

INVESTICE DO ROZVOJE VZDĚLÁVÁNÍ

## HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

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### Abstract

*With the increasing need for soft skills, the authors offer their students hands-on experience that will become useful in their future professional lives. The tasks that students are assigned in the ESP courses are designed and prepared so that they can help students gain the skills that are required in their later employment. Based on the discussions with business professionals, the authors have identified the areas of expertise that are necessary for students of either business or medical studies. Presentation and communication skills, as well as innovative and well-prepared CVs, have appeared as the crucial ones. Presentation skills are obtained via training, followed by presenting imaginary companies at a students' conference or poster session. Students are asked to give a speech in front of their colleagues and to accept and express comments or criticism. The Mahara platform is used for the creation of students' companies' pages. Thanks to ICT equipment, students participate in video conferences with their colleagues from foreign universities, where they try to find solutions for cross-cultural issues. It encourages them to work in teams, to enforce their ideas and to reach compromises. Finally, new attitudes towards CVs are proposed to students, including CV avatars and Mahara profile pages. The authors will be outlining the above mentioned activities and providing an insight into the way the activities are utilized at the University of Pardubice, Czech Republic.*

### 1. Introduction

The University of Pardubice offers their students of non-philological faculties several study programmes focused on Language for Specific Purposes (LSP). The present requirement for students to be well prepared for their future careers must be reflected in the modules that are opened. The authors wished to address this need and they tailored their courses' content to meet this demand. The thorough discussions with business professionals led the authors to the idea to implement soft skills in the programmes not only for business students but also for students of technical faculties. The business professionals feel that though students are well prepared theoretically, they lack the ability to present their knowledge, they are not able to hold meaningful and polite discussion, and they do not seem confident while communicating with foreign clients or colleagues. Thus the aim of the authors' courses appeared clearly structured, and the scope of attention slightly shifted from professional language toward professional skills. Although the authors unfortunately lack the most valid indicator which would be the rate of employability of the graduates they obtained positive feedback from their students that confirmed the importance of enhancing the skills mentioned above. During one year course the students improve their presentation skills; they create Curricula Vitae and participate in videoconferences with foreign Universities.

### 2. Presentation skills

To prepare students for presenting their own presentations, the authors spend some time giving them the theoretical background (from 4-20 lessons, depending on their year of study and level of English). Students learn how to structure a presentation, what to keep in mind and what to avoid, how to link the structure together, how to manage their voice so they convey the meaning and keep the audience interested, how to present facts and figures so they improve the impact of the presented information. Students use audio-visual technique to monitor their body language and this way they learn to manage it. Students also acquire the ability to build rapport with the audience and to strengthen the message by telling a story. The theoretical part is followed by a practical one. Students give their presentations in front of their colleagues. The fellow students are supposed to ask questions which give the presenters the possibility to practise reaction. This is the most immediate feedback the students receive. The presentations are monitored and recorded, and students receive



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a link to MediaSite video. The video is used for self-reflection. The presentation are also analysed by the audience and feedback is placed into LMS Moodle or Mahara.

### 2.1 Mahara e-portfolio

The e-portfolio Mahara is offered to students for creating their pages which might be used not only during their studies but for their lifelong learning or professional career. Students are asked to create a page where they present a fictional company of their own design (first year students of the Faculty of Economy and Administration) or their research (fourth year students of the Faculty of Chemical Technology). The page is used for further feedback and students comments.

#### General information

Our company FROBR Brewery is located in town Jičín in Královohradecký region. We deal with brewing and selling beer, selling our own souvenirs and make excursions around our brewery.

#### History

Our company was established on 1st June 1714. Originators were Cyril Brzák and Václav Fromelius.

Since the beginning of operation of the company there was only one interruption in business. It was in 1876 when the brewery burned out. Brewery was able to restore in 1879.

#### Products

Our product range includes several permanent types of beers:

- FROBR's Baron (light beer)
- FROBR's Princess (dark beer)

Our supply also includes some special types of beer, which are available only in certain season.

