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800.407.3540 | www.hannonhill.com | info@hannonhill.com

Makers of the Award-Winning Cascade Server content management software

Sarah Lawrence College

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Sarah Lawrence College is an institution of exceptional quality, which expresses extraordinary dedication to a clear, distinctive and compelling educational mission. Founded in 1926, the College's core pedagogy consists of small seminars, regular one-on-one faculty conferences focused on students' independent research, cross-disciplinary approaches, and the integration of the arts within a liberal arts curriculum. The College is known for having one of the lowest student/faculty ratios in the country.

One of the main avenues via which Sarah Lawrence College's mission is conveyed is its public website. A small group of individuals who make up the Sarah Lawrence Office of Communications Web Team is responsible for organizing, managing, and updating the school's web content.

Challenge

To effectively communicate the College's institutional philosophy and make information readily available to its constituents, the Communications Web Team at Sarah Lawrence is charged with effectively managing a site of over 2,500 pages and 15,000 other assets. Made up of just a handful of individuals, one of the main challenges faced by this small team has been the need to be able to work smarter and to work quickly, leveraging the content and information architecture of the College's public site to their full potential and delivering new content in a timely fashion.

In April of 2006, the Web Team at SLC partnered with the College's IT group on a comprehensive CMS evaluation process in search of a new vendor and new solution to aid in managing the school's public-facing web content. During the evaluation phase, the Team spent a considerable amount of time researching solutions, entertaining demos, and testing instances from a variety of vendors with the hope of finding a CMS solution to meet their needs. Serena Collage was selected, and though its selection was a step toward better content management for SLC, Collage's dependence on client-side Java and unforeseeable reliability issues with its editor created an unsustainable roll-out and support scenario for SLC's Web Team and IT group. These factors, in combination with learning of Serena's discontinuation of support for Collage, led the Web Team to set out to find a product that improved upon or possessed similar strengths to those of Collage, while providing a more stable and compatible experience on the client-side. Of equal importance to the Web Team was the selection of a company who valued their customers and was committed to their product over the long term.

At this point, the Web Team revisited the handful of final candidate systems it had identified for serious consideration in the previous research phase, which included

CMS solutions such as RedDot, Ingeniux, and Cascade Server. With some valuable experience behind them and having a better idea of what to look for and what to avoid this time, the Web Team selected Cascade Server as their new content management system. Notes Winston Churchill-Joell, Web Team member and Director of Interactive Media at Sarah Lawrence about making the selection, "the customer service with Hannon Hill from the very first phone call has been just a stellar experience."

Solution

In addition to building a trusting and enjoyable working relationship with Hannon Hill and its staff, strong product corollaries aiding in a seamless content migration and contribution setup, (Data Definitions and Asset Factories in Cascade vs. Collage's Document and Folder Definitions) made Hannon Hill's Cascade Server the perfect choice for Sarah Lawrence. Churchill-Joell remarks, "I'm confident that in Cascade Server, we've found the CMS solution we were looking for. Cascade has proven to be a great fit for us already, and I'm pleased we're finally in a position to approach key areas regarding participation in managing content on the site. We're looking forward to our continued work with Hannon Hill and the Cascade Server content management system."

Since acquiring Cascade Server in April of 2008, the Team at Sarah Lawrence has received training on the system and worked with the Professional Services team at Hannon Hill to perform a full content migration from Serena Collage to Cascade Server. After replicating the functionality and content that was migrated into Cascade within just a few months, the Services team at Hannon Hill performed and delivered what Churchill-Joell refers to as "a faithful migration from Collage into Cascade."

Saving the SLC Team weeks of copying and pasting content from one solution to the other, the Team was able to instead focus its efforts on the post-migration redesign of the school website. With the implementation and redesign underway, the Team was also able to spend time learning how to leverage the power of some of Cascade's most notable features, including GUI-configurable content indexing (querying assets) and page setup, drag n' drop asset reordering, XSLT filtering and formatting, and the system's Sites content model, which they'll use in the future to enable other areas of the College to work on completely separate projects in Cascade.

Results

The Web Team at Sarah Lawrence College has spent the last year fine-tuning elements of its implementation and conducting the aforementioned complete site redesign. By using a combination of Cascade's indexing and metadata functionalities and native support of XML and XSLT, they were also able to rapidly update the major search engines' indices (Google, Yahoo, etc) by submitting a syntactically correct sitemap file that excludes discreet folders and pages. As a result, the Sarah Lawrence College website now has over 2,300 pages being indexed and crawled by search engines.

With the Cascade CMS system fully implemented and being used by the Web Team and very soon by the school's Department of Academic Computing, these power users look forward to approaching key areas and contributors about using Cascade Server to manage web content. In the past, those contributing content faced a substantial learning curve posed by the systems being utilized. Churchill-Joell is now confident "that the little amount of time required of new users to get up to speed with Cascade's interface and editing tools" will make adoption of Cascade Server by contributors much more likely. Churchill-Joell continues, "having the option to get them involved is huge."

Future Plans

In addition to distributing the weight of updating and managing content, the Web Team at Sarah Lawrence has several things to look forward to with their future use of Cascade. The Team looks to utilize Cascade to output content in multiple formats, including formatting for the iPhone™ and other mobile devices, in the very near future. Additionally, they look forward to incorporating the use of more social media-driven features via the use of Cascade Server's connector strategy, premiering with the release of Cascade Server 6.4.

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