MAiP

FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

TALKING WALLS ©

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The Concept:

For the major project, I will design and produce an educational, interactive history template prototype, which can be expanded upon. The focus of this prototype is Dunster Castle, near Minehead, Somerset.

The idea is to recreate specific timeslices of a particular space. This space would be a place of architectural interest and / or heritage, therefore the intended client type would be organisations such as the National Trust and English Heritage. Their markets consist mostly of the general public (all ages), and educational establishments. It is these two markets that the prototype is being designed to cover.

I am aware that a team of people would normally create something of this size, hence the decision to make this prototype a sample of what the template could be. The finished item would have more information, more games, more detailed 3D models and a few more eras. It could be also designed to suit PDA's so that the visitor can walk around the castle with it to guide/amuse/inform. A web version could also be produced to run with the DVD or separately. It could certainly be reproduced for a kiosk within the visitor centre. Educators may also be able to use it as a resource for school visits, showing the eras as video clips and setting the children to write their own life stories in different eras.

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Construction:

Within this template, there will be areas designed to both entertain children while visiting the place of interest and to inform adults and children alike either while visiting the place of interest or at home. It was once mentioned to me that children find somewhere like Dunster Castle very difficult to visualise how it was over the many hundreds of years that it has existed. I hope to be able to remedy this by reproducing in 3D, the Castle as was in eras of specific historical and architectural change. Dunster Castle is particularly suitable because it resembles much more of a stately home now than a child's idea of a castle.

This has been done for places of historical interest such as the Sydney Opera House, Kenilworth Castle, Egyptian Pyramids and other similar places. What isn't being done is incorporating this 3D replication in a format that allows greater knowledge of the eras involved, for both adults and children, with additional areas of interest in the form of quizzes, puzzles, fact sheets and video clips of mock battles etc. The element that will also make this different is the narrative. There will be a narrative on the tours and other similar animations spoken as if by the owner or previous owner, giving the 'visiting guest' a personal tour of their 'home'. Within the 'Everyday Life' sections, again there will be a narrative, this time spoken by a set of generic characters such as the cook, smithy, groom, lady in waiting, knight/serf etc. These characters will be repeated for each of the timeslices created and will talk about their day at the castle. It is these stories of their own lives that will impart knowledge of their era, and not the usual factual data sheets that come with most CD-ROMs. With these life stories, Talking Walls will transfer tacit knowledge such as cultural, social values and morals, which are much more difficult to visualise, therefore combining both learning methods, visual and non-visual, for a complete educational experience.

To enable this to work as a template for other properties, there needs to be a library of elements that can be re-used. The characters for everyday life will be part of this library. The digital video clips of mock battles and everyday life scenes will also be edited to create a generic set of clips. Sound clips will also become library items. 3D modelled items such as plants, trees and everyday objects will be re-used. There are several websites that provide free 3D models, there may be a possibility of being able

to reference these models, i.e. acknowledging the creators. The interface will also be designed to be generic, creating an identity for a possible range of Talking Walls' DVD's.

Another unique aspect will be the 3D matrix. This will be designed so that the user can navigate through the different timeslices and the spaces within the timeslices and see where they are at any one time, however deep within the programme. I have not seen anything like this in my research, only 2D formats such as the Theban Mapping project and the Sydney Opera House site. The matrix will be visible at all times allowing instant reference.

The elements that will change with each project are the 3D modelled views of the place of interest and therefore the animated tours. The 'Seek and Find' game will also change along with 'Send a Postcard' and 'Gallery'. Any images available and provided by the place of interest will also change. The printable quiz sheet and tour guide will be other items that will need to change. This amounts to a reasonable amount of work, but not anywhere near as much as starting from scratch for each project, therefore making it quite feasible to reproduce a new 'Talking Walls' with just one or two people. The longest part would be the research into the history of the site.

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Background Research:

I have looked at several web sites and CD-ROMs that I thought would be similar and found them to be only touching the surface of the visual knowledge that could actually be put across to the user. The National Trust's websites for their individual properties are usually just one page of information regarding visitor information, with just a single image of the property. Considering the technology that has been available for a few years now, this really could be improved. There is no other information available for the property until you visit the place of interest where there is a range of guidebooks, or in some cases, guidebooks reproduced as a CD-ROM. Pitkin Unichrome have a range of guide books, the most recent of which (London), includes a CD-ROM. Contained in this CD-ROM are a few QTVR movies where you can see various panoramic views with a few interactive elements taking you to close-up photos. Other than this, it contains the same information as the guidebook. In a meeting with Pitkin, they mentioned that they were seeking a more interactive way of presenting information and were interested in the idea of Talking Walls. The National Trust Administrator at Dunster Castle is also interested in the project. With these two parties being interested, it is challenging me to create something that will continue to interest these parties.

The research regarding the history of Dunster Castle had already been completed during my degree in 1996, therefore the time it has taken to do this hasn't been taken into account. I have been able to use this time to research, develop and expand the idea into a more modern and extensible product.

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Management:

To create the sample prototype, the Gantt charts overleaf indicate the elements that need to be created and edited, and the approximate timescales for each one. I have Wednesdays, most weekends and evenings for the next 34 weeks in which to do this. Some elements can be worked on and left to render while working on other elements. Some sections will be fairly straightforward having elements of them during the last three semesters, others will be more complicated. The idea is to do so much of each as indicated, giving me a variety of tasks each week to keep the impetus going.

The second chart shows the different elements proposed to create the prototype and which age group they are designed for. The third chart shows the techniques and software required for each of the elements. The only new tasks are the Flash and Shockwave games, I have been taught Flash but have not used it in earnest, so this will be another challenge. There is also the meeting with Dunster to glean new and historical photos and the tutorials to arrange, but these should not take too long. I will need help with Director and possibly Premiere, but other than this, I hope it will go smoothly. There will be testing at each stage to ensure that as the elements develop, they work smoothly and cover exactly what was required at the outset. I am in the lucky position of having our own company, so although this doesn't always allow a lot of free time, I can use the quieter times to work on the project. All being well and as indicated, the elements proposed will be completed on time for handing in on the 24th September 2003.

Deborah Wilson   8th February 2003 ©