



asterisk

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THE PLAN

a. Mission Statement

Asterisk aims to turn Thinkubator into an important networking venue, discussion arena, and information clearinghouse for the alumni of the SFU Master of Publishing program while also serving the academic needs of current students and faculty.

b. Background

The original Thinkubator prototype was conceived as a group project during the 2000 Summer Publishing Workshops and was intended to serve as a site for alumni of the annual Web Publishing Workshop and of the MPub program. Very little documentation from this time exists, but in August 2001, John Maxwell and Haig Armen developed that idea “kernel” into a revised website that sought to “bring together students, researchers, and industry in an ongoing dialogue”—essentially an “online hub for the publishing community.”

Reconceptualized in Spring 2004 by the PubHub group for their Technology Project as a “forum-driven online magazine” for the MPub community (a project documented in *Rethink*), as of March 2005, Thinkubator was comprised of feature articles; project space and course information for current students; mPublic, a directory of current students, faculty, and alumni; external links; and a forum.

At the time, the majority of current MPub students (12 out of 16, or 75 percent) visited Thinkubator at least “almost daily” but the majority of them did so only to read the forum and/or access course pages. While the majority (10 out of 16, or 62.5 percent) had updated their mPublic profile, most only did so when prompted to in class and very few had posted more than a line or two of text. Beyond the current cohort, very few alumni used the site (and those who did are all from the previous year’s MPub cohort), and even fewer faculty were active on the site, which is why Asterisk decided that a redesign of the site and a publicity campaign were necessary.

c. Target Audience

Thinkubator has been redesigned primarily as an online interaction arena for MPub alumni. Our secondary audience is current MPub students, and our tertiary audience is MPub faculty.

Primary Audience: MPub Alumni

Thinkubator’s primary audience is MPub alumni, who are MPub students who have completed their coursework. This group includes a 122 people and grows in size by approximately 18 people each year. The majority are women between the ages of 25 and 40, and they are most likely based in Toronto or Vancouver. This audience is well read, political, intelligent, open-minded, vibrant, urban, and hardworking—not to mention extremely busy. The vast majority work in the editorial, design, marketing, or circulation departments of either a magazine- or book-publishing company. They are interested in current publishing-related issues, and seek a platform to not only express their views on these issues, but also to hear what others in the publishing community have to say. This group is also interested in networking with other publishing professionals.

Secondary Audience: Current MPub Students

Thinkubator's secondary audience is current MPub students. While the makeup of this group changes annually, the current cohort includes 13 women and three men between the ages of 22 and 32. Current MPub students possess similar characteristics to the primary audience, and they aim to work in the publishing industry once they graduate. This audience is curious, creative, and, in some form or another, may have been involved in the publishing community before entering the MPub program. Current MPub students are also interested in discussing publishing-related news and issues, may be looking for information to bring to their course assignments and in-class discussions, and are looking for ways to enter the publishing industry. Like alumni, this audience is extremely busy.

Tertiary Audience: MPub Faculty

MPub faculty includes two women and four men between the ages of 30 and 60, who are either academics or industry professionals.

d. Objectives & Strategies

Our mission was broken down into three key objectives, which were achieved sequentially:

OBJECTIVE #1

To understand the makeup of the current users of Thinkubator, their perception of the site (a.k.a., Thinkubator's brand), and their usage of it in its current format. Also, to gather the vision(s) and opinions of those who are connected to the site's creation and/or maintenance to determine who its audience should be, how to improve the site, and how best to promote it—and, in doing so, find a new direction for the site.

Asterisk manually evaluated existing levels of Thinkubator activity and analyzed the site's server logs; surveyed current MPub students and alumni; and interviewed faculty, Thinkubator's co-publishers, and Haig Armen.

OBJECTIVE #2

To make changes to Thinkubator that will help establish the site as an important online networking venue, discussion arena, and information clearinghouse for MPub alumni, current students, and faculty.

Asterisk removed the sections of the site that weren't useful (or were time-consuming to update), added features requested by our target audience, and made the site easier to use.

OBJECTIVE #3

To develop and carry out a promotional campaign for the "new" Thinkubator to draw more people to the site.

Asterisk planned several promotional events and direct marketing initiatives to ensure that pre-2004 alumni were introduced to the site and set up ongoing promotional strategies to maintain interest in the site.

These three objectives and associated strategies translated into the three phases of our action plan: Research, Redesign, and Relaunch.

PHASE 1: RESEARCH

a. Site Usage

Thinkubator Site Activity (as of March 10, 2005)

Thinkubator was analyzed manually to determine the level of usage of the forum and mPublic pages. Counting up the number of forum postings made between February 3rd and March 9th, 2005, we determined that while there were a substantial number of postings and responses, the majority of these were done by the same group of people—comprised of a handful of alumni from the 2003 cohort, a handful of students from the current cohort, and John Maxwell. Current students were responsible for 43 percent of the postings, alumni from the previous cohort for 45 percent, and John Maxwell for approximately 12 percent. By looking at all of the mPublic profiles, we determined that only 63 percent of current students had created a profile and most had only posted a few sentences; among alumni, that percentage was even lower, and for faculty, only John Maxwell had something posted in his profile.

For more detailed results, please see Appendix C.

Analysis of Server Logs (February 2004)

Asterisk analyzed Thinkubator's server logs to identify how much traffic Thinkubator was receiving. What we found was that the most visited pages of the site were the Homepage and the forum (possibly because these were the pages that people were most likely to have bookmarked). There were many people who visited Thinkubator but only a small handful actively made postings in the forum or updated their mPublic profiles.

For more detailed results, please see Appendix C.

b. Survey Results

MPublic Alumni Survey

Asterisk sent all MPublic alumni for whom we had contact email addresses a link to an online survey about Thinkubator as a way to get to know its primary audience better, how they related to the website, and to find out what would make them use the site more often. We received 19 responses to the survey (with respondents from almost all of the cohorts since 1996) and uncovered that while the majority of alumni had heard of the site, very few of them visited it frequently and even fewer had up-to-date mPublic profiles—if they had them at all. However, it was apparent that if the site was improved to better serve the needs of this group, they would use it more often.

Alumni mainly view Thinkubator as a way to keep in touch/network with former classmates and other MPublic alumni but they also see the site as a potential source for news and information. As a result, they said they would also like more industry news, resources, and the ability to post and browse job postings. Alumni also expressed interest in receiving weekly email updates from Thinkubator.

For more detailed results, please see Appendix C.

