and potentially other platforms." Hannah Love, Senior Communications Manager, Marketing Department

Additional developments being investigated include the ability to perform course comparisons across the University, providing a useful source of information for students and parents who are evaluating courses and opening up the course API to the faculties within the institution to allow them to integrate the centrally managed course data on their own sites.

A major development that will make a significant difference to the mobile user is the development of CourseFinder Mobile which is currently being prototyped and will run on the MyJadu API. This will be available via the browser on the mobile phone (iphone, Android, Windows Phone 7) and will utilise HTML5 localStorage which lets users save courses to the phone for viewing later. Students will soon be able to search for courses anywhere and anytime.

About Leeds University: The University of Leeds is one of the largest higher education institutions in the UK with more than 30,000 students from 130 countries.

With a turnover of £450m, Leeds is one of the top ten research universities in the UK, and a member of the Russell Group of research-intensive universities.

Further information on The University of Leeds can be found at www.leeds.ac.uk.

About Jadu: Jadu helps businesses and public sector organisations to create and manage their online channel quickly, simply and cost effectively. Jadu was formed in 2001 to provide Content Management Systems (CMS) for government organisations. Since its first major implementation for BERR in 2002, Jadu has evolved further and been implemented for hundreds of private and public sector organisations across the UK.

Providing a refreshing approach to Enterprise Content Management, Jadu offers ground-breaking functionality including integrated Online forms, Google searches, user intelligence and full statistical reporting, full standards compliance, product and catalogue management with a host of other web productivity tools and unparalleled support service. Further information on Jadu can be found at www.jadu.co.uk.

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