Initial Plan for the Restructured MODEM Platform

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1

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Initial Plan for the Restructured MODEM Platform

Introduction

The Open Sounds project will deliver a restructured, modernised version of the MODEM collaborative platform for use in schools and musical institutions in Italy, the UK and Denmark. The primary aim of the system will be to allow users of the platform to share files and to communicate in order to pursue collaborative musical projects.

Community

The platform will foster a community of users, each with a user profile. Users will be able to start new musical projects, and to contribute to projects started by other users. The project (or composition) will be the primary element of the system.

Projects will display the user icon of the owner, username, description, license, last update, tags and attributions. An embedded Javascript player will allow visitors to stream the project's mp3 to hear what the project sounds like. Initially this could be a work in progress version, later it could be the finished version.

Following on from the main project information, we will see a series of posts which can be made by the same user or by others interacting with the project. Each post can contain an attached file upload. These files could be parts of the composition, samples, project files – any contributions that users would like to make. All posts would be able to have new tags in order to attach metadata to files.

Tags will be used extensively on the site to allow users to navigate to the content that they are interested in. This technique is widely used in web 2.0 applications to allow the community to drive taxonomy. We plan to use new techniques developed with School of Everything and on the Netsounds site to allow us to provide a strong community driven subject navigation system for the portal.

Integration

The restructured MODEM platform will be fully integrated into the Open Sounds web portal. Thus when users log on to the system they will be taken straight to their user profile where they can access their projects, and see their posts on other projects. At all times logged in users will have the possibility to create a new project, they will have access to the latest projects list and to the tag browsing interface. The tag browser will allow users to browse through the various subjects of interest in the community, and will allow users to form groups (eg. school classes) and thus to see their classmates listed.

User profiles will be integrated with the Open Sounds portal user system. They will have a user icon, username, description, organisation / school, location & tags. On the user profile we will also see all projects started by the user, and all posts made by the user.

The look and feel of the system will be consistent with the main portal design, with extra 'theming' included in line with the main site theming where design elements exist in the collaboration system and not in the main site.

Attribution

As with the original ccHost based MODEM system, attribution will be of great importance in the new Open Sounds collaborative system. Students need to get correct attribution for their work in order for the system to allow us to valorise informal and non formal work within an academic context. When an element of composition is reused in another project, the system will allow the user to specify the source of the element on the system and provide attribution for the owner. This attribution will be evident both where the element is reused, and on the profile of the owner.

Wherever possible we suggest that users are encouraged to use Creative Commons licenses so as to allow other users to reuse their samples and other elements in new compositions / remixes.

We consider that attribution is central to the Open Sounds project because it fosters collaboration. When students see that other people are interacting with their work, it becomes clear that other people value what they are doing and encourages them to do more because they get credited. It's also educationally important because it teaches the subtleties of "inspired by", "reworked", "sampled", "plagiarised" etc... a good understanding of which is important for students moving into the workplaces of the modern media world.

Evolution

The primary evolution of the original MODEM ccHost system will be in the integration of projects (uploads in the old MODEM) and conversations (the forum in old MODEM). The forums in MODEM were found to be somewhat clumsy and out of date as a primary vehicle for collaboration. In addition, the strong separation in the system between forum posts and uploads was considered to impose a barrier to collaboration: The need for a user to first go through the process of uploading a file, then go onto the forum and write a post which references that file, is cumbersome. In the new system users will be able to post files (eg. remixes, new samples) directly onto project conversations, thus facilitating fluid collaboration.

Workflow

Workflow on the new platform should be as smooth as possible so as to encourage maximum use. After signing on a user will be taken directly to their user profile where they can access recent posts and the projects that they have initiated. On clicking on one of their projects, a user will be taken directly to the project page where they will be able to see the posts of their collaborators including download links for files posted as part of the collaborative process. They will also have an edit button on their project page to allow them to edit the main project information, and to post a new mp3 file if the composition has progressed, so that other people can hear what the project sounds like in its new form.

If a user hasn't posted any projects yet, they might like to visit the latest projects page. Here projects will be listed in short 'teaser' form with a play facility to allow users to browse through projects, listening to the mp3s posted by the owners to see what they sound like. When the user finds a project that they are interested in they can click through to find out more, and will be presented with the main project page. As this user doesn't own the project, they will not be able to edit the main project information, but they will be able to join the conversation. In the first instance the new user might like to browse through the conversation to see how the project has developed, and they might download composition elements (eg. samples) to try out on their own system. At a later visit this user might have prepared a remix of the project. They would then be able to post on the conversation, and attach their remix project file to their post so that other people & the owner of the project can download their remix.

Following discussions at the project meeting in Olbia, our understanding is that the partners feel that the owner of a composition should have full permissions to manage their composition as they see fit. Therefore if a user posts a remix that the owner doesn't like, the owner would have rights to delete that post, so as to keep the project clean, and to direct the path of composition. In our planning discussions since the meeting we have considered that this could cause problems in a schools context. Therefore if we go ahead with this strict ownership permissions system, we would recommend that teachers in schools are advised to run compositions themselves, where they

would normally accept all reasonable submissions from students. This would create a safe environment for students to experiment in before moving on to the potentially harsher terms of engagement on other people's projects.

Conclusion

The Open Sounds collaborative platform will follow closely the CCHost based system used in MODEM, but will update the technologies used so as so achieve sustainability for the system. In addition we will include innovations based on the experiences of the MODEM project.