

# **Non-LMS Build**

## **OLTD 504: Robert Hills**

With the development of internet resources and tools, complements of Web 2.0, we as teachers find ourselves able to create and manage courses without subscribing to specific Learning Management Systems (LMS) that have been designed to incorporate the core aspects of course management. Developing a course without the assistance of a LMS such as Canvas is far from impossible; in fact it could be easily argued that it provides greater flexibility as course management components can be developed to meet the needs of the course, teacher and students.

A trend that I have noticed with many powerful e-tools is that as they develop they move from a free platform to user pays. There is nothing wrong with paying for tools that can support or even promote student success, but with the ever decreasing personal budgets of teachers and school districts, the ability to incorporate multiple free tools can not only provide the same final results, but for far less. It could even be argued that a more bespoke management system could be developed capable of fulfilling the specific needs of the course.

The functionality of many applications however overlap. An example would be the ability of shared documents, such as Google Docs, not only being a way that documents could be presented, but also as a means to share ideas and allow collaboration.

As this non-LMS build was developed, it became apparent that as resources constantly evolve and develop, the build that I present will also develop as new tools become available. In reviewing tools and applications available for course development, my focus was on free tools. The following areas were considered:

### **Community**

A sense of community is central to my personal philosophy. With a sense of being part of a greater community, I have always felt that students are able to leave their issues at the classroom door and enter with a sense of purpose. When developed, the sense of community can support students in taking risks and share ideas, thus becoming members of the community and contributing to it in a positive way.

### **Discussion/Discourse**

In many ways, discussion and discourse supports the development of community. The sharing of ideas allows connections to be made with not only course content, but also with other students, teachers and the greater community.

## **Peer Mentoring/Helping**

Peer mentoring/helping not only provides student to student support, but also helps develop the learning community. If students are provided the opportunity to actively participate and share ideas, as their knowledge develops so can the knowledge of the collective.

## **Communication**

Isolation, in my experience, is a limiting factor in the learning process. Be it in the class or at a distance, the ability to communicate clearly in a supportive manner is central to evolving a sense of community. Here, I feel communication is greater than the didactic reporting of facts to learners, but should create an open dialogue that supports the learner as well as the community. To achieve this, communication should include various components that support the greater community as well as providing avenues for student to student and student to teacher dialogue.

Communities, websites, journals, email, video conferencing, wiki's and blogs all support communication. Where applications are used correctly, effective communication can be achieved from Student to Student, Student to Teacher, Teacher to Student(s) i.e. content and Student to World.

## **Collaboration**

For me, collaboration not only develops community, but scaffolds learning by providing opportunity for students to interact with the concepts being taught. Within the developing community, students are able to support and mentor each other and collectively they can provide opportunities to develop personal connections and knowledge with the subject matter.

## **Assessment**

Assessment is central to instruction and the delivery of course materials. It helps determine if goals and objectives are being met and provides essential feedback as to the future direction that a course must take to ensure essential outcomes are being met by students. Assessment also extends beyond the student to the course itself. This can be achieved in the form of a survey that enables a teacher to determine if there are adjustments that could be made to the course that would promote better learning.

## **Non-LMS Tools:**

Following is a survey of possible resources and applications that could aid in the development of an online course without the use of a LMS. Many of these resources overlap, so I have identified their core relation(s) to each the above categories. My intention with this survey was to seek applications that are free for the user.

**Google Suite:** (Community, Discussion/Discourse, Peer Mentoring/Helping, Communication and Collaboration)

Google has developed a number of tools and applications that support each of the areas for consideration when developing a course. Once a free subscription is established, the user is able to take advantage of numerous free tools that enable the development of an entire course.



Presentation of materials is supported by this suite of tools. For example Power Point presentations can be created and shared as can spreadsheets, calendars and word documents.

**YouTube:** (Discussion/Discourse, Content, Assessment)

YouTube provides an online resource that provides the teacher the opportunity to deliver content that supports or enhances lessons. In addition, it provides a tool/depository where students can submit video evidence of discussions or project work. As it provides a web address link, videos can be embedded into personal or group websites as well as Google+ Communities.



**Search Engines** (Communication i.e. student to world)

The internet, along with the search engines it hosts, provides students the opportunity to make connections with the wider community. There are numerous search engines available and as internet application providers such as Google and Yahoo battle to integrate their applications in to all aspects of our online lives,



consideration must be made as to which one to choose. Google, however, has done a good job at allowing quick integration of links, bookmarks, etc. through the use of their Google Suite of applications. Other search engines that deserve consideration however include Yahoo, DuckDuckgo, Ask.com and Bing.

**Google +:** (Community, Discussion/Discourse, Peer Mentoring/Helping, Communication and Collaboration)

The development of community is central to my personal philosophy. The evolution of an online community is supported by Google +. Students are able to subscribe to and share within the communities to which they belong. In addition, as a teacher, subject specific communities can be developed allowing students to communicate, share, mentor and discuss ideas, thus developing knowledge. When used in conjunction with other pedagogical tools, such as blogging, Google + communities become a powerful tool to promote and monitor student participations and progress.



