

Enabling Innovation

Cross Platform Polling Application

Overview

Laura Kalbag, a third year BA Graphic Communications student at Bath Spa University, won innovation funding in 2008 to develop an application called 'Votefully' that would map the political policy interests of the users to provide them with the means to learn about the issues that interest them and the stance that the political parties have on those issues. It was aimed at young people 17-21 years old, who will be first time voters at the 2010 general election.

About the Project

The concept for Votefully came about through a third year project, where Laura was challenged to create a design that could provoke change. Laura wanted to explore ways in which a mobile device could be used to help inform and inspire young people to vote in elections. The initial idea was to develop an iPhone application that could be used to find out about the policies of political parties, which in turn would enable the user to cast a well-informed vote using the application at the next election.

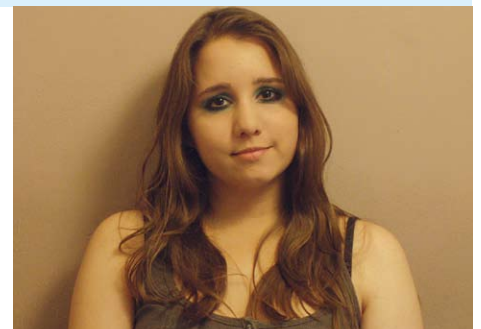
After talking to some Members of Parliament and undertaking further research into online electoral voting, it was discovered that the Government would not be pursuing online voting in the near future due to unsuccessful trials. Therefore, it was decided that the application might be more successful if it concentrated on the information and polling side instead of voting. Following this course also presented the opportunity for commercialisation of the concept through selling the polling data.

The innovation funding was used for:

- Content research
- Application and interface design
- Application development and testing
- Presentational materials for market testing.

Benefits

Laura was mentored throughout the project by a mobile project consultant, who taught her how to run a project and get an idea ready for development. She also received help with writing an in-depth specification document, which meant that she could get realistic and competitive quotations from web developers.



Laura Kalbag

Fast Facts

- The application will encourage political engagement in young people by giving them easy access to information that is relevant to their own lives
- The concept has potential to address the poor voting turnout in the 18-21 year old demographic
- Gives political parties a unique view of the political interests of the youngest potential voters and their likelihood to vote

Outcomes

Running a focus group with other students, as a means of market research, enabled Laura to develop her concept in line with the needs of the target demographic instead of making assumptions based on her own preferences. For example, Laura discovered that a larger number of students than expected are not necessarily comfortable with using their mobile phone to run applications or access the internet, and many do not have the ability to do so on their particular mobile devices. This led to developing the application to run on the web using both desktop computers and mobile devices. Text messaging was also used as part of the application's service in order to reach out to the widest possible audience.

To gain the confidence to create a mobile web application, Laura undertook the W3C Mobile Best Practice Certificate, to learn about the latest possibilities. Undertaking the web design herself enabled Laura to use valuable funding for the development of the application whilst learning more about creating web and mobile applications. Laura was also able to use the project as a further part of her degree. She had read a lot about working on web applications as a web designer but had not had much opportunity to test her knowledge.

Since leaving university, Laura has set up her own freelance web design business and has been working on a wide range of web application projects as a designer. Laura has taken the positive and more challenging experiences from the Votefully project and applied them to her freelance work, together with the skills she has learned. For example:

- Self-discipline to work on a professional project for herself
- The importance of formal agreements and keeping records
- The benefits of continuous client-contractor communication
- Understanding the potential concerns and pitfalls from a client point of view.

Perspective

“As the project continues, we hope to complete Votefully in time to have an effect on the voting patterns of young people in the next election. Even if we could make a few people feel more involved and engaged in politics, I feel the project would have been worthwhile.”

Laura Kalbag

Innovation Award Winner 2008

