

Case Study

Shoreline Community College Upgrades Website Architecture and Design with OU Campus™

Key Takeaways:

- Disconnecting a web CMS implementation from a website redesign can give institutions time to focus on restructuring and improving site content
- Separating web content from design allows each element to be upgraded and improved by separate teams, focusing talents and increasing efficiency
- With the use of XSL templates in OU Campus™, an entire site's design can be changed in seconds

Located just ten miles north of downtown Seattle, Shoreline Community College was founded in 1964 after a moratorium on community colleges was lifted in the state of Washington. Established on land acquired with help from the Boeing family, Shoreline today provides more than a hundred excellent academic, professional/technical, and workforce training programs to meet the lifelong needs of the surrounding community. Shoreline is fully accredited by the northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities. Though it's the tenth largest community college in the state, Shoreline is the fourth largest community college for online enrollment, making it a significant player among Washington higher education institutions.

Half a CMS Won't Work

Back in 2007, Special Assistant to the President Jim Hills knew that Shoreline's website was in need of both functional and design upgrades. This prompted a brief search for a web content management system (CMS) by its Database and Web Application Programmer, Gavin Smith. But soon afterward, Shoreline was chosen by the state of Washington to participate in a pilot program whereby the Microsoft® SharePoint® platform was to be implemented statewide at public institutions in order to manage web content. Shoreline faculty and staff were given copies of SharePoint Designer in anticipation of the SharePoint Server CMS implementation, when an economic recession hit and the state was forced to realign its information technology funds. Shoreline was stuck with only half of a web content solution. Continuing with the SharePoint solution was unviable, since as many as four staff members would be required to manage the software if Shoreline decided to purchase it independently.

For an entire year, the community college had no CMS, leaving content contributors with only the SharePoint Designer tool to publish web pages directly, which was both inefficient and tended to produce invalid HTML. Furthermore, without a workflow control and approval process, Shoreline's Public Information Office had no means of reviewing pages being published, which resulted in inconsistent content. They eventually removed content contributing privileges from all but three staff in their office, which, not surprisingly, resulted in a workflow bottleneck. Shoreline's original plan to redesign the look and functionality of its site was put aside in order to juggle content management, while the site's content quality actually deteriorated.



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Back on Track with OU Campus

Fortunately, a CMS committee was formed and after an extensive review of CMS options, the committee chose OmniUpdate's OU Campus™ web CMS to service the college's needs. The site migration to OU Campus was efficiently carried out by OmniUpdate's professional services team, which organized Shoreline's website into XML data files with XSL design files, effectively splitting content from design. One part-time individual was hired at Shoreline to manage the new CMS and train users in small groups, quickly bringing them up to speed. In no time, users regained permission to update their content directly while administrators policed standards through an approval process. Shoreline finally had an effective web content management system.

But this was just the beginning. Shoreline still wanted to upgrade the look and feel of the site and add new functionalities, including breadcrumbs, accordion menus, slideshows, and integration with the Blackboard Learning Management System. Additionally, the website needed to be accessible on mobile devices. Shoreline contacted OmniUpdate to request template development services, a mobile website implementation, and the OU Campus Live Delivery Platform™ module, which enables image galleries, comments, forms, surveys, and more.

While Al Yates of the Shoreline Visual Communications department crafted a new design, faculty and staff moved beyond simply updating content to actually reorganizing the information architecture of the website. They rearranged file hierarchies into a more logical root/tree structure, and old deadwood content and pages were pruned off. The website changed little aesthetically during this time; however, the underlying architecture of the site was overhauled to a more intuitive organizational structure. Meanwhile, OmniUpdate prepared to implement many of the new functionalities Shoreline had requested, while Gavin used a placeholder version of the new design by replacing the background images on existing templates.

Once the new design was complete, Shoreline passed the design (along with the HTML and CSS) to OmniUpdate to convert to XML/XSL. Re-theming a site with a new design and new functionalities can generally take six to eight months to complete, but since the Shoreline faculty and staff had already done the hard work of information architecture restructuring and had invested time and resources to the project, it took just two months from beginning to end. The very final step was plugging in the new XSL templates, which globally updated the look of the entire site in just seconds. With the appropriate XSL templates, Shoreline can now publish site content in different formats or designs blazingly fast.

Shoreline's Technical Strategy

Step 1: Implement OU Campus to establish controls

Step 2: Optimize information architecture and improve existing content

Step 3: Redesign look and feel and take advantage of new functionality

Ready for the Future

After attending OmniUpdate's User Training Conference in the spring of 2012, Gavin learned how OmniUpdate creates a mobile version of an institution's established website using the most frequently-visited pages, and how updates to the parent site using OU Campus are automatically reflected on the mobile pages. Now that Shoreline's

site is firmly established with XML/XSL, mobile implementation is the next logical step.

There are also plans to implement a major look and feel upgrade to the site every few years. "Our website needs to be

as good and as functional as other players in the market," noted Jim. "I love the ability we have with OU Campus to globally update the look of the entire site so simply."

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