Scott's Workblog

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The VLE of the Future

UCISA recently asked for people to come up with ideas on a "VLE of the future". I'm not sure if my response is exactly what they were after, but I've included it below as I think people from a wider audience might find it interesting. In summary, the VLE of the future isn't a VLE, doesn't belong in institutions, and isn't a portal...

I think the VLE of the future is going to be less like an information portal, and more like an aggregator. its going to be more like an editing and publishing tool and less like a browser. Its going to break out of the browser window and sit on the desktop. The VLE of the future will look less like a Content Management System or Intranet, and more like a cross between Shrook, SubEthaEdit,XJournal, iChat, iCal, and iTunes (well, on a Mac at least). It will be slick and minimal, and will actually be fun to use.

eLearning is as much about setting contexts as having tools or content, and the VLE of the future will act like a personal organiser that helps users coordinate tools and services from learning providers. It will also have a very strong social networking capability, so that users can discover other people with shared interests and goals, and forge instant connections. If a user wants to host a sim or a role-play, then they will be able to use their VLE to discover people to take on the other roles based on their published interests and availability.

As well as coordinating with offerings from learning providers in the traditional sense, the VLE of the future will connect very strongly with informal activities that inform learning, integrating with applications like 43Things, LiveJournal, and del.icio.us.

The VLE will collate recordings of users activity with reflections in an ongoing portfolio that can be shared with others.

The VLE will not be institutional, it will be personal, and it will have features that support informal as well as formal learning situations, and a whole range of social activities that we would barely recognize as "learning" today.

The VLE will allow a user to subscribe to sets of services and materials provided by a range of entities, including universities, colleges, companies, and individuals. It will also allow users to create their own contexts and invite others to join in, publishing their activities and materials either through simple hosting services, or perhaps directly (if symmetric broadband and IPv6 become ubiquitous).

So anyone can use the VLE of the future to become a learning provider.

The publish and subscribe aspects of contexts will build upon standards-based distributed technologies such as ATOM, RSS, FOAF, OAI, iCalendar and Web Services. Anything supporting the standards can join the fun, and there will be a range of personal VLEs to suit every taste, platform and pocket. There will be funky VLEs for kids, powerful, enterprise-integrated VLEs for business users, incomprehensible but highly scriptable VLEs for geeks, and so on. Any of these VLEs will work with any provider.

The VLE of the future will interact with my webcam, my mobile phone, my iPod, my TiVo, my TV, my stereo, my guitar, or practically anything else with a socket or a wireless connection. Practically anything can act as a source for something I distribute, stream, or collaborate on through my VLE context, and practically anything can be a rendering platform for my VLE.

The VLE of the future won't offer us many new tools or content types - chat, resource sharing, discussion, blogging, real-time collaborative authoring etc - but it will offer us new connections and opportunities to engage with one another.

Oh, and it may not take 5 years.