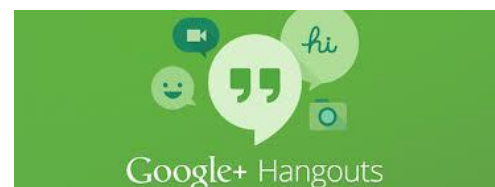
**Gmail:** (Communication and Collaboration)

Google suite continues to offer complimentary applications by offering Gmail. Gmail offers direct and private communication through subscription to the Gmail system. Here communication can be made to the individual as well as the group using the common and basic email format that allows text communication as well as file delivery via 'attachment'.



**Google Hangout:** (Community, Discussion/Discourse, Peer Mentoring/Helping, Communication and Collaboration)

There are numerous video chat tools available, many of which allow screen sharing. Google Hangouts is one of them and can be utilized by a teacher to conference a student body so as to deliver a lecture or hold a meeting. In addition, file sharing and instant messaging can be used to centralize communications. Google Hangouts follows what could be arguably the market leader in this technology, Skype.



**Peer Mentoring/Helping**

All of the previous tool as well as personal blogs, wikis and websites can be developed or be adapted to empower students to support each other in their learning. This, at least for me, aids in the development of community and learning.

**Socrative:** Quiz creation/surveying. (Communication & Assessment)

Socrative is an application that allows the development of quizzes as well as surveys. It allows for real time Student to Students as well as Teacher to Student(s) questioning. It has a simple and pleasant user interface and setting up quizzes and surveys can easily be done from any mobile device.



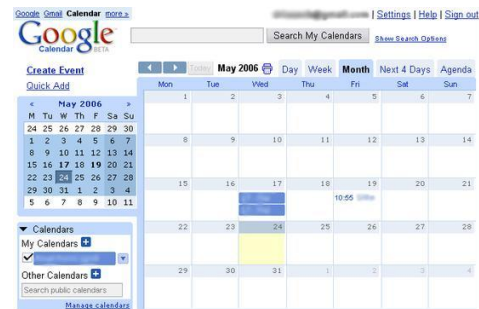
**LearnBoost Grade Book:** (Communication)

Communication of progress and attainment of outcomes is essential between students and teachers. There are a number of grade book programs available online, however LearnBoost.com provides a free grade book that is simple and intuitive to use. Not only does it allow the communication of grades, work and progress, but it allows other areas within a course to be managed as well, ex. Lesson plans, Google apps, etc.



**Google Calendar:** (Communication)

Amongst the many online calendars, Google calendars are easily created, accessed and shared. This provides a powerful communication tool for course outlines, assignments and assessment activities and can be embedded into many course websites to aid planning and communication.



**Google drive:** (Collaboration, Communication & Assessment)

Google Drive is, in essence, a file storage device accessible anywhere. Its application can support the sharing of documents, presentation and materials for editing as well as being used as a central submission repository for projects, etc.



**Weebly:** (Community, Discussion/Discourse, Collaboration, Communications, Assessment)

There are numerous free resources for the development of personal websites. These include Google Sites and Weebly. Both offer a free website hosting and the tools associated with the development of a website. The tools provided by Google Sites are complimentary to the other tools in the Google Suite, but Weebly is my website development tool of choice.



Having never developed a website previously, I found Weebly to be very user friendly whilst providing a variety of page choices, including blogging, journaling and acting as an e-portfolio tool. As such, websites like Weebly support discussion and develop community. The ability for websites to allow work to be showcased also lends it to being used as an assessment tool.



Developing a course website as a teacher using Weebly provides a central location or 'Dashboard' where students can go to review course materials, access links, monitor events via a calendar as well as acting as a centralized communication tool.

## **Non-LMS Build**

Having completed a far from exhaustive review of an overwhelming number of online resources available to a teacher in the development of an online course, one thing becomes clear; online education has caught the attention of many application providers. I feel that as Web 2.0 tools continue to be developed we will see leaders emerge in the provision of applications and tools. The Google Suite of applications often appears at the top of search returns for communication and community tools, whilst many other applications, such as Google Hangouts and GMail provides tools that can be utilized in an educational setting.

Regardless of the selected tools, it is clear to me that we will continue to see the development of user friendly tools that support online courses and communities. My only question is will these free tools surveyed slowly evolve into user pays applications, as many already have, placing many teachers in a situation of perpetually seeking new free resources.

It can be seen that a course can be developed without using a LMS. Both approaches, developing a course with or without a LMS have their advantages. The advantage of not using a LMS is that the course developer can select specific components that they feel supports their course better, thus building a bespoke management system. In addition, not using a LMS presents possible savings as components can be acquired for free. That being said, the most immediate advantage of using a LMS, such as Canvas, provides a centralized management system where all components are located in one place and the user(s) experience no issues with integrating applications and tools. Using an LMS and therefore avoiding the need for students and teaches to use multiple tools with multiple points of contact may out way issues surrounding learning the LMS and any cost savings.