

Here be dragons

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1. VALUE PROPOSITION

A clearly articulated value proposition is an important part of the success of capstone projects (Mann and Smith 2006a, Goodwin and Mann 2007). At Otago Polytechnic the Agile Development Framework prescribed (Mann and Smith 2006b) uses a value proposition as the basis for development. The goal is that students form a relationship with their client based on an appreciation of the business problem, rather than a merely technical one. In the first two weeks of the project the students and their client collaborate to arrive at a joint understanding of the business problem. This is articulated according to the following template:

The xxx project has addressed the problem/opportunity of xxxx (business problem, so 'invoice processing too slow and resulting in lost orders' rather than 'need a website'), it has xxxx (been in use since xxx) in which time xxx (orders have been processed), with a xxxx (measurable improvement that relates to the business problem - ie invoices processing time improved by 56%).

This statement is written in past tense, as if it were the opening statement in their end of year assessment panel. This end of year panel is looking for evidence of successful deployment resulting in measurable change in the business problem. The task for the year then becomes one of simply (!) delivering on that statement.

2. DRAGONS' DEN

To reinforce the importance of this value proposition statement, for the past two iterations of the project we have run a critique session for each project with industry representatives. In addition to the benefits of articulating and defending their value proposition, the intention is to emulate the real world where many graduates will be put in this very position of having to pitch their idea to an employer, potential client or financial backer. We believe that the more experience they have presenting in front of a professional audience and receiving constructive criticism, the more confident they will be when they enter the workforce.



This poster paper appeared at the 3rd annual conference of Computing and Information Technology Research and Education New Zealand (CITREnz2012) incorporating the 25th Annual Conference of the National Advisory Committee on Computing Qualifications, Christchurch, New Zealand, October 8-10, 2012. Mike Lopez and Michael Verhaart, (Eds).

Among the industry experts present were representatives from Dunedin IT businesses. Economic development agencies contributed dragons from Audacious (student business enterprise), from Dunedin City Council, and from the Upstart Business Incubator. Kai Tahu were represented, along with a marketing advisor and project manager. The “Dragons” were asked to ask probing questions, focussing on the students’ understanding of the business problem. The aim was to critique the projects as early as possible, to provide a chance to get feedback, and hopefully unearth opportunities and risks students might not have thought of. In addition to verbal discussion, dragons were provided with a form containing each group’s value proposition statement and prompts for opportunities and risks, with options to deliver on/avoid those, along with suggested actions. Each group was allotted 2-3 minutes to make their pitch with a scheduled 10 minutes to allow for discussion. The entire class sat in on the entire process, with forms for peer feedback. Each group was allowed four slides:

1. Your names. Also include who the client is. Or if entrepreneurial, then list skills and roles that make up a “board of stakeholders”
2. Your value proposition statement. What the business problem is, how will this be solved. (no mention yet of technology). (this is the most important slide).
3. A slide with 2 or 3 options for how you will deliver that solution.
4. Risks. A table that highlights key risks, and what you will do to overcome them.

Feedback forms were collected and used as the basis for ongoing discussion. Dragons were contacted later for further feedback. “I found the quality, diversity and focus of the potential projects to be of a high standard,” said Mr Steve Walker, Business Coach at Upstart Business Incubator in Dunedin. “Speaking to a number of the ‘Dragon’s Den’ team after the presentations, many expressed a desire to return around the halfway mark to see how the projects are developing and offer any advice if needed, as well as seeing the end result. They certainly have our attention.”

“Technology skills, talent and a great infrastructure will allow Dunedin and New Zealand to compete at global scale. I love what I see out of the BIT degree program, especially the talent and the skills they are acquiring,” said David Quinn from Audacious in Dunedin; an organisation that encourages and supports student entrepreneurs. “My only concern is we are not producing more students out of this programme. They are a big part of our economic future”.

REFERENCES

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