Current MPub Students Survey

As for the alumni, Asterisk sent all current MPub students a link to an online survey about Thinkubator as a way to get to know its secondary audience better, how they used the website, to find out what would make them use the site more now, and whether they would continue using the site when they become alumni. All 16 students completed the survey and we uncovered that most of them visited Thinkubator almost daily and that the two most popular sections of the site were the forum (by far) and the course pages.

This group said that during the MPub coursework period, they would like to use Thinkubator to get in touch with alumni for information on the industry, the program, and internships. They also looked to access a greater number course materials (which they said would require faculty to post more on their respective course pages and also to separate out course-related postings from the main forum). Everyone said that they would keep using the site after they finished their coursework, noting that keeping in touch with classmates, industry news and information, and job opportunities would keep them coming back. Current students also expressed interest in receiving monthly email updates from Thinkubator.

For more detailed results, please see Appendix C.

c. Interviews

Summary of Interview with Kathy & Sarah - March 3, 2005

Asterisk began its round of interviews by talking to Kathy Sinclair and Sarah Dingle—Thinkubator’s co-publishers at the time of the interview—who were responsible for compiling and posting features for the site; overseeing the forum; and acting as advocates, promoters, and ambassadors for Thinkubator. They said they saw the site as an online community for past and present MPub students who can use it for information sharing and also as a means of entertainment and procrastination. They noted that Thinkubator is a public site and that some professionalism needs to be maintained, which might be a deterrent to using the site. Other things hindering people from using the site, according to Kathy and Sarah, include shyness, lack of time, and confusion about Thinkubator’s purpose; the site not being user-friendly also posed a problem, in their opinion. Kathy and Sarah wanted Asterisk to clearly identify the site’s mandate, develop its voice, and create content guidelines (defining what was and wasn’t appropriate for the site).

Summary of Interview with Amanda Growe - March 4, 2005

Amanda Growe, an MPub alumna from the 2003 cohort, acted as the Thinkubator co-publisher over the summer before Kathy Sinclair and Sarah Dingle got on board. She said she believed Thinkubator’s function was to allow current and former MPub students to interact and share ideas about common interests. She thought the forum was the best part of the site but she identified a problem: is it a professional site or social site? The site is Googled, and anyone, including prospective employers, can read the site. So Amanda said she constantly censored herself and thus was not benefitting as much as she could from using Thinkubator.

Summary of Faculty Interviews - March 4–11, 2005

Most faculty members were unclear about how to best use Thinkubator. They said that they felt that the content is often relevant and that the site could be useful for their classes but they would forget to check the site and didn't use it for their classes beyond posting the syllabus. However, faculty said they would be interested in receiving an automatically generated email telling them what's newly updated and they would be willing to attend an information session to learn how Thinkubator could enhance their current interaction with students. Faculty also saw the site as a way they could keep in touch with former students and pass along freelance work opportunities.

Summary of Interview with Haig Armen - March 11, 2005

Along with John Maxwell, Haig Armen was one of the original minds behind the Thinkubator project, and he actually came up with the name. The initial idea behind Thinkubator was to act as an online venue for industry professionals across Canada to discuss and “think” about industry-related topics over the web. Our conversation with Haig focused on his disappointment that the current site had abandoned its roots as a discussion forum to become a “gossip” forum. It surprised him to realize that the initial impetus for the site had dropped so low on the list of the site's priorities. (“It's called ‘THINKubator?!?!’”)

Haig said that last year's “forum-driven online magazine” was a particularly strong way to launch discussion and cited *Slashdot* and *Plastic* as popular examples of this format. However, he thought it would work better if the topics on Thinkubator were more focused for a more meaningful discussion. To develop an audience, Haig suggested to do one of two things: find an audience and cater to it, or make the audience general and keep the focus tight.

PHASE 2: REDESIGN

a. Redesign Rationale

Our goals in redesigning Thinkubator were to make it better meet the needs of the site's audiences and to improve its usability—two things that are crucial to establishing Thinkubator as an important networking venue; discussion arena; and information clearinghouse for current MPub students, alumni, and faculty.

Thinkubator's primary audience is MPub alumni and our research indicated that they wanted the site to help them stay in touch and network with former classmates and other MPub alumni and provide them with industry news and information. They also wanted the ability to post and browse job postings. Thinkubator's secondary audience, current MPub students, envisioned the site similarly (especially when they thought ahead to their future use of the site) but they also wanted to have easy access to course information and the ability to contact alumni. Finally, Thinkubator's tertiary audience, MPub faculty, needed to be able to post course information and have a means to post job opportunities.

b. Summary of Site Changes

After evaluating our audiences' needs, Asterisk determined what changes to the site made sense, which ones would add value to the site, and what improvements would make Thinkubator more user-friendly:

Discussion

At the time of our evaluation, the forum was the most visited part of Thinkubator, but postings often contained information that was only of interest to the current MPub class. Since current students can interact with each other either in class or through email, the forum has been re-branded as a platform for discussion about relevant industry-related topics (with five separate categories in which to post). If necessary, the co-publishers can step in to initiate appropriate discussions. Also, the current types of postings that are simply announcements or notices of events will be redirected to the newly created "classifieds" section and course-related posts (in particular presentation notes) will be redirected to the "courses" section. As a value-added feature, users can subscribe to an RSS feed for their forum(s) of choice or an aggregated feed of all five forums.

Classifieds

Alumni requested a way to post job opportunities on Thinkubator and expressed that they were willing to post job openings for other alumni or current students. Faculty—Rowly Lorimer, in particular—were also keen on having an area of the site where they could post freelance work. To meet this need, Thinkubator now includes a classifieds section where people can post and browse job opportunities, upcoming industry events, things for sale, and any other notices that site users want to pass on to others.

Directory

Our research indicated that both alumni and current students like the idea of an alumni directory since it gives them an opportunity to keep in touch with their classmates and network across cohorts, and faculty like being able to stay in touch with former students. *Rethink's* original concept of a directory, mPublic, was not successful because few people

visited the section; it is perceived as difficult to use, and it contained various bugs. Asterisk's redesign of this section addresses these concerns and our promotional plan will remind people to update their directory profile every year so that the information is kept current.

Other Notes

The redesigned Thinkubator will no longer include a feature article. The feature was only updated periodically (rarely as often as it should have been) and was a time-consuming project for the co-publishers who already have a heavy school workload to manage. Also, our research indicated that this section was not driving people to the site—nor was it very popular—and we felt it was important to make the site's contents appear current.

