

My Work, My Way

Macquarie University's journey to consumer computing

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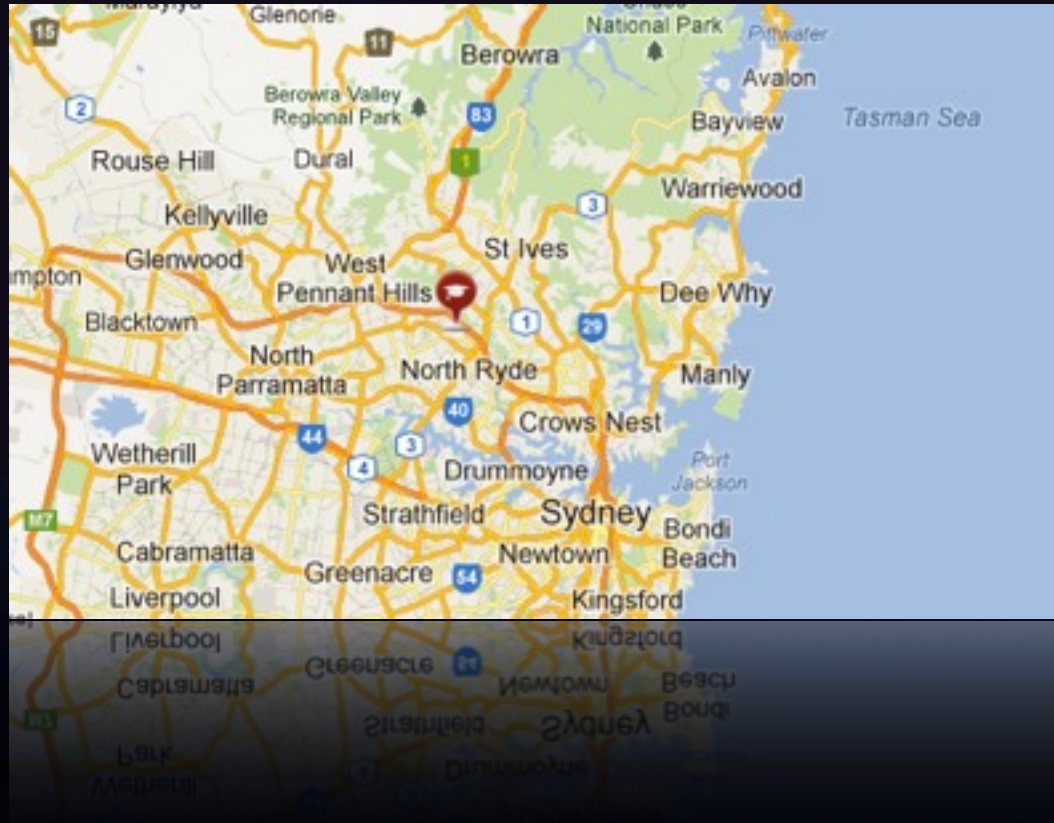
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My job title is a little unusual for a university. That's part of the story.

I'm going to share with you my perspective of MQU's journey to consumer computing.



About MQU



Over 37,000 students
Around 6000 staff



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Our main campus is located in the north of sydney.

The campus has lots of beautiful green spaces.

Like most other universities we have a few computer labs, but far more weather proof power points under outdoor benches where people sit and do work using our ubiquitous campus wifi network.

We also have brand new robot operated library, full of open spaces for students to also hang out and work.

We have over 37 thousand individual students and around 6000 individual staff.

IT @ Macquarie University



Informatics

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Macquarie University IT is an amalgam of distributed IT departments servicing the needs to their respective business units and they are loosely coordinated through the central IT office, Informatics.

The Informatics Helpdesk is the central place for students and staff to get help, mostly around IT.

During peak times, we see lots of students and staff. If you go by the number of tickets, the Helpdesk handle around 2500 for students and about 7000 for staff in the week just before the semester starts.

Before 2010....

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Before 2010, the IT landscape was very different at Macquarie.

