



LSE Mobile: A new and exciting mobile application for LSE students

Overview

Founded in 1895, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), based in London, UK has grown to become one of the foremost social science universities in the world for teaching, research and academic excellence. The university has an international intake, which extends from its central London campus, to around the world. The Schools cosmopolitan student body consists of around 9,000 from 140 countries and 3,000 staff members, with about 45 percent drawn from countries outside the UK.

Challenge

To support its increasingly mobile student and staff population, LSE's IT strategy revolves around innovation and providing unique support tools for both its staff and student needs. About three years ago, as part of this strategy, the university began to look closely at the changing needs of how students expected to receive information. It was identified, that many students owned a smartphone and the trend was increasing, with many of the international students carrying around three or four devices. Coupled with mobile network operators offering increasingly affordable data plans, it became a need for the university to seek new ways to offer this diverse user group with access to information, 24/7 from any location.

With an established reputation for offering innovative services to its student population, Assistant Director of IT Services, Amber Miro said, "As part of our service development plan, we started to look for the best way possible to provide information to our students, in a way that we felt was convenient for them. Students today, lead increasingly busy lives. They have to juggle many activities: study, part-time work and social activities. We wanted to find a way to provide them with a service that would fit in with how they wanted to receive information – so we reviewed existing communication channels as well as getting student feedback on proposed solutions."

There were numerous methods that were used across the campus to distribute university-wide information including the website, student portal, plasma screens, printed guides and

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posters in classrooms, lecture theatres and computer rooms. Although each of these channels offered it's own value – none of them were able to meet the needs of the mobile student. In a focus group conducted by the university, it became apparent that students wanted to look for key university information and access services during dead time – usually when they couldn't do anything else: for example when they were traveling, or between lectures. Students were also found not to proactively go and look for information in different places.

Solution



Given the specific needs of LSE, the solution that they chose to deploy was a mobile application for student smartphones, which would integrate with university data sources and provide everything that students would need whilst on the move. With limited internal resource and expertise to develop a solution in-house, LSE looked further a field, and met with Hugh Griffiths, CEO of oMbiel to see a demonstration of their campusM™ mobile

application.

“campusM™ ticked all the boxes, enabling us to drop our information into it and to brand it as our own solution – ‘LSE Mobile’,” said Amber. “We immediately knew that this was how we wanted to proceed. We saw how other universities had adopted campus apps and we were quickly able to visualize how we wanted to customize our own application to meet our needs at LSE.”

In March 2010, LSE started with a small pilot lasting approximately 4 weeks that reached out to 10 students, who downloaded a beta version of LSE Mobile. The aim of the pilot was to get initial feedback, ideas of what students wanted to see in the application and to solve any issues before full launch.









The pilot along with the user group survey provided invaluable insight into what students found of most value in LSE Mobile. Feedback showed that one of the key features that students wanted, was their timetable and exams. They also found Campus Maps useful as well as PC Availability. During the pilot, it was discovered that PC Availability was too

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hidden away as a category in the Campus Maps menu. This feedback has now enabled this feature to come to the forefront as a main menu item on the home screen, so it is easy to see and more accessible. Students could also see the value of the News Feeds and requested that more were added in the future.

“The key to the success of LSE Mobile is continually listening to student ideas,” said Amber. “The launch of LSE Mobile has been a success and is recognized by students as leading edge for the university. We are striving to make improvements by working with oMbiel to add new functionality, content and to keep it fresh. Success will depend on integrating with more of our university systems and data, to create a richer user experience.” An interesting piece of student feedback concludes, “It’s a good app now, which can develop into a very useful app in the future.”

Today, the application can be downloaded free from the Apple’s App Store and is compatible with both the iPhone and iPod touch. LSE Mobile currently makes use of many existing LSE services including:

Locations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Find your way around LSE buildings, locate printers and check PC availability in computer rooms
People Search 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Search the LSE directory, call or email contacts and add them directly your phone's address book
Timetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">View your course and exam timetables
Friend Locator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">See where friends are on the campus and contact them to meet up
News 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">View and subscribe to news feeds; find out about forthcoming training courses; listen to podcasts of public events
Pocket Guide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">LSE Mobile FAQs and the IT@LSE pocket guide to IT services at LSE
Alerts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Receive alerts and announcements
PC Availability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check PC availability in computer rooms on campus

Increasing widespread adoption

Since the launch, LSE Mobile has been downloaded about 1000 times on the iPhone or iPod touch. To increase adoption rates, by the end of September, LSE Mobile will launch as a web application, with the aim to launch an Android application in early 2011 and a BlackBerry application later that year.

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There are other plans to enhance the application that include making Library Services available. Students will be able to access their library account, fines, search catalogues, reserve and renew books. Next year, LSE Mobile will be amongst the first wave of universities that will launch their VLE platform, 'LSE - Moodle' on the application as well as offering students access to their account information.

Outcomes

LSE Mobile has been very well received amongst the university's user community. "Students are extremely proactive in providing feedback," said Amber, "What we have noticed is that if students think it's good – they continue to want more of the same." Amber goes on to explain; "We have mechanisms in place to gauge the success of LSE Mobile and to maintain its popularity. Students can post comments on the Apple Tunes store, they can feedback directly to us or we have our annual user group surveys that let us keep abreast of student satisfaction. We are expecting levels of student satisfaction to be in the high eighty percent range in it's response to the new application."

Observational feedback has shown that LSE Mobile has already seen students benefiting through greater efficiency and simply being better armed with information. Whether it is searching for contact details, class locations or other specific university information, students now have the ability to do this on the go and at the touch of a button. Having the information in one, central location contrasts vastly to proactively finding out where to get the information and then looking through files or searching for campus maps. If attending a new class, students can quickly look up the building they need. In the event that they are running late for a meeting, they can easily look up contact details for the organizer via the People Search function.

Whilst the initial release is used primarily to assist students, the LSE mobile application can be used for staff and visitors alike. Amber concludes, "We're already looking into new and exciting functionality that will help evolve LSE Mobile and keep our students connected."

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About campusM™

The campusM™ Mobile Platform brings together a suite of campus-based information services directly to the mobile devices of students, visitors, staff, alumni, prospective students and conference delegates. The application platform can uniquely be branded for any university, enabling a user to be better connected, and to enhance their university experience in a way that was never possible before.

Developed by UK based oMbiel, campusM™ is designed for some of the world's leading mobile platforms and devices including the iPhone®, and iPod touch® as well as on hundreds of other mobile devices from manufacturers such as: RIM, HTC, LG, Motorola, Nokia, Palm, Samsung, Sanyo and Sony Ericsson, making it easier than ever to access university specific information on the go. For more information, visit www.campusM.com.

About oMbiel

oMbiel develops innovative applications including the campusM™ mobile platform for the higher education sector as well as offering mobile integration services to enable university data to be incorporated into its applications. Founded in 2008, oMbiel is headquartered in the UK. For more information, visit www.ombiel.co.uk.

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