Although alumni and current students stated that they wanted to see industry-related news and information on Thinkubator, Asterisk believes that there are several other online news sites and offline resources, such as *Quill & Quire*, that effectively meet this need. Our goal for Thinkubator is not to compete with other resources, nor to act as an aggregator of information that can be easily found elsewhere online, nor do we have the resources to generate this sort of content ourselves. However, the existing resources pages, with links to industry news, job boards, and government employment/internship programs, have been retained.

c. How the Site Works

Logins

Logins are important because they are a way to manage Thinkubator's users and their activities. Anyone can browse the site but MPub alumni, current students, and faculty are encouraged to "join" Thinkubator and then subsequently log in each time they use the site in order to start or reply to a discussion in the forums, post classifieds, update their directory listing, and add to the courses section.

Joining is self-serve: anyone can get a login by filling in an online form. There's a link that, when clicked, opens a window with the form that needs to be completed to get a username and password. People are asked for their real name and a valid email address, and they create a username and password. There's also a box that can be clicked if they want to opt out of receiving Thinkubator promotional emails, site update emails, newsletters, etc. When they click "submit," an email is sent to John Maxwell who checks that the name and email address correspond to an MPub student, alumni, or faculty (to avoid spam from invading our discussion) and, if they do, John sends them a confirmation email, including the guidelines for using the site and their username and password.

Role of the co-publishers

The co-publishers work with John Maxwell to maintain the site and promote it as the networking venue, discussion arena, and information clearinghouse that it is meant to be. Two MPub students serve as co-publishers at any given time. In the spring and summer semesters, there are two students from the same cohort. In the fall, there is one student from the older cohort and one from the newer cohort.

Please see Appendix D for the co-publishers' job description, which also contains a list of the accompanying duties and responsibilities.

Role of John Maxwell

As Thinkubator’s “executive publisher,” John Maxwell oversees and manages Thinkubator and creating directory pages for each new class of MPub. His duties include granting access to those who request user names and passwords; responding to emails sent by people having trouble using the site; implementing site changes, improvements, and bug fixes, as necessary; and coordinating the current co-publishers (as necessary) and soliciting new ones when their term is up. John is also responsible for leading faculty information sessions.

d. Main Site Components

Discussion

Thinkubator’s forum has traditionally been the most popular part of the site, and we’re re-branded it as an arena for discussion and thought about important industry-related topics. In redesigning the forum, Asterisk has split the discussion into five category sections to make it more user-friendly and to avoid clutter. The categories include Books, Magazines, Design, Technology, and Miscellaneous. Users don’t need to log in to read the discussion, only to start or reply to discussions. When they post a new message, their first and last name will display as opposed to their username.

The co-publishers will monitor discussion postings to see if categories need to be added or deleted. They will also instigate discussions, if no one is posting in a particular forum, for example.

Classifieds

The classifieds section provides a venue for posting job opportunities, industry event listings, buy & sell ads, and any other notices or announcements. Anyone can browse the classifieds that have been posted, but people need to log in to post a notice. This is a post-only feature, with the postings listed in reverse chronological order and displayed by category, 30 per page. To post a notice, the user has to complete an online form specific to the section in which they want to post the ad, with a title for the notice, additional details, their contact information, and an expiry date. The notice is only posted until the day following the expiry date.

Directory

The directory will allow current MPub students, alumni, and faculty to network with each other. Alumni, current students (including incoming students once they’ve been formally accepted), and faculty can create a profile by filling out an online form with fields for name; current city of residence; internship location (if applicable); job title; and optional fields for other details, such as what they read, what they listen to, and a photo, if desired. There will be a listing included for each alumna and alumnus, current student, and faculty, which can be updated once they request and receive a username and password. There will also be a box to click if the user is willing to be contacted by others, which will allow site users to send them email via the site (without their email address being displayed). There is also webspace linked to each person’s directory listing that can be used to file, host a blog, or serve as a professional portfolio—the use is up to the user (limited only by the functionality of zope). There will be a “last updated” date listed at the bottom of each profile. Linked discussions can be initiated automatically when new files/resources are posted to this section simply by filling in the “discussion question” field at the time of upload.

MPub Courses

Thinkubator is a convenient place for current students and faculty to post course-related documents and information. The MPub Courses section will have one page for each MPub course and group project. Ideally, the instructor for each course will post the course syllabus, and assignments and resources as appropriate, and students will also be able to post their presentation notes. Linked discussions can be initiated automatically when new files/resources are posted to this section simply by filling in the “discussion question” field at the time of upload.

Please Appendix F for the site map and wireframes.

e. Ancillary Site Components

About

The About page describes the site and how it works—essentially why things are the way they are. Also included is the site’s mandate and mission statement, contact info for the current co-publishers and John Maxwell, a blurb about the CCSP and the MPub program, and a link to the CCSP website.

Search

Search is used to locate specific contents of the site.

Help

The Help page includes information on the following topics: how to join/get a username, how to log in, how to post in the discussion, how to navigate the discussion, how to upload files to various sections of the site, how to use the search feature, how to post a classified, and how to update your directory listing. John’s email address will also be included in case people still have questions or are experiencing other problems.

Resources

This page includes links to various offsite resources—such as industry new and job boards—and various useful documents (tipsheet for interviews, etc.) and interactive features (moving-to-Toronto wiki).

RSS

Users can subscribe to an RSS feed for their forum(s) of choice or an aggregated feed of all five discussions.

Please see Appendix F for the site map and wireframes.

f. Intended Use Cases

Primary Audience: MPub Alumni

Jill Krox successfully completed the coursework for her MPub degree. She sailed through all her classes and aced all her finals and papers. Jill just finished her internship at a medium-size publishing house in Montréal during the summer and has come back to Vancouver to write her project report. At this stage, Jill visits the website four to five times a week mainly to read what other people have posted in the discussions. Jill only occasionally initiates discussions in the forum, but she always logs in just in case she wants to make a post. She enters the site from the main page, logs in, and immediately clicks the books-discussion icon. Once she has read the most recent postings, Jill decides to check out the directory to see her classmates' and other alumni's updated profiles. After having a laugh at Jim's recent listening choice, Jill then exits the site.