By some it was perceived quite negatively for various reasons, not least of which was chronic underfunding of the department, which left it unable to properly attend to its clients.

In fact, in my first week there 2 years ago, I met the faculty IT managers who promptly lectured me on IT's shortcomings.





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Of course it wasn't like that!

But certainly the perceptions had to change and most of all the approach had to change.

We needed a new operating model which was not only sustainable but also conducive to a good campus experience for everyone.

student

staffer

teacher

researcher

manager

regulator

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We needed to reassess. We needed to look at all our personas and understand them better so that we could not only support them but try and delight!

Let's take our biggest population: students. Students already come to us, all of us, expecting wifi everywhere, expecting to find everything online, expecting to collaborate and connect with each other online. And this is not just the case with students. A significant number of staff are there too, and growing. Teachers, needing to interact with students on a daily basis, are also expecting the same kind of access to communications technology.

Someone told me the other day that they were considering encouraging BYOD. It made me smile because it's already happening. If you don't believe me, have a look at your wifi logs. See how many unique devices connect and how many are those that belong to you.

People will always use whatever is at their disposal to do what they need or want to do. Putting up artificial barriers - and this includes poor user experience - to adopting technology only serves to push activities underground and frustrate people.

Simple

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Everyone at QUESTnet 2012 received a little remote control helicopter from Netapp.

How many of you opened up the box?

How many of you read the instructions before trying to make it work?

How many of us deploy IT systems that feel just like that?

At Macquarie we wanted to make technology simple. Natural. There to make work easier, not get in the way. So this sounds easy and reasonable when you say it, but what does it take to deliver that experience?



New Thinking

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We needed a new way of thinking and a new working culture.

We needed to redefine our priorities to focus on our end users.

The first thing we threw away is the idea of a mandated SOE and we espoused values around individuality and freedom of choice. We moved from “supported devices” to “best effort support”. We needed a partnership with our users. We changed our engagement from “thou shalt” to “how can we help?” and assume they have nothing but a web browser. Assume the expectation of the simplicity of a google search.

Without these things, you can’t “not get in the way”, and certainly not delight.

Superior Usability

Ubiquitous availability

Interop

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So how did we go about the processes of delivering technology?

We started by looking at how we run projects to introduce new technology.

We realised that to enable the most open experience we needed to ensure that open standards, accessibility and interoperability was at the top of the agenda.

We wrote down a checklist of technology requirements that we wanted to leverage both at the front end and at the server side and ensured that projects took that seriously.

We aim for consumability and accessibility for end users. When I say consumability, I'm talking much more than BYOD.

When we look at tech at the user's side, we think of the web. HTML5, no plugins. Consumable from anywhere with just internet and a browser. We want the ability to reference any piece of information with a URL. In fact, we have a saying "whatever the question, the answer must always be there's a link for that".

At the same time we standardise on technology at the server, when we host, so we can bring about cost savings, scalability and reliability. When we don't host, we need to minimise vendor dependence by securely integrating via standards based protocols.

Deliberate Design

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We also said no more design by committee.

Every piece of technology we deliver has to have somebody responsible for that design.

That person is charged with ensuring that we have no new legacy and that design is fit for its user audience.

We design *specifically* for user experience during projects.



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Most importantly, we need to design holistically for the end user.

It's not just about the tech, it's about a product.

We borrow some of the principles of product management practice from the corporate world.

It has tech, it has a sales model, it has a support model, it has a targeted marketing campaign, it has marketing collateral and its adoption by end users is measured and the product grown on that basis. For them, it has to be better than the alternatives.

We've even adapted our project delivery methodologies to ensure that projects deliver all the elements needed for great technology experiences.



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With this approach, we make sure that we deliver the best technology that we can, given that we do not, or want to, control the experience.

We want to be the *enablers* of the always-on always-connected Internet culture.

We want to make sure that we play our part in keeping universities relevant and that we can compete globally; in an ever expanding global market.

We want people to do their work, their way.

So, did it work?

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Yes!

We are now managing an IT capex portfolio 10 times larger than we did prior to 2010.

We have departments queuing for us to roll out new tech for them.

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