

DRESSR...

an online closet?

[By: Tonya Cone / photography by: Park Street]

Most of us have looked into our closet at least once and despaired that we had nothing to wear, even when staring into a sea of clothes. Whether caused by a disorganized closet or boredom with wearing the same old outfits, Sara Brumfield of Austin, Texas, has created an online program that she believes can solve this and other wardrobe dilemmas.

The program, called Dressr, offers users the opportunity to upload photographs of pieces of clothing they own or have found on the Internet into an online "closet." The pictures can be linked into a network of other users' photos and shared with friends. Users can build outfits out of the pieces in their closet, which are searchable by tags such as color or type of clothing. They can also list items and outfits in a calendar, which tells the user when they last wore each piece of clothing.

"There is so much fantasy involved in getting dressed — this is what I could look like — and some people would build fantasy wardrobes and

outfits of what they would wear in their wildest dreams," Dressr founder Brumfield said.

Brumfield said Dressr, scheduled to roll out early in 2007, will appeal to many types of users. The technology makes it a natural fit for teenagers, who frequently use programs like MySpace to socialize on the Internet, and who already spend a lot of time discussing clothes. She also expects it to appeal to *fashionistas*, who will use the calendar feature to avoid being caught in the same outfit more than once, and professionals who want to organize their wardrobe according to how they can mix and match items to make the most outfits. Users can also put together shopping wish lists.

Those trying to figure out what to wear for an event, such as a wedding or prom, can combine these features and uses; they can add several items to their closet along with accessories, put them together into an outfit, get friends' advice, and then purchase the "right" ensemble. Brumfield explained that this process helps users to make the most of the clothes they have or want

to have while designing their own look

"There's this trend in fashion with a lot of do it yourself fashion — people are designing and creating their own clothes, their own looks. Now more than ever, people don't want their looks to be dictated by designers and fashion magazines. Dressr allows them to see how real people are dressing, putting together outfits, combining clothing to make new and interesting looks. Instead of buying a fashion magazine, people will come to Dressr and see how other people are wearing clothing similar to theirs and get inspiration from real people," Brumfield said, referring to this as the "democratization of fashion."

She also explained that the program may be used to interact with other types of media. "The clothing obsessed members of the Veronica Mars television show forums, who currently track down the wardrobe worn by the cast members and post links to it on their forum, would create a closet on Dressr to display and comment on clothing from the show," she said.

Brumfield expects to offer various Dressr



Brumfield lays on her couch while working on some details to add to the program "Dressr" which is an online closet that will interact with the user and the stores.

account levels. A limited amount of space and options will be available free of charge. The next step is an enhanced account with more features and space, available for a subscription fee. She expects to support the site with sponsorships from retailers, who will pay to have their clothes featured on the site and run contests. She thinks she will offer advertising as well.

Brumfield was inspired to work on the project by grassroots fashion blogs featuring photographs of people on the street, as well as Web 2.0 sites like flickr.com, which similarly allows users to store, search, sort and share photos, and del.icio.us, a site that allows users to store, share and search compilations of Web sites, music and books. Using her background in computer science and women's studies and work in the technology industry, she coupled this technology with a fashion notebook she has put together with magazine clippings and charts that build different outfits around one key piece and came up with Dressr.

"The realization that I could build this application on my own and launch it, and hopefully find users for it without large sums of money, was from the example that people like del.icio.us founder Joshua Schachter set. He built his application while holding down a day job and eventually sold it to Yahoo!," she said.

Like Schachter, Brumfield is juggling several roles while starting her company. She is developing the program and rolling out the business while mothering a two-year-old and holding down a full-time job supporting enterprise system management software. She said Austin's size makes this possible. Because of the small software community, she has friends who are helping her out with various aspects of the business, including a graphic designer who is designing a logo for a small fee, and a friend who is developing the user interface free of charge.

"Working in Austin has been great because I have this network of friends and family who really support me, and support means things like

helping me design my user interface, my logo, talking to me about business models and letting me practice my demo to them. We're still a small town compared to places like Boston or Silicon Valley, but we have what you need if you are starting a business," she said.

Brumfield finally set Dressr into motion when she discovered a design and usability focused Web application framework, Ruby on Rails, at the end of 2005. After years of not developing software, she discovered that the application "made programming fun again," and plugged into the local Ruby on Rails community. She said users are very supportive and as the "girl in the group," she hopes she is the first to have the idea to put this technology together with a love of fashion.

"This is really the culmination of three of my passions: technology, business and clothes. I've always known I wanted to start a business, but when I came up with an idea that combined my passion for fashion with my technology skills, I just had to go for it," Brumfield said. ■