As a new alumna, Jill soon discovers the benefits Thinkubator provides especially for her. Having worked for four months in an intense publishing atmosphere, Jill finds she has more insight into the Canadian publishing industry than the new MPub cohort. She begins to identify with the alumni who have worked in the industry for a number of years and post regularly in the discussion. As a result, Jill begins to post more often in the discussions. By this time, Jill has bookmarked Thinkubator's main page on the first new topic listed in the books discussion. When she enters the site, she immediately clicks on the first new topic listed under the books category—copyright in Canada. When she reads a comment with which she strongly disagrees, Jill adds her two cents. Jill then logs out and exits the site.

While Jill is working on her project report, she begins to think about finding a full-time job somewhere in Canada. She decides early on to take some time off after her internship to work on her project report. Whether or not she finishes by January, Jill intends to find a job by the start of the new year and turns to Thinkubator. On a daily basis, she enters the site, clicks on the classifieds tab at the top of the main page, and takes a look at the most recent job postings. One day, Jill finds an intriguing job posting in her field of interest and notices that the application deadline is three days away. She takes note of the contact name and email address, and decides to apply right away. Jill's application catches the eye of a book publisher in Toronto, himself an MPub alumnus. He recognizes Jill's name from the posts on the Thinkubator discussion and remembers being impressed with her comments. He phones up Jill for an interview and ends up offering her the job.

Finally, finishing up her project report in time to start her new job, Jill moves to Toronto. Jill still has the Thinkubator main page bookmarked on her computer and visits the site daily. Jill reads the classifieds less frequently but remains a regular contributor to the discussion and enjoys having a creative and thought-provoking space to interact with other alumni on industry-related topics. Jill also updates in her directory listing for the benefit of the current MPub cohort in case they need to contact her with any questions about the program, her internship, or her new job. Eventually, when Jill is looking to hire someone for the new imprint of which she is in charge, she notices an application from an MPub graduate, and she visits Thinkubator to look up the applicant in the directory.

Secondary Audience: MPub students

Darren Anderson is part of the current MPub cohort. Ecstatic about being accepted into the program, Darren attends the orientation enthusiastically. However, he feels slightly nervous about entering a new school. He hopes to find new friends among the other members of his cohort. During the orientation, John Maxwell introduces Thinkubator to the new students and tells everyone that they can request their own user names and passwords. As John is giving his Thinkubator pitch, Darren remembers coming across Thinkubator a few months ago but was intimidated with the level of sophisticated banter present in the discussions.

With John's encouragement, Darren "joins" Thinkubator. When Darren visits the site for the first time, he sees the classifieds tab at the top of the main page and decides to check it out. When he enters the Buy & Sell page, Darren happily sees that a member of last year's cohort is selling the textbook for the marketing prerequisite at a very low price. Darren immediately clicks the link included in the post to email the seller. Darren also begins to regularly visit the discussions to read the posts, and he logs in to contribute frequently to the discussion in the technology forum. Darren discovers that he can debate with alumni and discovers a new sense of confidence in himself. Darren also enjoys going through his classmates' and the alumni's bios in the directory. He is impressed with the alumni profiles, and thinks that he will contact Jill Krox and ask about her internship in Montreal.

During the school year, Darren visits Thinkubator five times a week to access course resources, uploaded readings, and course outlines in the courses section. Several faculty members use the Thinkubator forums to initiate discussions on course-related topics as well. On Monday afternoon, after his Text and Context class, Darren enters the Thinkubator site and clicks the courses icon located in the side bar of the main page. He then clicks on the Text and Context icon, and prints off an article that Rowly has posted as next class' required reading.

Tertiary Audience: Faculty

Craig Riggs is the instructor for PUB600. He has a lot of handouts to distribute to the class and finds it beneficial to post them on Thinkubator. Not only does he save the department administrative costs from printing, and photocopying, Craig also uses Thinkubator as a way to store his handouts and finds it much more convenient to tell his students to "check Thinkubator" than to shuffle among his files for a paper copy. Craig logs in to Thinkubator and clicks on the courses link, then clicks on the PUB600 link, and posts his course handouts within two minutes. Craig also regularly posts changes on Thinkubator to his course syllabus since he prefers to direct all his students online to find the most up-to-date document.

He uploads a particularly interesting article on purple cows that initiates a discussion linked to it in the books forum. When Craig hears about a marketing internship at The Walrus, he posts the job in the classifieds section.

PHASE 3: RELAUNCH

a. Thinkubator's Brand

At present, the Thinkubator brand is a forum-driven site used primarily to post PUB802 handouts and instigate discussions. A few current MPub students also see the site as a place to post jobs, or discuss social events. A few MPub alumni see the site as a place to interact with current students, and a place to find moral support as they complete their project reports. Most of the alumni who currently use the site are from the previous year's cohort, are unemployed, thus have time on their hands, and live in Vancouver. Asterisk has decided that MPub alumni and our branding efforts will be directed towards them.

The Thinkubator brand will expand to primarily target MPub alumni. At present, Thinkubator is associated with the CCSP and MPub, which will help give the brand credibility and authority among the older alumni. There is no other website that currently serves MPub alumni. The easy-to-use format and quality content of Thinkubator will enhance a powerful brand and help it become the hub of the MPub alumni community.

The Thinkubator brand is already strong within a small group (current students and the 2003-04 cohort), so the present challenge is to expand the brand recognition and brand equity to alumni by adding meaningful content, making structural changes, and by using innovative promotional strategies.

The following are the conditions favourable to branding and how Thinkubator will address them. (The "favourable conditions" are all taken from *Basic Marketing: A Global-Managerial Approach*, p.292.)

1. *The product is easy to identify by a trademark brand.*

Thinkubator has a name and logotype that are easy to remember and recognize. One downfall is that it is not evident from its name that Thinkubator is an interactive MPub alumni site. However, brand familiarity will be established through initial and ongoing promotional efforts.

2. *The product is the best value for the price. And the quality is easy to maintain.*

There is no cost to Thinkubator, other than the user's valuable time, and Thinkubator competes with other websites for people's time, attention, and energy. Thinkubator must deliver the best value compared to other sites and it must deliver quality material, with which the brand will be associated. Thinkubator's content will be refined and expanded to create a site that is valuable to its users.

3. *Dependable and widespread availability is possible. When customers start using a brand, they want to be able to continue using it.*

As a website hosted by SFU, Thinkubator will always be accessible because the server is stable.

4. *The demand for the general product class is large.*

The demand for websites is high and those sites offering forums and timely information, both of which Thinkubator will do, are especially desirable (taken from *The Magnet Effect*). Thinkubator has a niche within that framework as it will cater to the MPub alumni.

