

FreeMoodle.org as an example of Moodle-based free LMS.

Stuart R Meador

Managing Director, HRDNZ (Moodle Partner), stuart@hrdnz.com

Abstract

Over the past few years we have seen the emergence of numerous free education sites. Initiatives such as Khan Academy, Coursera, MIT OpenCourseWare, and Wiki Educator all demonstrate that the face of technology enhanced learning is changing. The Libre knowledge movement (free knowledge) and OER (Open Educational Resources) are examples of the paradigm shift in perceptions and practices around knowledge and education.

What has been missing from the landscape is a similar service that is totally free, learner focussed, and based on Moodle – the best Learning Management System in the world today.

FreeMoodle.org was started in mid-2011 by an official Moodle Partner, and intends to address this by providing completely free Moodle hosting for individuals and organisations, provided that the courses are open and free to others. FreeMoodle.org is unique in being Moodle based (bringing with it the pedagogically sound principles) and supported and managed by an official Moodle Partner (HRDNZ). FreeMoodle.org fundamentally provides a single Moodle-based learning destination for learners – whoever and wherever they are.

Keywords

The future of the LMS, Free Moodle, International collaboration.

Challenges for FreeMoodle.org

Wiki-based open education initiatives whilst interesting, are often teacher focussed, and output is largely text based. In terms of user experience these environments are a long way behind Moodle. FreeMoodle.org is unique in that it is always up-to-date, Moodle Partner supported, will never become a commercial service (or feature distracting advertising), and is free from localised political influence.

There are real challenges around the funding, control and management, and business models when considering free online learning. To create a credible, professional and resilient long-term site using Moodle requires more than just knowledge of the LMS; it requires a commitment to the worlds learning community (potentially every single human being), and an ethical contract that will maintain and grow a truly valuable resource. For this reason, I maintain that a Moodle based free education site must take it's mission, and strategic direction from a community of teachers.

FreeMoodle.org is a project of the Haidee Foxwell Educational Trust (Charitable Trust status pending). This allows the project to receive tax free donations, and apply for funding from external bodies. Currently the project is funded by HRDNZ (Moodle Partner).

Example of the new paradigm

Recently we have seen a wonderful example from Greece of how FreeMoodle.org can be used collaboratively by teachers. The Greek FreeMoodle team has entered into agreement with the Association of Greek Users and Friends of FS/OSS GreekLUG (NPO/NGO for the adoption of Open standards and the promotion of Free Software) to join forces and complete an extensive series of additional modules on the basic use of computers during 2012 to complement the already successful LibreOffice Calc and Presenter courses.

Future development and direction

The future of the open LMS must stimulate more collaboration between teachers in similar subjects, but questions remain about how we encourage and achieve this in a free environment.

The ultimate aim is to position FreeMoodle.org to sit alongside YouTube, Flickr, and Facebook in the minds of internet users, and be recognised as the place to go if you want to learn something effectively, in a true learning environment, and at no cost.

References

<http://www.freemoodle.org>
<https://www.coursera.org/>
<http://www.khanacademy.org/>
<http://wikieducator.org/>
<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libre_knowledge
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_educational_resources

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements to the networked learning conference for sharing this style guide.