



Suffolk University Attains a Higher Degree of Web Content Management with OpenText

OpenText Web Site Management gets top marks from Suffolk University for improving online offerings

Industry

Higher Education

Customer



Business Challenges

- Difficult to maintain brand consistency
- Slow and inefficient process for managing Web content
- Unable to expand Web site with existing resources

Business Solution

- OpenText Web Site Management

Business Benefits

- Web site expansion accelerated
- Brand consistency implemented
- Easier maintenance of Web content
- Widespread user adoption and built-in controls to manage Web content

Suffolk University is located in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. Established in 1906, the university offers degrees in more than 70 areas of study and has additional campuses in Dakar, Senegal, and Madrid, Spain.

In September 2006, in time for their centennial year, Suffolk University launched a redesigned and expanded version of their Web site (<http://www.suffolk.edu/>) using OpenText Web Site Management. The new Web site features consistent branding, an improved and easily-maintainable site structure, and thousands of pages of information for staff and students alike, including an online course catalog. The result is a comprehensive online presence that drives more visitors to the site and offers an optimized experience for those who want to learn about the university's programs and course offerings.

Business challenge

The university site relaunch was the culmination of a 15-month project to implement improvements in the appearance of the site, the scope of information offered and to help manage an ever-increasing amount of content. One of the primary objectives in conjunction with the relaunch was to implement a Web content management system that would provide a more efficient and automated process to manage their Web site.

To meet their September 2006 deadline, Anne Macdonald, Managing Associate Director of ITS Web Services, and her team needed to find a Web content management solution that did not require a lot of programming on the back end. A user-friendly system was also important because many of the people that would be using the system were not necessarily tech-savvy. After an extensive search involving over a dozen different vendors, Macdonald narrowed it down to a shortlist of three. Each of these vendors was brought in to demonstrate their content management system to around 30 Suffolk employees. In the end, it was OpenText Web Site Management that stood out because it offered the right mix of affordability, ease-of-use, and flexibility. "The OpenText solution required little programming and was more or less ready out of the box. OpenText also ranked among the best for ease-of-use," said Macdonald.

Content updates made easier

For the Web Services team, one of their main goals in implementing a Web content management system was to create a much easier process for non-technical staff across the University to edit and maintain their own Web content.





“At the end of the day, I know that I’m not going to come back to my office with a list of things that need to be edited. The OpenText Web content management solution allows us the time to do more development work on other projects so that we can push ahead. We’re no longer just staring at the Web site all day saying, ‘I’ll never finish this!’ Web Site Management has become invaluable to our university—to the site, students, and staff.”

Anne Macdonald,
Managing Associate Director of ITS Web Service

Before implementing Web Site Management, the Web Services team, comprising Macdonald and two team members, spent approximately 75-80 percent of their time editing or adding content to the Web site. While they had tried to implement a process whereby other users could make their own edits, this proved too difficult for most non-technical staff members. “Editing Web content is not part of the daily responsibilities of most people at Suffolk University. We only had about a 25 percent success rate in training people to make their own site edits,” said Macdonald. “Some were eager to edit their own Web pages, but, in the end, they were not comfortable using HTML editing programs.” As a result, most Web edits were pushed back onto Macdonald and her team.

With Web Site Management, editing Web content is something that anyone at Suffolk can master. “We implemented a policy that every department, every area, would do their own editing,” said Macdonald. “At least one representative from each department is trained on the content management system. The first year involved training a lot of users and getting people comfortable with the idea of making their own Web edits. User adoption was very quick.”

Macdonald and her team conducted three-hour training classes to cover everything that Suffolk employees needed to know about the system. A review process was set up to ensure that new users were properly trained, and pages are reviewed by different areas of the University, or by Web Services, to identify any consistent problems. As opposed to the incredibly poor success rate for teaching people HTML editing, Macdonald and her team have realized a virtually 100 percent success rate training people to use Web Site Management.