5. *The demand is strong enough so that the market price can be high enough to make the branding effort profitable.*

As previously mentioned, there is no money exchanged for using Thinkubator; the cost is in the time and effort it takes to enjoy and use the site. Asterisk fully expects Thinkubator to be realized as a well-used site with ongoing promotion efforts. Further, the success of Thinkubator as a site will not be measured by profitability, but rather by increased usage.

b. Promotions Plan

Overview

Once the Thinkubator redesign is complete, Asterisk will begin to implement promotional strategies to market the website to its target audiences. These strategies will make alumni, current students, and faculty become interested enough in Thinkubator to visit the site and become regular users. Our promotional objectives look not only to make our target audience aware of Thinkubator but also to encourage them to become active participants and contributors. We also strive to maintain a high level of regular usage from alumni, students, and faculty with ongoing updates in the form of e-newsletters, office homepages, and posters throughout the year.

Strategies for All Audiences

Launch Party

A launch party for Thinkubator is planned to coincide with the Master of Publishing Program's 10th anniversary and SFU's 40th anniversary celebrations in September 2005. Many members of our target audiences will attend the celebration making this event the perfect place to launch the new Thinkubator site. Current plans involve setting up a table with information about Thinkubator and a computer to demo the site. People will be encouraged to sign up for a username and password. Thinkubator flyers will also be distributed at the event. Asterisk will prepare these flyers, and they will be printed from the department printer. John Maxwell will also speak briefly on the benefits of Thinkubator. John and the co-publishers will coordinate the table at the event.

Electronic Newsletter

Survey responses indicate that most current students and alumni would like to receive email updates from Thinkubator as long as the emails inform readers what is new on the website. A weekly e-newsletter (*Please see Appendix E*) will be sent to those who have requested to receive it. When people sign up for an account on Thinkubator, the online form will ask whether or not they would like to receive this e-newsletter. A little over half the people Asterisk surveyed subscribe to other e-newsletters, so the concept is not foreign to our audience. The e-newsletter will play a key role in generating interest in the discussions taking place on the discussion forum and to drive people to check out what is new on the site. The co-publishers will be responsible for creating and sending out the newsletters.

Strategies Specifically for MPub Alumni

Asterisk believes that if Thinkubator is redesigned based on our recommendations, students will naturally become regular users of the site before they become alumni. The launch event and e-newsletters will encourage pre-2004 alumni to use the website. In addition, the following two promotional initiatives will be implemented:

Survey

A survey was created for alumni to answer questions about Thinkubator. As soon as the survey was emailed, alumni became aware of Thinkubator's existence and several alumni have responded by requesting a username and password. The same group were informed about the new and improved Thinkubator, as well. As incentive to complete the survey, an autographed photo of Rowly Lorimer was won.

Personal phone calls

There are currently 122 alumni. For those who never responded to the survey, a personal follow-up phone call will be made to let them know about the new website as well as taking down their information for the site's director. They may not have responded to the email survey because they have new contact information that MPub needs to know. The phone call will serve as a way to update the directory as well as promote Thinkubator. The majority of the alumni probably do not update their email information with Jo-Anne Ray, but she knows where each alumni works in the industry and, as such, these people can be reached. Phone calls will take place one month prior to the September launch party and also serve as an invitation reminder. Co-publishers will make the calls.

Strategies Specifically for Current MPub Students

Homepages

Thinkubator is now the homepage for all the computers in rooms 3042, 3044, and 3046 (the project "offices"). Seeing this homepage every time they use the Internet will remind students that Thinkubator is the official website for the MPub program and encourage them to use it regularly.

Posters

The MPub areas on the third floor will have Thinkubator posters displayed on the bulletin boards. Posters will advertise the Thinkubator's features and how the website can help current students network with alumni. The posters will bring Thinkubator into the forefront of people's minds and make it a part of the third-floor MPub community. The first posters will be designed and placed up on the bulletin boards by Asterisk. Co-publishers will monitor the posters and replace them as needed. They will be printed from the department's printer.

Orientation Package

A flyer about Thinkubator will accompany all orientation packages sent to MPub students. These easy-to-do and inexpensive flyers will introduce members of each new cohort to Thinkubator early in the year. Asterisk will provide Jo-Anne Ray with a small box of flyers and ask her to insert them in mailouts to incoming students. (These are the same flyers that will also be distributed at the launch party.)

Strategies Specifically for Faculty

Mpub faculty will be provided with an individualized handout (*Please see Appendix E*) on how they can and why they should incorporate Thinkubator into their coursework. Interviews with faculty revealed that many instructors do not use Thinkubator because they do not see how the website could benefit them. Also, they do not realize how easy it can be to use Thinkubator. This handout will hopefully encourage faculty to incorporate Thinkubator into their curriculum. John Maxwell will also lead faculty information sessions in September.

Targeting faculty will also provide the additional benefit of encouraging current students to use Thinkubator regularly. For example, if faculty regularly post handouts on Thinkubator, students will have to visit the site more often.

APPENDIX A

Project and Group Details

Project Team

| | |
|--------------------|----------------------------------|
| Christine Davidson | Document Editor |
| Holland Gidney | Document Editor/Graphic Designer |
| Robyn Matthew | Technical Lead |
| Susan Pi | User Advocate |
| Heather Young | Project Manager |

Meeting Schedule

Asterisk held meetings every Thursday afternoon, Friday afternoon, and Monday evening; Thursday afternoons we met with our technical consultant, Wesley Fok. We scheduled other meetings as needed.

Decision Making

There was an agreed-upon discussion time for each issue, then we moved to vote and decide on a majority basis.

Reporting

The contents of this report is primarily intended for Thinkubator's co-publishers, but is also directed at the site's creators, MPub faculty, and those who have an interest in the site's development.

Evaluation Methods

We will measure our success by evaluating the degree to which we achieve our goals and objectives, and also by our answers to the following questions:

1. Have we researched the Thinkubator audience and gained insight into how they use Thinkubator? Have we created a quality vision for Thinkubator? Does this vision have a meaningful audience and a larger purpose?
2. Have we redesigned Thinkubator in such a way that will encourage MPub alumni, current students, and faculty to use and enjoy the site?
3. Have we put in place immediate and long-term promotional strategies to help create and maintain the audience for the site?

APPENDIX B

Terms of Reference

Alumni

Alumni refers to students who have successfully completed all courses in the Master of Publishing Program at Simon Fraser University. Alumni are Asterisk's primary audience for Thinkubator.

