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Makers of the Award-Winning Cascade Server content management software

College of William & Mary Case Study

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As proclaimed on their website, the College of William & Mary (W&M) is different-- and they like it that way. As the second oldest college in the US and a "Public Ivy," the school is prestigious, yet accessible. It manages to be an intensely rigorous research university while making a name for itself as an innovative cutting-edge academic groundbreaker. With a combined graduate and undergraduate enrollment of almost eight thousand, W&M merges the diversity and experience of a public school with a community-oriented campus and presence. The College's web presence is as multifaceted as the rare combination of factors that make W&M the school it has become in its 316-year history.

Challenge

For institutions of higher education, a campus web presence is a significant factor in contributing to enrollment, prestige, and visibility. For this reason, it is imperative for schools like William & Mary to have a competitive website with a consistent and appealing look and feel. Like many schools do, W&M previously used a variety of systems to manage the campus website and did so in a very decentralized and collaborative way.

Prior to acquiring a formal web content management (WCM) system, 75% of W&M's then 450 content contributors used a homegrown solution written in PHP4. The solution required these users to map drives and store pages on a file system. Others used Dreamweaver to edit content and then store that content directly on the web server. The processes in place at W&M were largely decentralized and informal. As Tina Coleman, Managing Editor of W&M's website, remarks, "Every department had a folder on the web server for their site. And these separate sites weren't part of an integrated web presence." The process wasn't scalable, and as a result, the team at W&M chose instead to pursue a formal content management strategy.

With a goal of redesigning the College's website and standardizing the process of managing it, the W&M Integrated Web Services (IWS) team led the efforts to find a vendor and WCM solution that would meet the school's fairly common needs. When asked why the school chose to pursue a campus-wide web content management system, Coleman notes, "We had sites all over the place, without any consistent design, look, or fashion of editing them. The redesign project was a way to consolidate not only the look and design, but the support of web editors on campus as well."

Solution

Planning for a Redesign

After issuing a design RFP to vendors, developing a short list of solutions to research, and hiring consultant [mStoner](#) to help with the campus redesign, the WCM evaluation process for W&M officially began. As is true with any well-planned WCM search and implementation, the team at W&M involved representative stakeholders from the College's various schools, units, divisions, and departments from the very beginning. One key endeavor that set W&M's efforts apart, however, was its project redesign blog, [re.web](#), which documented the College's efforts to "reassert its web efforts." Led by Susan T. Evans, Director of Web and Communication Services at W&M, the re.web effort was initiated to communicate with stakeholders and gain acceptance and understanding of the project's milestones, timeline, and goals.

As part of the re.web efforts, consultant mStoner came on campus and met with over 100 individuals from varying groups of students, alumni, staff and faculty in order to gain an understanding of W&M's culture, challenges, and goals. Once the vendor short list was whittled down to two finalists, mStoner presented both systems to a representative audience who surveyed and evaluated both Hannon Hill's Cascade Server and the RedDot system.

Stakeholder evaluations and the system's ability to meet fundamental requirements specific to university WCM needs ultimately led the W&M team to select [Cascade Server](#) as the College's official web content management system. In addition, the system's platform-agnostic nature, customizability, WYSIWYG control, and folder-based navigation were key factors in demonstrating Cascade's ability to meet W&M's decentralized needs.

The forethought, pre-implementation planning, and buy-in garnered under the re.web umbrella set the stage for one of the most successful campus-wide WCM adoption efforts Hannon Hill has seen to date. "I think it was very successful. Everyone felt involved and they were more accepting of our decision because they contributed their voice and we listened to it," comments Mark Windley, W&M CMS Administrator and Web Project Manager.

Results

Campus-Wide Implementation

After choosing Cascade Server as the school's solution, the IWS team of seven was charged with leading the efforts to migrate content into the Cascade Server system. In keeping with the themes of collaboration and buy-in, the team first met with each department and division to discuss their respective sites' information architecture (IA). IWS team members then presented the IA to a team of student workers, who were responsible for creating the folder structure and performing the content migration in Cascade Server.

During the first iteration of content migration, the IWS team worked with students to train them on the system using real site content. As Windley notes, "It really was not that difficult for them. It was advantageous that training sessions used live content to really remove the fear factor." Once content migration was completed for each site, a finished Cascade Server website was presented to each respective college, unit, and so on, so that each could begin taking ownership of its web content.

To keep these stakeholders vested in the effort, the IWS team provides formal training and a dedicated Cascade-related support email. "Because new departmental sites were fully migrated by student workers, departmental web editors didn't have as much hands-on experience in the beginning," notes Coleman. "We may have to retrain a few people, but they're all catching on quickly, so it's been successful."

In addition to a support outlet and training option, W&M also provides Cascade Server online help documentation specific to the College's own implementation. CMS Administrator Mark Windley notes, "It's the nature of Cascade that it's such a flexible tool and it's something that anyone can customize for their own particular needs. We have very specific and customized page types that do very specific things. We were able to build them fairly easily, but we needed to be able to explain to our users what these page types are doing and why." Providing training and documentation specific to W&M's implementation of Cascade Server was a key step taken by the College to ensure continual momentum for end-user adoption and interest.

Furthermore, the goal of consolidating systems and streamlining WCM processes is in sight, "we just finished the majority of our transition, and we feel pretty confident that there is going to be quite a bit less burden on us (IWS) moving forward," adds Coleman.

Benefits and Accolades

With all of W&M's main website content now being managed in Cascade Server, the number of content contributors on campus has grown from 450 to upwards of 600 end-users. "We are surprised that we have more users now, but it's a good thing," notes Windley. "Real excitement was generated with this tool and our redesign, and that's helping to address keeping web content up to date."

As a result of the efforts of the W&M IWS team, the campus website has already received accolades from the College's constituents and third-party organizations. "The feedback we've received from visitors has been overwhelmingly positive," remarks Windley. "Prospective students and parents are constantly giving us good feedback on the site and how easy it is to use."

Furthermore, within just a year of launching the newly-designed W&M site, the efforts of the IWS team and W&M community were recognized with several awards. eduStyle awarded www.wm.edu with the Noteworthy Site award in September, 2008; it since has also awarded the school with the Judged Award and the People's Choice Award for "Best Redesign". For a full list of awards garnered by the W&M redesign efforts, please visit: <http://www.wm.edu/aboutthissite/>

Lastly, aside from positive feedback and accolades regarding the new campus website and design, the change in web content management processes has led content contributors at W&M to focus their efforts where it matters most-- on quality web content. "On an individual department level, end users are 100% in control of their content now and care about it," remarks Coleman, a sentiment shared across the W&M IWS team. As Mark Windley adds, "that was our ultimate goal, for them to focus on their content."

Future Plans

With all site content being managed in Cascade Server (excepting the school's athletics and library sites), W&M now has time to evaluate and improve upon a successful and

stable website implementation. "We're definitely pleased, and I think we made the right choice," remarks Windley. "We're comfortable with the way we're using Cascade now, and we're very comfortable with what we see as the roadmap of Cascade Server in the future. Specifically, with the new functionality 6.4 offers in terms of Connectors, it's right in line with what we've been thinking." In the short-term, the IWS team has declared a 6-month "stability phase" in which Mark Windley, sole CMS administrator will have the opportunity to work on formats, templates and configurations to make them as efficient as possible before moving into Cascade Server's new Site content-model.

<http://www.wm.edu/>

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