In the second year of implementation, the new system really took hold, due primarily to a change in mindset. Initially, there had been hesitation by some, including reactions like, “Wait, you want me to edit my own pages?” After a while, most employees began to realize the significant advantages of being able to easily control

their own content. Macdonald now hears more positive comments like, “This is great! It is so much better than the old method with tear sheets and handwritten edits.” Now the staff members make their own edits, and, most importantly, the changes are implemented immediately.

For Macdonald and her Web Services team, this has resulted in significant time savings. “OpenText Web content management has completely eliminated the burden of having to handle the vast majority of Web content edits,” says Macdonald. “We no longer have to do any content edits. This has freed up over three-quarters of our time to work on important development and other Web-related projects.”

Improving Web content with controlled contributions

With Web Site Management in place, everyone who depends on the Web site for accurate and up-to-date information has benefited. Some have a direct benefit in that their job is made easier, while others have the indirect benefit of getting their content updated much faster. There are now over 200 users across campus involved in maintaining the information that is posted on the Web site. This has created a much more dynamic system where people from all areas of the university are actively creating and editing their own, self-relevant content, with controlled time frames for altering or posting new information. This paradigm shift—wherein users now have a sense of ownership for their content and may post what they want to, when they want to, and how they like to—has improved the quality of Suffolk University’s site and information sharing opportunities, driving in more visitors who want to learn about programs and course offerings.

Suffolk has been able to use Web Site Management to update and edit their academic catalog, now available in an online version posted on the Web site. Course descriptions are imported from their Student Information System database to create an online



version that replicates all the information found in the printed catalog. The online version of the catalog also contains a detailed navigation structure replicating the table of contents found in the printed version. All edits and reviews for the online catalog take place through the Web content management system, where workflows and authorizations are set up to indicate which users can edit individual areas or pages of the catalog. In the future, the University might even move away from using the printed materials altogether and have the online catalog as their official version. The project has realized extended benefits including savings on printing and distribution, the assurance that information is continuously up-to-date, and that the content is easily available.

Brand identity is maintained throughout the site because the OpenText technology ensures that users only have the ability to edit content and not the appearance or layout of the site. This is achieved using templates that lock in the appearance of the Web pages and only gives users the power to make content edits, ensuring a consistent look and brand identity. As Macdonald describes, “we wanted to be able to control the branding and take away from people the responsibility for what their site should look like. We want them focused solely on maintaining content.”

The OpenText solution also enables smoother content interaction throughout the Web site. For instance, it is simple to manage identical content that appears in multiple locations, which is often the case for news and events information. Before implementing Web Site Management, the process for posting a news story in multiple locations was very inefficient at Suffolk and often involved cutting and pasting content into various templates for different Web pages; if the content was edited on one page, it would also require editing on the other pages. A user would have to manually search for each piece of content on each page and perform separate edits. With Web Site Management, the university is able to use a keyword system that searches for, and pulls out, all of the required content for editing and then restores the new version of the content back into the multiple locations it was taken from.



Future developments

Macdonald is impressed with the overall improvements that she has witnessed using Web Site Management, noting, “It is amazing to see how much the site has grown! Starting with about 3,000 pages, the site has now swelled to approximately 30,000 pages. This is the result of a dynamic process whereby users across campus have control over their content, their Web site, and their time frame.”

With ownership of Web content spread out among multiple users campus-wide, Macdonald now has the ability to work on other Web projects that will take the Suffolk site to the next level. Macdonald is interested in adding more functionality from OpenText that will give Suffolk the ability to identify site visitors and to create Web experiences that are tailored to visitor needs, including information feeds.

Macdonald and her team remain confident about their decision to implement Web Site Management and are excited about newfound site development possibilities. “At the end of the day, I know that I’m not going to come back to my office with a list of things that need to be edited. Web Site Management allows us the time to do more development work on other projects so that we can push ahead. We’re no longer just staring at the Web site all day saying, ‘I’ll never finish this!’ Web Site Management has become invaluable to our university—to the site, students, and staff.”

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