Audience

The audience refers to various groups of people who use Thinkubator for different reasons and purposes. Our primary audience is MPub alumni, our secondary audience is current MPub students, and our tertiary audience is MPub faculty.

Brand

A brand represents an image of a product or service that people recognize right away. The best brands are so strongly associated with a particular entity that they become indistinguishable from one another. (see *Thinkubator Brand*)

Brand Recognition

Brand recognition is when customers remember the brand. Thinkubator's brand recognition will come from our promotions and word-of-mouth.

CCSP

CCSP stands for Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing. Founded in 1987, Simon Fraser University's Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing is a university/industry initiative dedicated to the development of publishing in Canada and internationally.

Co-publishers

Co-publishers of Thinkubator act as ambassadors, promoters, and advocates for the site. John coordinates the recruitment and training of six co-publishers a year, on a rotational basis. (See *Appendix F for job description.*)

John Maxwell

John Maxwell is the professor for the PUB802 and 607 courses for the Master of Publishing Program. He came up with the original concept of Thinkubator along with Haig Armen in 2001 and continues to be Thinkubator's biggest advocate. John Maxwell would make a good paper topic for PUB802.

Logotype

A logotype is a stylized treatment of a name with no additional logo, as in the typographic treatment of the actual word "Thinkubator" at the top of the pages on the site.

MPub

North America's premier training ground for professional publishing, the Master of Publishing Program at SFU is a rigorous 16-month program of seminars, guest lectures, group projects, an internship, and project report.

Peak

When there is the largest number of users using a site. On Thinkubator, the peak falls between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Post (Posting)

To upload a message, or the message itself, on Thinkubator that initiates a “discussion” in an effort to solicit responses.

Promotion

Promotions increase awareness of a brand. They serve as strategies to reach an intended audience and attract them to the product. Thinkubator will benefit from initial and ongoing promotional strategies which will create an awareness of the site, and hence the brand.

pubHub

PubHub is the MPub 2003-04 Technology Project group that produced the *Rethink* report and redesigned Thinkubator.

Regular Usage

Regular usage consists of users who visit Thinkubator at least once a week. Ideally, all users will visit the sit at least this often.

Rethink

Rethink is the report produced by pubHub. The group’s mandate was to bring Thinkubator to its full potential. They redesigned Thinkubator as a “magazine-driven forum for the MPub community.”

Spike

The graphical representation of an increase in usage on a site. As part of Asterisk’s research, we identifies a spike in Thinkubator usage that occurs between 10pm and 1am.

Thinkubator

Thinkubator is an important networking venue, discussion arena, and information clearinghouse for MPub alumni, current students, and faculty. Thinkubator is managed by the co-publishers and John Maxwell.

Thinkubator Brand

The Thinkubator brand unifies and represents the MPub community online by offering a unique site that provides discussion forums, classifieds (including job postings and industry events), and an MPub directory.

Usability

Usability is the measure of how easily something can be used. In terms of websites, it examines how well the functionality of the site fits users’ needs, how the flow of the application fits users tasks, and how the response of the application fits users’ expectations. Usability describes the ease with which users of a certain website can find what they are seeking with the least amount of frustration and confusion possible. Thinkubator will be designed with the users’ needs in mind and will also incorporate revised “search” and “help” functions to enhance usability.

Usability Testing

Usability testing entails a systematic look at the way in which Thinkubator’s users actually use the site. On a one-on-one basis, the tester studies how each user navigates the site and documents the areas that trip up its users and actually impede users’ navigation through the site. Usability testing allows the website’s creators to fine-tune the site on a more specific basis to ensure that it is as user-friendly as possible. PubHub employed usability testing to create the current Thinkubator; we didn’t have time.

Usage

Usage will be determined according to the site's posting levels and traffic statistics. Asterisk is concerned with what pages and sections of Thinkubator are currently used the most, how much, and by whom.

Use Case

Use case describes the ideal user of Thinkubator and how they would likely interact with the website on a regular basis. It states when, how often, and for what reason users visit Thinkubator. The use case also details how the user navigates through the site.

Users

Users are the individual people who concern themselves with the information and resources found on Thinkubator. They may use all or any part of the site and still be considered users. They may or may not login or post. They are people who benefit from visiting the site and using its features. Asterisk's goal is to have MPub alumni as core users.

APPENDIX C

Research Details

Details of Thinkubator Site Activity (as of March 10, 2005)

Forum usage

* There were 67 posts and 154 responses in the 38 days. Therefore, there were 1.76 posts/day and 4.05 responses/day. In other words, there were 221 postings and responses in total, or 5.82 posts and responses/day. Unless otherwise specified, the “posts” or “postings” below refer to the original post as well as the responses to it.

* 11 percent of the postings were done by profs

* 45 percent of the postings were done by alumni (all from the previous cohort)

* 43 percent of the postings were done by current students

Previous cohort:

* 13 of the 18 have used the forum = 81 percent

* 5 of those people have made 75 percent of the posts (agrowe, annaBC, cahernan, lgontard, and pfred)

Current students:

* 10 of the 16 have used the forum = 63 percent

* 4 of those people have made 73 percent of the posts (heathery, hegidney, jencroll, wfok)

* 10 of the original posts were directly related to PUB802

Faculty:

* 2 of the 6 have used the forum = 33 percent

* one person (jmax, aka John Maxwell) has made 96 percent of the posts

mPublic

mPublic is not being used to any extent by current students. (In fact, 10 of the 16 current students (62.5 percent) have created a profile in the mPublic section. Although a high percentage of students have mPublic profiles, most of them have only written a few sentences to make up their new page.

Thinkubator Site Usage Statistics (February 2005)

Select statistics pulled from the server logs:

The Thinkubator logs can be found at: <http://thinkubator.ccsf.sfu.ca:8080/zopestats/>

* Total Visits: 14,059

* Total User names: 37

* Average Visits per day: 502

* Peak Usage: 9am-4pm

* Second Spike: 10pm-1am

* Primary External User Agent: Google

* Most visited page: Homepage, forum

* Top Entry Pages: forum, RSS

* Top Exit Pages: RSS, forum

* Top Referrers: forum, Home

* Top Users (who log in): Wesley, John, Jen, Anna BC

MPub Alumni Survey Results

The survey can be found here: <http://www.chrominance.net/TKBRsurvey/surveyAlumStart.php>

The summary of the results can be found here: http://www.chrominance.net/TKBRsurvey/results_Alumni.php

Highlights

Asterisk received 19 responses from the survey. The responses were well spread out from year to year starting from 1996:

- * 1996: 1
- * 1998: 2
- * 1999: 3
- * 2000: 3
- * 2001: 2
- * 2002: 1
- * 2003: 7

Fifteen people had heard of Thinkubator before the survey but only four people visit it at least “almost daily”. Nine people never visit the site at all and 11 people have never filled out their mPublic profile. From these responses, it’s clear that alumni do not play an active role in Thinkubator currently. Yet, there is an interest from the majority in having an online venue for publishing professionals to interact within. Most cited MPub bios, e-mail reminders, job postings, and industry events as ways to maintain their interest in Thinkubator.

