The IDC Social Start-Up Nation: Changing Lives Online

A Center of Internet Psychology initiative aims to improve lives worldwide with online positive psychology projects by students.

Second—year Communications students taking the "Internet: Social and Cultural Aspects" course run by Prof. **Yair Amichai-Hamburger**, director of the Center of Internet Psychology at IDC Herzliya's Sammy Ofer School of Communications, were challenged this year to create websites dealing with global, day-to-day issues to help boost Israel's image.

The 13-week course, also known as the IDC Social Start-Up Nation project, comprised theoretical teachings alongside a team project to create a website focused on a specific cause. Students were asked to team up, think up a topic of interest, and create a proposal for Amichai-Hamburger detailing why that issue needs public attention.

"I believe the IDC Social Start-Up Nation project can alter people's negative perceptions of Israel by showing them positive online voluntary projects dealing with issues affecting people from every part of the globe that young Israelis are creating and sharing with the world," Amichai-Hamburger said.

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Lyrane Arditi and her team chose to create a website on mindfulness. "Our website is full of ideas and exercises to empower global users in using the Internet wisely," she said, and added that the team had also included information and tips on how to be more aware of feelings, sensations, thoughts and the surrounding environment in an effort to understand life situations and be more successful. "I first learned about mindfulness at IDC, and I want to share this beautiful concept with the entire world," she said.

Harold Nakam said he values the importance of technology but recognizes the social pressures it creates. "Many people my age suffer from a recognized anxiety disorder known as 'Fear of

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Missing Out.' The Social Start-Up Nation website that my team created has a quiz to measure the user's level of FOMO and offers tips on how to minimize such feelings and help us live happy lives," Nakam said.

Vertigo and Meniere's disease, a disorder of the inner ear that affects hearing and balance, are issues being tackled by yet another group. **Danielle Schefler** said the idea for this topic came from her personal experience as a Meniere's sufferer. "Our goal is to try to help reduce the stress for people suffering from these illnesses by providing a one-stop destination for information and explaining that stress itself is a trigger," she said. "We really hope to reach a global audience and get good interaction and feedback from around the world."

"This is what we call e-leadership," said Amichai-Hamburger, who has great visions for the project and believes that within three years the Social Start-Up Nation will be utilized by other schools, universities and organizations worldwide.

"The Internet is a place for open communication," he said. "It's a safe place for those who are not usually comfortable discussing their issues in public. The websites are the platform to put these many issues into the public domain, but our students are encouraged to promote these sites by various means, namely by using social media tools. The idea of the project is to change lives."

Another website was created by **Dean Bines**, **Tal Tendler**, **Yuval Lev** and **Liel Barazani**, who focused on helping people make the best use of brief periods of spare time.

"We spend most of our lives on a tight schedule," said Barzani. "We're constantly running around in circles trying to get everything done. Our goal is to make it possible for people to maximize brief windows of time to enrich themselves and their environments. The project aims to provide people with tools to take advantage of brief windows, between five and 30 minutes, by doing

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things such as a CPR crash course, mindfulness exercises, and so on."

Prof. **Uriel Reichman**, IDC's president and founder, said, "Since its founding, IDC has been teaching its students the values of freedom and social responsibility. The Social Start-Up Nation Project is truly in sync with these values, and I have no doubt that as the program continues, it will have a huge global impact."

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– Sophie Vardi