- Christmas lager - 17°
- Summer beer - beers with flavours of summer fruit

We make sure that ingredients used for producing our beers were of the highest quality. It causes that the special kinds of beer are limited.

#### Logo



This is just basic introduction of our brewery and more information will be released on the presentation.

#### E-shop

The FROBR Brewery joined to internet sales in 2005, when our websites and e-shop has opened.

On the e-shop customers can find variety goods of ours and also some souvenir items.



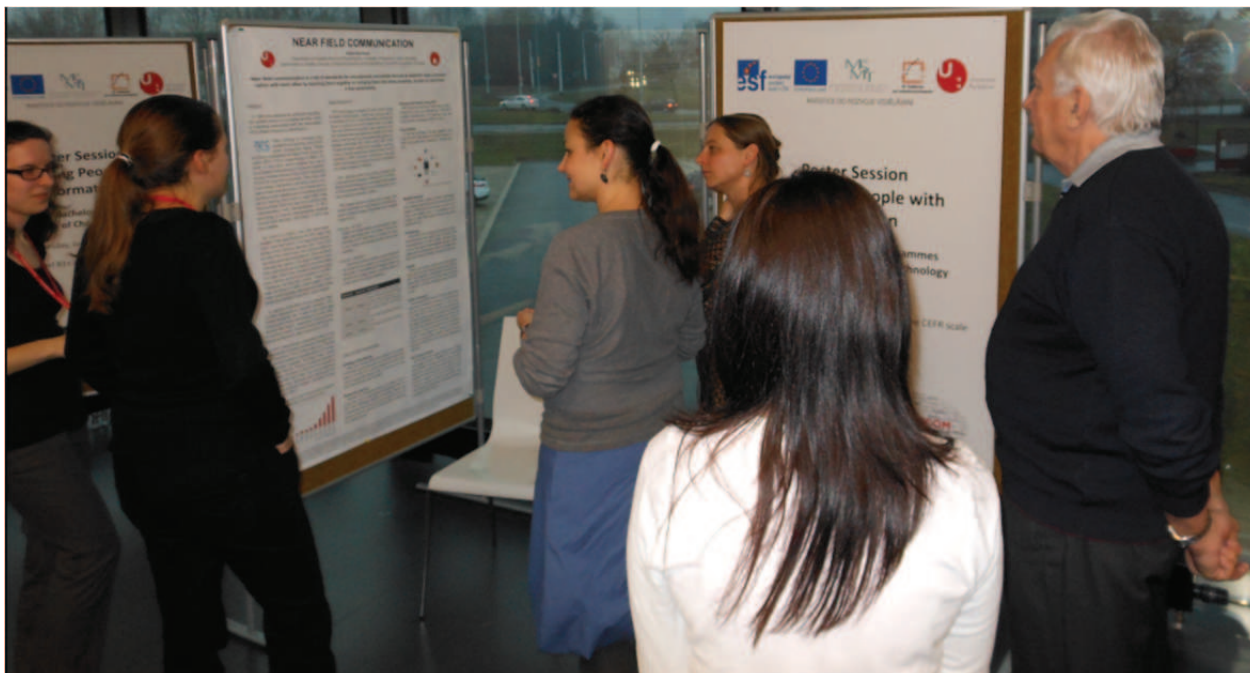
(Pic. 1, a web page of students' fictional company in Mahara)

### 2.2 Poster

More and more often, the students of technical programmes are asked to present their research at conferences in poster sessions. The authors have decided to reflect this need in the course syllabus. Students use Mahara to design a poster with their research results. The poster is presented in small poster sessions which are followed with a discussion. Students are also offered the option to present their printed poster to the professional audience which gives them the opportunity to undergo the experience of a scientific conference.



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(Pic. 2 Poster Session)

### 3. Curriculum Vitae

Another task that students are assigned and that is crucial for their future business career is to create an outstanding CV. Every student learnt at their secondary school how to write a structured CV. The authors want to show the students different approaches to CV creation.

