

Most people or companies will go online to research your work.

Interview With Melanie Bowles Senior Lecturer BA Hons Textiles Chelsea College of Art and Design, co-founder on The People's Print – A creative enterprise for digital textiles.

Joe Easeman: What is your relationship to online media, both personally and within your industry?

Melanie Bowles: I'm familiar social media and use it within my practice, The People's Print, it is the easiest way to communicate to a group of like-minded people from all over the world. It is most understandable way of communication for the student and for the 'born digital' generation. In textiles there is a generation that are not digital, which is fair enough, because they are not born digital, so it is hard to integrate it into the course.

'...social media...is the easiest way to communicate with like-minded people from all over the world'

We are constantly learning especially with social media which moves so fast. I went on an e-learning course about 2 years ago and I came back with a presentation to show the course team but it is hard to implement new ways into the course and a lot easier to use in my own practice. We have a set of e-books which we have designed on The People's Print website as learning tools.

I have recently just finished a new book called 'Print Make Wear – Creative projects for digital textile design', coming out in Spring 2015 by The Peoples Print'. Its fourteen tutorials, and each one has a garment at the end of it each tutorial, so it is the complete DIY design loop using digital printing on fabric.

How important are online identities within your industry? How important for professionals and students?

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Most people or companies will go online to research your work. So your online identity is vital if you are in the professional field. I think it is important to have a online presence so students and professionals know what your work is about. So do your students have websites or blogs?

All the student have blogs, that's in the first year and they are really good. I don't know how many leave with websites but the majority. To have a basic website is really easy to do and textiles it such a visual discipline it works really well for our students. They are often excellent photographers and create textile collections so there is lots of material to work with.

Is this something that you would like to see integrated into the program or is it something that you think students would seek outside of the course?

It would be brilliant to integrate it into the program. It would really help students prepare for when they leave.

Do you hear your student say they use any of the tools provided by the university at the moment, such as workflow, myblogs?

No, I went on a course for Workflow and was really impressed but so hard to use it in our course. You would have to know the program well enough to teach it or have extra support from the University to implement it. It looks very well thought through but I am not sure how you would get a large course like ours to use it.

Most students use blogger to create their own blogs.

One of the things we talked about in the focus groups is to have some sort of introduction to these tools so the students know they are there.

There are such good things out from UAL but the students aren't using them and I am not sure how aware of the tools, resources on offer from the UAL. I think they all seem a bit remote and it would be good to have some face to face workshops, demo's, support.

One thing that came out of the focus groups was to develop a web portal on online identities. What sort of tools do you think students and graduates in your industry would be looking for in that?

A subject specific web portal would be good, designed specifically for textile students so it is not too generic.

What is your own online presence, what's it like, how did you develop it?

My online presence has been quite organic in how its development, it hasn't been anything purposeful, I think it's because I teach digital textiles working online is an extension of my medium. I have learnt on the job but and self-taught but I find it enjoyable and over the years has develop clarity.

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