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Northumbria student named a winner in Orange international design competition

A design student from Northumbria University, Newcastle has been named a winner in an international competition run by Orange.

In response to a brief that asked young designers to create a vision or product for the future, Melissa Smith, a Fashion Communication student at Northumbria, came up with an innovative concept that celebrates digital technology while also encouraging users to switch off and engage in more traditional activities.

Melissa said: “People are increasingly distracted by their digital devices. I noticed, especially in cities, that more and more people are walking around not even realising where they are going because they are zoned in on their digital activity. It’s also sad to see parents distracted by their phones when they are with their children, or conversations being interrupted by text alerts.

“I am an iPhone and Mac user myself so understand first-hand the value of digital technology. However, I think we need to strike a balance between digital and real-world interactions, and that was what my design was based on.

“My concept is not about discouraging use, but about being aware of how we use digital technology and how the technology itself can encourage us to engage in other, offline activities.”

Melissa’s concept, entitled TIME, uses digital technology to monitor and control digital connectivity. It was inspired by Zen master and poet, Thich Nhat Hanh’s, sentiment: “The most precious gift we can offer anyone is our attention.” TIME would run as an interface in the background of all connected devices via Cloud services, and use alarm-like properties to gather and collate the data its user consumes on a daily basis. The data is then shared back, giving the user suggestions of non-digital activities at appropriate intervals.

TIME was recognised as one of three overall winners in the Orange student designers competition – entitled Orange Spreads Your Wings. Melissa was named as winner in the Design For All category for her observations and research into the ‘always-connected’ culture.

Matthew Lievesley, Reader in Human Centred Problem Solving at Northumbria University said; “Melissa’s project is bold, innovative and inspiring. It generates conversation around the future of digital technology and how it can almost come full circle – using the benefits of technology to encourage users to disconnect where appropriate and strike a healthier balance.

“Northumbria was pleased to be chosen as the only UK institution to take part in Orange Spreads Your Wings this year, and it’s through partnering with global brands such as Orange that we are able to offer our students exciting industry opportunities, great experience and international exposure. We’re all incredibly proud of Melissa and the high quality of the work that was put

forward by all of our participating students. I can't wait to see how they contribute to the future of design, technology and culture throughout their promising careers.”

Melissa was presented with her award by Facebook's Director of Product Design, Margaret Stewart at a prestigious ceremony in Paris on 1 April. She said: “The evening was beyond expectation and filled with prolific industry names and personalities. Huge thanks to Orange for the opportunity and Northumbria University, especially my lecturer, Gayle Cantrell, for giving me the platform to gain as much from the whole journey as possible. It's an honour to receive an award of such prestige. “

To view Melissa's film submission which brings her concept to life, [click here](#). For full details about the competition, [click here](#).

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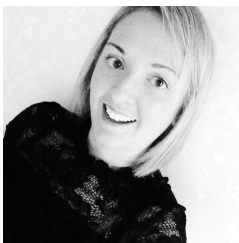
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