



eCommerce 2007/8

Module Guide

Level 6 (Final Year)

School of Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics,
Kingston University

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Goals of the Module

- To provide students with an overview of the impact of and trends in electronic commerce in differing business, retail and leisure environments.
- To introduce students to issues from across the industry in companies large and small, traditional businesses and start-ups
- To provide opportunities for students to consider their own ecommerce business ideas
- To discuss how the IT industry is changing and the roles for information systems designers and computer scientists in the ecommerce industries
- To explore the link between business strategy and electronic commerce and the importance of customer service
- To examine the emerging business models in e-business in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and innovation.

By the end of the module each student should be able to

- Describe current trends in the ecommerce marketplace
- Describe designing and building of ecommerce solutions
- Discuss some the technical options for implementing and running web based ecommerce
- Discuss the importance of online marketing, customer relationships and search engine optimisation
- Identify key business, legal and regulatory issues which may impact on electronic business.
- Relate the development and implementation of electronic business systems (including training, Intranet, customer service, monitoring and entertainment systems) to wider social and business trends.
- Critically assess how the technical and non-technical aspects can best be managed to ensure the successful implementation of electronic business systems.
- Develop a case to justify the expenditure on electronic commerce in terms of business benefits.
- Apply appropriate tools and techniques to identify opportunities for implementing e-business

Lessons from last year

I have run this module for the past 4 years but it changes every year as the eCommerce marketplace changes. Here are some of the lessons from last year and some of the changes I have made as a result:

The module was extremely well received and well attended with very high levels of participation in all activities. Jarek's OS Commerce session was particularly popular with students applying what they had learned to their projects as well as within the module. Sessions on Google, customer journeys and advertising were also very popular. I experimented with Podcasting producing one every two weeks during the module. These were all listened to by a large number of students. Interviewing experts from the industry was the most successful format.

The examination produced a wide spread of marks. I felt that a few students suffered from extremely poor exam technique and appeared not to have answered the actual questions at all. Some produced very scrappy answers resulting in low marks. Only a few students produced really well thought through exam answers despite generally good case study preparation.

I was disappointed by some of the eCommerce work presented at the Projects Poster session and am determined to try to improve the overall quality of eCommerce projects. A student in our Faculty should not be able to spend 14 weeks struggling to connect a PHP web server to a MySQL database.

Changes in this module for 2007/8

- Change some of the technical aspects of the course to introduce Ruby on Rails instead of ASP as a language for exploring web/database prototyping
- Emphasise the growing importance of Mashups and Web Services in the eCommerce marketplace
- Increase the number of Podcasts
- Change the case study preparation to focus more on ideas that will also influence final year projects. These include customer journeys and wireframing
- Provide more revision questions to help the students plan for the examination
- Encourage less technical students to do some of the activities in my new First Year Toolbox Module that runs alongside eCommerce

Teaching and learning approach

Lectures

The module will be run as a series of lectures with accompanying online activities.

For this course I will be using www.jonathanbriggs.com to disseminate information and support discussion.

I prefer this to Blackboard but would welcome comments and feedback.

All lecture notes will be posted to www.jonathanbriggs.com before each session.

Please ask questions by commenting on the appropriate document or lecture.

Indicative lecture topics

Introduction to ecommerce

Making money: business models

Inside an e-business

Designing effective e-commerce

Technologies to support e-commerce

Building an ecommerce store using Open Source components

Web services

Web pages versus web applications

Designing customer journeys

Payment

Running an e-business company

Lessons from traditional business

Reflections on ecommerce

Search engine optimisation, analytics and web marketing

Online activities

Each week you will be presented with an activity that will allow you to get involved with ideas explored in the lectures.

At the end of each activity you must complete an online survey form to feedback your ideas. I will then provide you with comments and answers questions as appropriate.

It is essential that you participate in all the online activity. In previous years a few students have felt they are following the course only to be disappointed by their exam results.

Many have clearly misunderstood key concepts.

The online components of this course should allow us to test this understanding earlier and help each student improve their performance.

Indicative activities

1. Register and summarise your eCommerce experience so far

2. Evaluation of competitors in a marketplace

3. Building an aShop

4. Exploring Open Source eCommerce software

5. Improving the customer experience

6. Designing customer journeys

7. eCommerce detectives

8. Exploring implementation technologies

9. Google Power

10. Mashups

This year I am able to award up to 10% of the exam mark for your contribution to these activities.

Assessment

- The module will be assessed by examination only (single 2 hour exam). The exam will consist of two parts: one multiple-choice paper plus one short answer paper.
- The short answer paper will be based on an activity that you must complete during the semester. You will take a report produced during the semester into the exam and hand it in along with your exam answers.
- You will NOT be expected to memorise or to copy large sections of your report onto the exam paper but re-present key ideas in answer to specific questions.
- You will work in a small group to complete the activity (Groups must not be larger than 4 people). If you choose to work alone then you should still complete all the deliverables as outlined below.
- The work will involve the creation of a proposal for the improvement of an existing electronic business. Criteria for selecting a suitable business will be distributed in week 3 of the course.

Case study preparation for eCommerce examination

This module is examined using an examination based on a Case Study that you will prepare during the module.

The Case Study asks you to choose an existing UK ecommerce site and make specific improvements as to how it could be improved by comparing it to other sites in the same market.

