

Review of Eclipse.net in Silverlight

By Lucian Boyd Harte, Quintin Kynaston School.

I am a beta tester school for MLS and so have the privilege of trying out the new features of Eclipse before most users.

We are in for a treat with a completely new, redesigned, feature rich library homepage in the next release, which I have been testing. The new page appeals and pulls students into using it. It is something that talks their language.

The page design is completely new and so difficult to even start describing, in essence the block structure of the old design has gone, and been replaced by a more interactive, inviting page.

The design has some excellent new features. Students can now read the library news as if it were a newspaper, with turning pages for different news items. There is a new returns trolley item so students can find recently returned books from the trolley yet to be shelved. There is a central word cloud of the most popular searches that spins and rotates depending on your mouse position. The top ten's and new resources have been updated too with a similar to iPod scrolling view, with book covers as opposed to album covers.

I have always encouraged students to do reviews of books they have read to put on Eclipse. In the current version it is difficult to find the reviews once complete. Reviews are now one of the central items of the new release being visible on the homepage, this is a great new feature which allows the students to communicate what they feel about a book but also reward them with it's display (once approved by me) on the homepage.

Searching has been overhauled too. As soon as you start to type a search a little box asks you to confirm which fields you wish to search, e.g. just author, title or everything. It's really easy to use and no decrease in speed in comparison to the current version. The picture based search and advanced (Boolean) search facilities are also much improved too! The results are then displayed graphically in a fantastically new designed search results page, that displays everything you need, including at the touch of a button the ability to filter your results by book, website etc.

All the features I still love are still present too, but now easier for students to engage with. Meet the Author has some of the homepage dedicated to it, allowing students to watch interviews by their favourite authors straight away. The library map showing a books exact location also remains. Students can reserve books but also add them to a new feature called My Stuff. A bit like a bookmark list of resources they'd like to find again quickly, or print out details.

It's pretty amazing that a library management system has all these features. Only a few years ago, they were so simple with perhaps one computer dedicated to searching, now the system is across the whole school, which can be used as a central information centre with web links (pre chosen, so we know they are appropriate), the ability to upload documents, podcasts, making a central, essential system, all revolving around the library and books.