The following comments from various surveys indicate the potential of Thinkubator:

“If Thinkubator is set up as a blog with an RSS feed then I would subscribe to the feed, but I wouldn’t want regular emails. The value of Thinkubator has not been established in my mind. What are the benefits of using it, what can it do for me? Those questions would have to be answered before I would be encouraged to use the site.”

“More industry news. A lot of what’s posted is about technology (which makes sense given its origins in the tech part of MPub), but I’m in editorial and am interested in editorial and general publishing news. Granted, I get a lot of it from *Quill & Quire* and work, but it would be nice to see more of that on the TKBR.”

“If it were a resource for me to stay up-to-date on new technologies or trends in the industry, or provided other references. The option to connect with other MPubbers if I run across jobs or opportunities would also be useful. I haven’t spent too much time checking out Thinkubator up to this point.”

The redesigned version of Thinkubator addressed their concerns and served alumni in a much better way than it is currently. Alumni also got a chance to keep connected with their cohort and the MPub community in the closed section of the redesigned Thinkubator. This section is important since:

- * 15 people at least somewhat agree that Thinkubator is useful to help them keep in touch with the MPub community.
- * 14 people at least somewhat agree that Thinkubator will be useful to get in touch with their cohort.

- * 12 people at least somewhat agree to post job openings on Thinkubator.
- * Everyone at least somewhat agree to want to know other MPubbers who are in the industry.
- * 16 people at least somewhat agree that MPub is a network that they could take advantage of.
- * 18 people said they would be willing to be contacted by current MPub students looking for guidance.

The alumni who answered the survey also spend a lot of time online with 17 people spending 7+ hours per week on the Internet. The majority post on forums and look for industry information online.

17 people were willing to be contacted for further interviews.

Current MPub Students Survey Results

The survey can be found here: <http://www.chrominance.net/TKBRsurvey/surveyStuStart.php>

The survey results can be found here: http://www.chrominance.net/TKBRsurvey/results_Student.php

Highlights

The entire current MPub cohort completed the survey. Among the 16 surveys, there was a general consensus on how everyone viewed Thinkubator. Currently, the website successfully serves as a social hub for current students to congregate. Twelve students visit Thinkubator almost daily and the forum is ranked as the most visited page on Thinkubator.

The following sections are ranked in order of most visited:

1. Forum
2. Courses
3. Hot Topics
4. Features
5. mPublic
6. Resources
7. Links

There was also a general consensus on who is included in the MPub community. Everyone believed alumni, current students, and faculty belonged in the same community. This result reveals a cohesive group with members identifying with each other. Everyone said they would continue using Thinkubator after they graduate because they want to stay in touch with classmates. Up-to-date publishing news and job opportunities were also frequently cited as a reason to keep coming back to Thinkubator. A few problems were identified with Thinkubator that potentially hindered several of the current students from using the website more often.

Improvement suggestions by current students include:

- * Adding industry news and relevant articles.
- * Making the alumni database more complete and user-friendly.
- * Improving site usability by fixing the problems that users identified in the surveys .
- * Providing a more comprehensive job opportunities page.
- * Getting faculty to be more involved with.

The majority of the current students are relatively technologically savvy:

- * Everyone uses email to communicate with other people.
- * 6 people post on forums.
- * 11 people spend 7 hours or more per week online.
- * 6 people use a form of instant messenger.
- * 3 people have online blogs.

APPENDIX D

Thinkubator Co-Publisher Job Description

John Maxwell coordinates the recruitment and training of six co-publishers a year, on a rotational basis.

position summary:

The co-publishers of Thinkubator act as ambassadors, promoters, and advocates for the site.

position requirements:

Candidates must be either a current MPub student or, in the case of the co-publisher who overlaps with the next cohort, part of the most recent cohort. Successful candidates will be self-motivated and enthusiastic about making Thinkubator the best it can be!

duties and responsibilities:

1 Monitor the discussion forums to see if categories need to be added or deleted depending on popularity.

Timeline: weekly

2 Initiate discussions in the forum.

Timeline: as necessary, there should be at least one new discussion per week in each section (if not, the co-publishers should start one)

3 Monitor the discussion postings and the classifieds to make sure there is no spam, offensive content, or libellous content.

Timeline: daily

4 Add links, resources, information, etc. to the Resources section of the site.

timeline: once per term (minimum)

5 Add new fields for users to fill in their directory listings (such as, "what I am reading")

Timeline: one per term (minimum)

6 Email the Thinkubator newsletter to all requesting users.

Timeline: weekly

7 Suggest site improvements and point out bugs.

Timeline: as necessary (however, they should do one full site review per term)

8 Monitor and replace the Thinkubator posters on the third floor to ensure they are present and in good condition.

Timeline: as necessary

9 Act as a promoter and ambassador for the site.

Timeline: all the time!

decision making:

Make decisions regarding discussion categories and appropriateness of content. Make decisions about timing and content for adding stimulating discussion to the forum. Work with John to make decisions regarding site improvements.

APPENDIX E

Promotional Materials

Weekly E-Newsletter

To: <recipient's email>
From: publishers@thinkubator.ccsp.sfu.ca
Subject: Think you know Thinkubator? Think again!

<first name>,

Discover. Engage. Discuss. Check out Thinkubator!

What's hot in the books discussion:

<hottest topic headline with link to homepage>

<hottest topic headline with link to homepage>

What's new in the technology discussion:

<newest headline with link to homepage>

<newest headline with link to homepage>

Your profile in the directory hasn't been updated in <amount of time>. Click here to update it now! ("here" is linked to main directory page)

Visit Thinkubator today!