Areas for your report

1. Background on your chosen “client” and their business
2. Clearly identify (and prioritise) design improvements with explanations of each
3. Description of current and proposed home page improvements using wireframes
4. Exploration of likely levels of existing integration
5. Estimation of current traffic and business
6. Recommendations for SEO, PPC and online marketing activity
7. Competitor analysis (at least 3 other sites)
8. Estimation of current online visibility plus recommendations for improvement
9. Description of current and proposed customer journeys
10. Discuss decision support tools that might be developed to help your customer choose products or services from the site

Choosing your case study client

Must be a UK based company that already sells online

Should not sell mobile phones, general books or DVDs

Must be capable of significant improvement

Budget for improvements should be between £30,000 and £60,000

Must be possible to identify competitors and compare with your chosen company

You do not have to contact the company directly but use information available online

The examination

- The examination consists of 20 multiple choice questions (worth 40%) to test your general understanding of eCommerce concepts plus short answer questions (worth 50%). 10% of your marks are awarded for participation in module activities.
- Please note that you may take a proposal document of up to 10 sides of A4 (Minimum text size 10pt) into your examination. All proposals must be handed in alongside the exam answers. No other notes may be brought into the exam room.
- The case study itself is not marked as part of the examination
- The examination asks you to re-present your ideas in order to answer a series of short answer questions
- These questions will not ask you to consider all of the issues addressed in your report

Preparing your case study

- You may work individually or in a group of no more than 4 people
- Structured activities during the module will allow you to develop parts of the report
- Feedback will be provided on ideas raised during these activities
- You may develop a single document or individual versions
- You must bring the document into the examination and must hand it in
- Find evidence (references and examples) to back up your recommendations
- Draw diagrams to illustrate your ideas
- The module team is unable to review individual reports during the module
- If you are working in a group then it is expected that you will use roughly the same proposal as other members of the same group – this is OK!
- Marks will be deducted if more pages are taken into the exam or if more than 4 students use the same basic proposal!

How to achieve high marks in your examination

1. Read all the questions before you start to make sure that the answer you are writing is not expected later in the paper
2. Answer the questions written rather than the questions you would like to be there
3. Justify suggestions and recommendations you make in your proposals
4. Draw clear labeled diagrams
5. Assume that the marker does not have access to your case study document
6. Provide sufficient points in your answer to justify the number of marks available
7. Spread your time out across all the questions and don't leave any questions completely unanswered
8. Write rough notes at the start of each question and put a single line through it if you do not want it to be marked (we may still give you some marks for these notes)
9. Remember that the first few marks for any question are much easier to achieve than the last few
10. Make sure that your answers refer directly to your case study company

Examination dates

Dates will be advised. I do not have control over the dates as these are set centrally. There are likely to be early in the January exam period.

Example questions for revision

These are more general than those asked in the actual examination but if you can answer all of these you will be well prepared for the exam.

1. What is the biggest fault with the current site, in what way does it damage the site and how would you recommend fixing it?
2. Describe the 3 major changes you would make to the site and explain why these are the most important
3. Describe other companies. B2B partners and other organisations who are likely to be involved in implementing a new version of the site
4. Discuss whether landing pages could be developed for your client and describe how these might affect traffic to the site
5. Describe 3 things that competitors do that you would want to incorporate into the new site
6. Draw a diagram showing the improvements you would make to the visitor journey through the checkout process for the site
7. Design a PPC advertising campaign for the client and explain why it is likely to be successful
8. Estimate in high level terms the work that is likely to be involved in implementing your full proposals
9. Describe suitable technologies for implementing the changes you are suggesting
10. Describe likely future changes in the eCommerce marketplace that you would want to take into consideration in making your recommendations.

Indicative reading

The focus of this module is on the ecommerce business marketplace.

You should try and read some of the following books

Search Engine Marketing Inc., Mike Moran and Bill Hunt, IBM Press (2006), ISBN: 013185292-2

The Perfect Store: inside eBay, Adam Cohen, Piatkus (2002), ISBN: 0749924039

Why we buy, the science of shopping, Paco Underhill, Texere Publishing (2000), ISBN 158799044X

Right Side Up, Alan Mitchell, Harper Collins Business (2001), ISBN: 0002571528

Dot Con, John Cassidy, Allen Lane Publishing (2002), ISBN: 071399598X

Amazon.com: Get Big Fast, Robert Spector, Random House (2000), ISBN: 0712669671

Futurize Your Enterprise: Business Strategy in the Age of the E-customer, David Seigal, Hardcover - 318 pages (September 1999) John Wiley & Sons; ISBN: 0471357634

Net Success : 24 Leaders in Web Commerce Show You How to Put the Web to Work for Your Business, Ford, Haylock, Len Muscarella, Hardcover - 320 pages (April 1999) Adams Media Corporation; ISBN: 1580621147

The E-Commerce Book: Building the E-Empire, Steffano Korper, Juanita Ellis Hardcover - 284 pages (15 August, 1999) Academic Press Inc; ISBN: 0124211607

Customers.com, Patricia Seybold, Hardcover - 380 pages (November 1998), Business (Century/Arrow); ISBN: 0712680713

Contact details

Initially address questions and comments through the website www.jonathanbriggs.com.

I prefer to be contacted by phone than to receive email:

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Please make sure that ALL of your emails have telephone contact details and a proper subject line. Emails without a subject line are likely to be rejected by my spam filters.