#### 3.1 Mahara

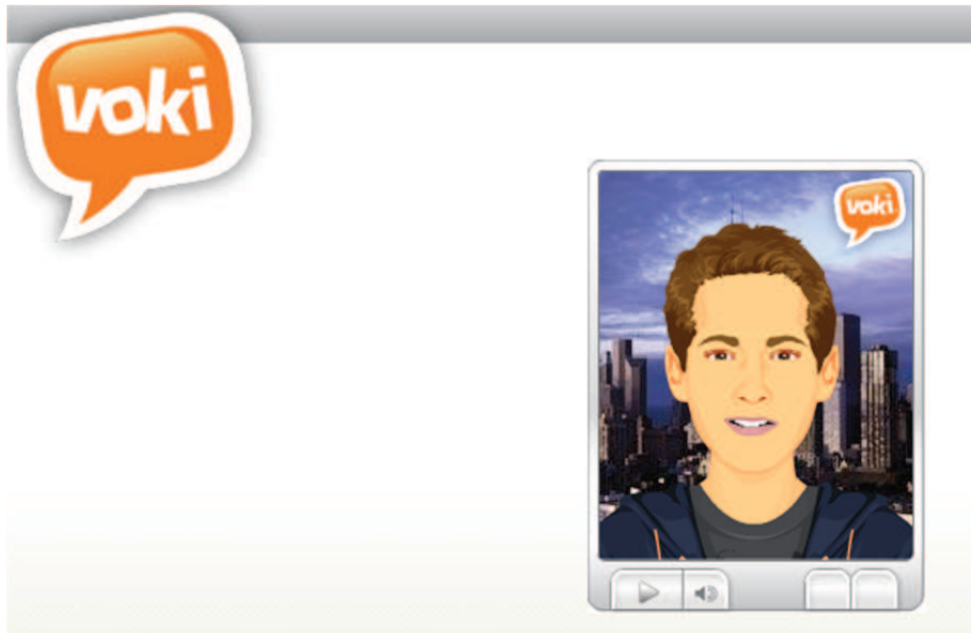
As Mahara e-portfolio is accessible even after students' graduation, they are encouraged to use Mahara for building their CV using not only texts but also videos and photographs. The student's page can be easily upgraded and edited at any time may there occur any changes in their professional development.

#### 3.2. Voki

Students are encouraged to use different ways to present themselves. One of the options is to use an avatar to present them instead of the structured CV. Voki is one of the web pages where users are allowed to create an avatar and provide it with information that the avatar would pronounce. It is not limited to the study period and it can be also edited and changed any time. Avatar can be embedded or linked to different web sites or documents.



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(Pic. 3 Student's avatar created at [www.voki.com](http://www.voki.com))

### 4. Videoconferencing

Thanks to globalization many international enterprises have headquarters and offices in different countries. Videoconferencing becomes a regular way of holding meetings. The employers expect their employees to master the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. The first three skills are practised during the videoconferences. Students face stressful though beneficial situation when they are confronted with cross-cultural issues, different accents and responsibility.

The University of Pardubice cooperates with the University of Applied Sciences Haaga-Helia. Students meet for one month during three sixty-minute sessions where they discuss pre-set topics, and present each other arguments for their solutions. Each videoconference is chaired by one student who is responsible for smooth run and equal speech delivery.



(Pic. 4 Students during one of the VC)

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### 5. Conclusion

The above mentioned projects prove to be valuable and appreciated both by students and the authors. Students work individually, teachers' role is to tutor, facilitate, encourage, and coach rather than direct. Fulfilling the tasks requires students' collaboration, inspires critical thinking, improves their communication skills, and provides space for students' creativity. Nevertheless, there are some cons, LMS Moodle and Mahara are not device agnostic, the projects place demands on students' digital literacy. The universities involved in videoconferencing must have similar videoconferencing units. Last but not least is the fact that the preparation stage of the projects is extremely time-consuming for the authors and the projects themselves involve a lot of monitoring and analysing.

### List of reference literature

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