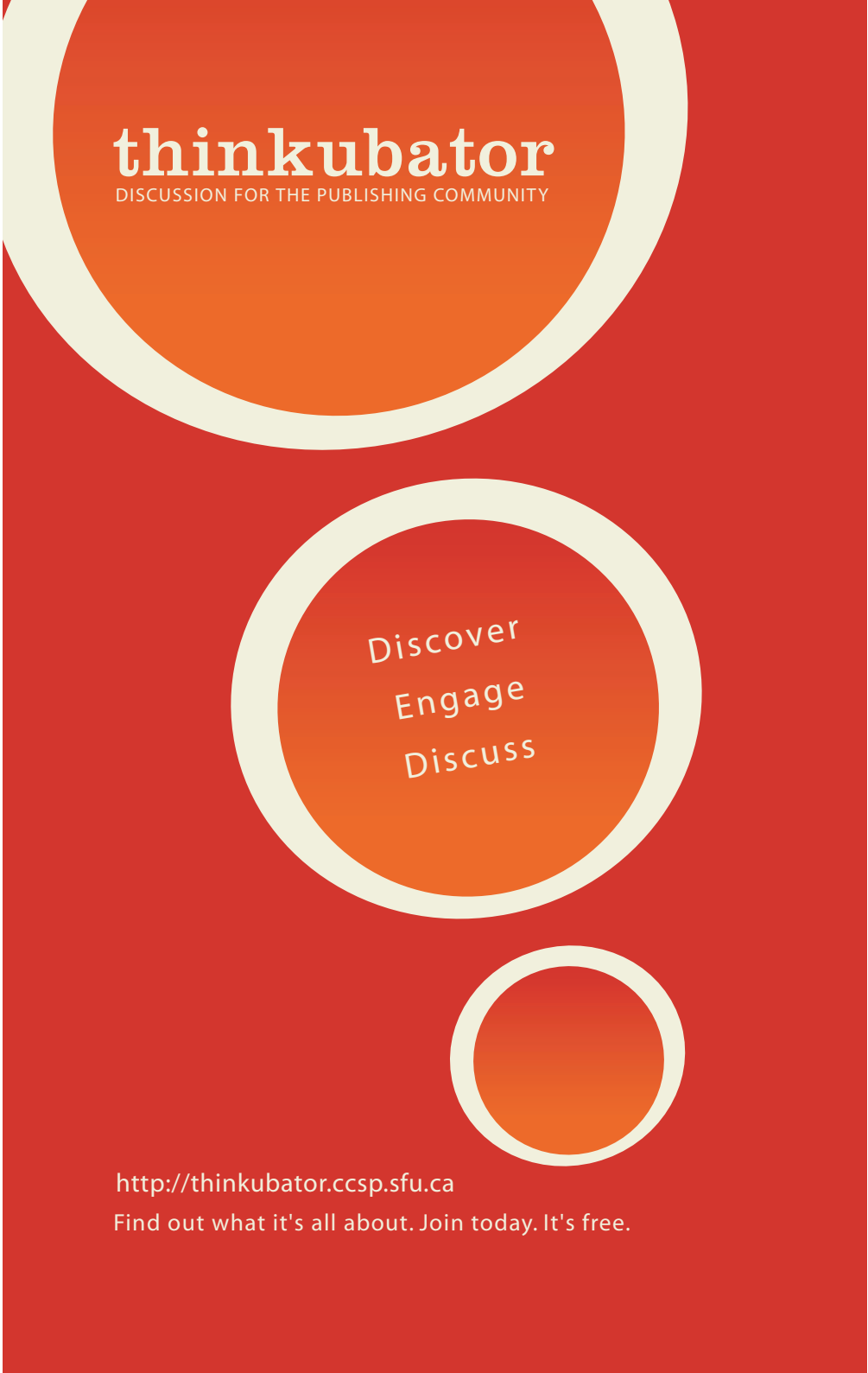
Thinkubator is an online networking venue, discussion arena, and information clearinghouse for SFU MPub community.

See you online!

From <co-publishers' names and email contact info>

You are receiving this email because you are subscribed to Thinkubator's e-newsletter. If you wish to cancel your subscription, please email jmax@sfu.ca.

Poster/Flyer



thinkubator
DISCUSSION FOR THE PUBLISHING COMMUNITY

Discover
Engage
Discuss

<http://thinkubator.ccsp.sfu.ca>
Find out what it's all about. Join today. It's free.

Faculty Letter

Dear Faculty,

Please join your colleagues for an information session led by John Maxwell describing the benefits of Thinkubator for you and your students. Learn how the site can save you time, enhance your courses, and aid your students. A thirty-minute investment in Thinkubator will translate into time saved in the future.

By posting course information on Thinkubator, instructors contribute to an important resource where students can access the most beneficial and applicable materials for their studies.

Time Saving Mechanism:

Your time is valuable and so is that of your students. You will be saving yourself and your students time by posting readings and notes on Thinkubator, which offers a more effective means of disseminating information than emails or photocopies.

Central Location:

One of Thinkubator's advantages is that it's an online resource designed specifically for the MPub community. At present, professors are using divergent methods to contact their students with a vast amount of information that could be consolidated into one central and organized spot. Thinkubator's messages, links, and articles are archived for easy reference.

Development of an Important Resource:

As professors and instructors post more and more of their course materials and reference articles on Thinkubator, the more valuable the site becomes as a resource.

Students benefit from a one-stop resource for course content and related materials, and Thinkubator offers the perfect vehicle to acquire such information. Instead of having to scroll through countless emails to retrieve the email associated with an important article on BookNet, the student can simply tap into the relevant Thinkubator courses section where the document can be easily located.

Improving Course Content Over Time:

Thinkubator also acts as a warehouse for expanding course content over time. Additions and changes to courses can be completed throughout the year to reflect advancements made in the industry and to keep content as current and relevant as possible. Also, handouts can be downloaded and printed when students are ready to process the information. You would no longer need to print copies of information that students could access on their own.

Extending the Learning Experience Outside of the Classroom:

Thinkubator is excellent for piquing interest outside of class on related topics. You can generate conversation topics discussed in class and add more fuel to the fire on some topics with additional material not on hand during class. You can be both a generator of content and responder to it. Students will benefit from your expertise and guidance in delving even deeper into the topic at hand.

Students Come to Class More Prepared:

Posting discussion topics on Thinkubator before class begins will allow students to better prepare for class, contribute to the discussion, and retain more of the information. A time line on the Thinkubator with related articles for certain classes will assist students without a class syllabus on hand.

Overall Benefits:

All these points add up to two important benefits for you: saving time and enriching the classroom experience. You will become more efficient in your class management and your students will appreciate the faculty's efforts to facilitate easy access to course information.

Thank you for your support. We hope you enjoy Thinkubator!