CASE STUDY
University of Technology Sydney & UTS Insearch

Design and UX projects
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Bringing life to a new brand

The University of Technology Sydney (UTS) undertook a complete rebranding exercise in 2017, with a website design by Digital Garden a key output following the rebrand. Their student pathways subsidiary, UTS Insearch, also engaged Digital Garden for a user experience (UX) project and new website design concept.

Digital Garden designed the new UTS site, bringing to digital the bold shapes of blue, red, black and white that were created by leading branding agency Houston. The colourful and unique new look was rolled out across advertising, campus branding and the website during 2017.

Following in their footsteps, UTS Insearch - the student pathways provider to UTS - also commissioned work from Digital Garden. Our task focussed primarily on a new user experience (UX) for their site. We were enlisted to talk to students and education agents from around the world to help understand what they needed and wanted in a new UTS Insearch site.
01.
Insearch of a future at UTS

The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) is one of Australia’s leading higher education institutions and a world-renowned research centre. The university’s reputation for attracting smart minds and fostering great talent makes the educator a prime choice for students from across Australia and around the world.

A key pathway for students to gain access to a degree at the university is through UTS Insearch - a premium pathway provider. The function of UTS Insearch is to act as platform for international students looking to gain entry to the university, as well as for domestic students who may not have gained direct entry to UTS.
02. Transforming the user experience

UTS Insearch engaged us at a time of organisational transformation. With a visual rebrand of UTS underway including a redesign of its website (also by Digital Garden), the plan was to more closely align UTS Insearch with the university itself. The pathway provider's website was nearly five years old and not adequately catering to its truly global audience.

Digital Garden was commissioned to undertake a user experience (UX) project to help reimagine the website journeys and outcomes, for students, education agents & parents alike.

Activities and deliverable in this UX project included:

- Whiteboard workshop for key stakeholders and our UX project team
- User interviews of student and education agents face-to-face and via Skype
- User survey of prospective students around the world
- Desk research on competitors and existing research
- User journeys and personas mapping based on our findings
- Research report of all materials presented to the client
02. Transforming the user experience

- SEO and content recommendations for implementing in development phase
- Information architecture of the proposed website
- Interactive prototype demonstrating core functionality
- User testing of international participants matching target demographics
- Functional specifications document to supplement the prototype in development

- UI design concept of homepage for both desktop and mobile
03. The global challenge

International students wanting to study at UTS in Sydney are the primary demographic for UTS Insearch, with aspiring students from China comprising the majority of this group.

With students applying from around the world to study on campus - including from Australia, Asia and South America - this presented UTS Insearch and Digital Garden a lofty challenge in proposing a digital solution that suits a wide range.

Through our user interview, survey, desk research and previous research findings from UTS Insearch, we looked at the impact of and ways to implement solutions for:

- Cultural factors and expectations country-to-country
- Average English language level of the student
- Average English language level of the parent/s
- Needs of the education agents/channel partners in each nation
- Varying levels of connectivity and internet speeds
- Device takeup and usage
- Content creation and administration for staff in a CMS of choice

In exploring these considerations, the Digital Garden UX project team spoke to users - both students and agents - situated in their home countries as well as those already based in Sydney. We spoke to specialist education agents and business owners both face-to-face and via Skype, representing the student markets of China, Colombia, India, Indonesia and Nepal. We also spoke with prospective UTS Insearch students from Australia, China, Brazil and Pakistan.

The interviews were instrumental in validating the findings from our desk research report, as well as highlighting new findings about the enrolment and discovery processes. Actionable insights were identified in the interviews that relate to improving features and content that UTS Insearch already had, as well as opportunities for new features to be implemented that will be helpful for students and education agents.
A prime area of consideration was the approach to languages other than English. While some markets see less widespread use of English as a second language (particularly amongst parents of prospective students), our findings determined that the entire site did not need to be wholly multilingual. Students expected a site about an educational institution in a natively English-speaking country to be presenting the majority of content in that language.

**The solution put forth by Digital Garden was for:**

- a country-of-origin ‘flag selector’ icon to be present in the header of the site
- custom native language messaging/calls to action to appear upon selecting student’s originating nation, explaining where throughout the site they can expect to see content tailored to their country and/or language
- specific course entry requirements, pages and CTAs appearing in context to their chosen country/native language
- the ability for UTS Insearch to deploy language-specific landing pages that can act as a homepage for certain markets, such as China
- displaying location-contextual social media feeds and accounts per country, such as Weibo for China (whereas Instagram or Twitter could not display)
04. Seeking validation

Validating our user research and interview analysis is critical to translating our thinking into the UX of the new site’s interactive prototype. The survey - sent out globally to thousands of prospective students who had communicated with UTS Insearch - helped us to further expand upon, explore and ultimately validate the concepts uncovered during our user interviews.

User interviews, survey results, desk research and our UX expertise informed the creation of the interactive prototype that was to serve as the experiential and functional foundation of the UTS Insearch new website. Following iterations of the prototype with the pathway provider’s stakeholders, we set out test out the new UX from an outsider’s perspective.

Usability tests of the interactive prototype were carried out using an online testing platform, engaging users matching our target demographic criteria in some of the key student markets for UTS Insearch.

While our set tasks for the participants helped uncover some minor amendments required to improve the onsite experience, the tests largely yielded successful outcomes. Navigation, journey flow, country considerations and content presented to users all proved to be easy to understand and considered, according to the recorded user sessions and the real-time feedback captured.
05. A strong foundation

Following the completion of the UX project, UTS Insearch are now armed with:

- A deeper understanding of how users across their international markets interact with and what they expect from the site
- A functional specification and interactive prototype as the foundation for developing the new site
- A UI homepage concept design that closely aligns the pathway provider with UTS and its own current rebrand

From here, the next steps are for:

- UTS Insearch to choose a CMS and a development vendor that suits their requirements
- UI design production on internal screens to commence
- Development of the new site, with a launch later in 2017 scheduled
Get in touch.