Case Study

Local café in Athens transforms into a
virtual experience with Moodle LMS

Kimolia Art Café is a small backstreet café in Plaka, Athens in Greece. Kimolia (greek word for chalk) began in 2011 and continues to be a family-run business. During the global pandemic, many small businesses, including Kimolia, were forced to close following government mandated measures to fight against Covid-19.

Initially with no other goal than to keep business going, the family motto 'we're in the memory-creation business' rang true as a week into the quarantine, Kimolia reopened its doors, albeit in a completely different way.

Problem

Kimolia faced 2 different sets of challenges, both for the locals and for the cafe as a business. On a societal level, people needed a room to connect, to hold private lessons or to simply to enjoy themselves with some simple online games. The goal was to support the simplest form of entertainment, and the most important one, the kind that involves human connection - a connection that was being challenged by the pandemic.

On a business level, not only did Kimolia have to continue running, it had to remain relevant within the community. The cafe's followers needed to have a sense of belonging and show pride, and as a family-led business, they wanted to show that they are more than just a café: if you can put your mind into it, you can have an impact on people's lives.

"Many years back, in 2011, I was visiting Calgary, Canada and as I was walking through the Calgary Zoo, I saw on a wall a quote by Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.' Albeit with not the same impact, this quote has been on my mind since we started our little project". - Nikos Palavitsinis, Co-owner, Kimolia Art Cafe and Business Development Manager, Eummena.

This catapulted a new project: the reopening of Kimolia as the first online cafe in Greece.

"We wanted to open up our café for free to our clients, and to achieve something bigger than simply promoting our café. We were looking to support our community in the same way that Moodle supports its community. So, in a poetic sense, Moodle was the perfect fit from the beginning."

Nikos Palavitsinis,
Co-owner, Kimolia Art Cafe and Busi and Business Development Manager, Eummena.

Action

The project needed a platform that could be easily customised, adapted to the conventions of an offline café, at the same time supporting the tools that would enhance interactions and collaboration amongst the people that would use it, including activities such as blogs, forums, chat rooms etc.

Time being of the essence, tools and features needed to be intuitive, operate in a similar manner to platforms people were already familiar with and be diverse to appeal to a range of users with different skills with little time for training. The ability to create fun, interactive content and embedding web and video content was non-negotiable - the goal was for people to enjoy themselves.

The virtual cafe needed a user-friendly interface, allowing for large volumes of accounts to be created (to be sent every day to people that 'booked' a table). User accounts would be auto replicated and reset each week, so they had to be both easily configurable and secure, to ensure that personal information couldn't be accessed and potentially misused.

All of these boxes, and more, were ticked by the Moodle platform. Nikos Palavitsinis, co-owner of Kimolia Art Cafe, Business Development Manager at Eummena, eLearning expert and all-round Moodle fan, started the project using MoodleCloud.

Moodle Partner Eummena provided the infrastructure without cost, to back the project in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a free open source platform, the project could support its community in the same way Moodle supports its users in the educational space.

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Especially in the initial set-up phase, the Moodle community and its forums were critical for success when dealing with roadblocks.

"For every issue that I faced, for every configuration I wasn't sure how to make, Moodle forums and communities - never failed me. There was always a solved question from someone that had tried something similar in the past. This saved me a lot of time in the end." - Nikos Palavitsinis.

Results

The LMS supports hundreds of concurrent users, with unlimited storage, and a dedicated server for BigBlueButton (BBB) video conferencing sessions. Moodle's Certified Integration, BBB is crucial to the project, serving as the most used tool to create that human connection the online cafe set out to bring back in the community. H5P assists in content creation - users can access activities such as games throughout their session at the cafe.

Whilst still in lockdown (at the time of writing), Kimolia continues to run online, providing more than 3,000 accounts to its guests so far, and has witnessed many a celebration, including playing host to people's birthday parties.

Due to its success, it has gained popularity, attracting media exposure from major television networks, radio stations, newspapers and online news sites. In just one month, its website reached 14,000 unique visitors.

"We are definitely looking for ways to keep Kimolia Online active and alive, to serve informal learning and to offer chances for people to connect and work together on projects, despite geographical or weather restrictions. There's great potential - although we have yet to digitize coffee or wine!"
- Nikos Palavitsinis, Co-owner, Kimolia Art Cafe and Business Development Manager, Eummena.

Kimolia has provided more than 3,000 accounts for its guests so far, having 5,500 views on BBB, another 5,500 views for its 'Hangman' game, totalling 2,000 BBB sessions that connected people, friends and family during the pandemic.

More Information:

To find out more about Moodle Partner, Eummena, visit
https://moodle.com/partners/eummena/

You can read more about the project at
www.kimolia-art-cafe.gr/en

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