

OmniUpdate
Web Content Management

OmniUpdate OU Campus™ Implementation Case Study:
California State University, Long Beach

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Introduction

WebsiteASP is a leading provider of web content management solutions for higher education, with over 1 million web pages published by institutions worldwide. The demand for OmniUpdate web content management technology from higher education is attributable to WebsiteASP's focus on ease of use, scalability and flexibility to work with a wide range of web site architectures and network infrastructures. OmniUpdate has been adopted by a diverse set of higher education institutions such as Dartmouth College, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Lincoln University, Louisiana Tech University, University of Massachusetts, University of Michigan, and the Los Angeles Community College District. Today, the OmniUpdate family of e-Education solutions includes products that address the specific needs of faculty, staff, students, and alumni. The demand for the OmniUpdate e-Education solutions continues to grow as schools nationwide are realizing improved efficiencies, better web communications, as well as financial benefits. In a few short months, California State University at Long Beach identified the value of WebsiteASP's OmniUpdate OU Campus™ and documents its value in this case study.

Case Study Summary

As with all successful and progressive organizations, the Library at CSULB web site has grown in size and functionality. Its relative success has provided challenges as well as accolades. With growth comes the challenge of keeping up with the demand for more information and keeping the existing amount of information current. The CSULB Library administration relied upon part-time and volunteer workers to keep the content of the web site current. With greater demand, they found that a bottleneck impacted service to their constituents. They quickly realized that central control over content management no longer worked.

Once the problem was defined, they identified the qualities that they needed in an application to address their needs:

- Low threshold application (low level of technical entry and maintenance)
- Low cost of entry. No new hardware or headcount requirements.
- Capability to distribute the responsibility for content maintenance
- Low support requirements and costs.

Following is the case study, as recorded by Sara Sluss the project champion on campus. It describes how CSULB selected and implemented the solution from WebsiteASP successfully. The effort is a paradigm of bringing a successful implementation and higher levels of constituent services to the institution.

Background

The University Library at California State University Long Beach houses 1.5 million volumes (books and serials) in a six-story facility serving the research needs of 32,000+ students and 3,400+ staff and faculty.

The CSULB Library web site initially went live in 1996 after a year of internal discussions about which content could/should be provided. The initial concept was simple: the library needed to have a web presence. The initial content was equally simple: the library web site offered the equivalent of an electronic brochure describing the library's services, collections, hours, pathfinders for research topics, etc.

In the fall of 1996 our initial offering was approximately twenty-five page files of content. The web site was managed by organizational "volunteers" and by an occasional paid student assistant¹ who did simple coding and loading of web pages on behalf of the organization. When no student assistant was on payroll, the organizational "volunteers" (usually only one or two persons) did the required coding and loading of files.

Unlike other organizations where web site management usually devolves onto IT staff, at Long Beach these "organizational volunteers" were members of the library faculty. From the birth of the web site, the majority of the content was developed for instructional purposes as part of a suite of information used by librarians as their teaching tools. So it was natural, in this environment, for the librarians to take on responsibility for web site content maintenance.

Web Site Management

In subsequent years, the library's web site (like everyone's web site) grew exponentially as staff discovered and created more content information to add and as access to electronic resources exploded on to the library scene. In 1996 the web site offered information about how to telnet to our catalog and two databases from off-site via our web pages—CARL's UnCover[™] and FirstSearch[™] (all other databases at that juncture were either restricted to use by faculty only or were CD-ROMs accessible at specific workstations within the physical building).

By mid-year 2000, the library was offering off-site access to eighty web-based commercial databases, as well as our web catalog, via the site. The pathfinder series for research topic support ballooned from a half dozen to seventy unique pages. The library had twenty-five content providers with valuable and timely information and varying HTML skills, one HTML skilled person (who was eventually officially declared "web site content manager"), one growing web site, and one FTP account!

Very few of the content providers were adept with HTML or with any of the various HTML editors available to them, so content was delivered to the web site manager in

¹ The student assistant was routinely one of our computer lab assistants who worked on web pages during lab down times.

a variety of formats. The most common method of delivery for new content was a marked-up word-processed document. The most common method of delivery for updated content was an email message indicating a change in URL or an addition to a specific page. The few content providers who had some experience with an HTML editor were usually not well versed in HTML so even though they might be able to deliver content as an HTML file, minor errors in code would need to be corrected before a file could be posted.

The Problem

As the library's web presence became more robust and more persons within the organization took on more responsibility for content, a bottleneck developed. The library web site lived on a server managed by the campus and we were assigned one FTP account for the entire site. The library administration and systems felt that there should be one person ultimately responsible for the account and for the content of the web site, so individual providers (even if they all had the skills to do so) could not load their updated content. Everything was filtered through the content manager, and the content manager was a faculty peer with full time responsibilities beyond the web site.

This situation became untenable. Content providers were using their web pages as part of their instruction and needed to have new and/or updated content posted quickly. Most content providers were not interested in learning HTML, and the few who had done so were unhappy with a situation that didn't provide them with direct access to the FTP account (for security reasons). The content manager maintained total control of the account and everything had to be funneled.

The Process to the Solution

It was apparent that although there was a need to secure and maintain control of the overall account, there also needed to be greater flexibility so that the content providers could maintain their information at will. The library systems team began seeking a solution to the problem.

A variety of content management solutions were examined; however, most were of the "shotgun to kill a fly" solutions. Most applications were more powerful than the scope of the problem since the pages needing updating were static and all that were evaluated required higher-level skills of the content providers than could be expected in this organization.

The library required a low threshold application to support a group of individuals who, for the most part, had little technical training or aptitude. In a tight budget situation, the solution could not require new servers or software or costly licensing arrangements. By the same token, any solution appropriate for the organization would have to be managed without necessitating the hiring of new IT personnel or the reallocation of existing IT staff. It seemed hopeless and the status quo was wearily embraced.

Timelines

In Spring 2001 the library's technology strategist and the content manager for the web site attended Internet World in Los Angeles. One of the many representatives in the vendor pavilion was *WebsiteASP*. Their product, *Omniupdate* offered a solution that addressed our needs: a low threshold application offering high levels of professional results with minimum cost and minor support requirements. In May 2001 the solution was discussed with the Dean of Library Services, content providers and the systems team, all of whom supported adoption. The decision to purchase *Omniupdate* was made early July 2001. Installation was completed in August 2001. Training was offered to content providers in September 2001 and we had full user adoption by mid-November.

Preparations for Implementation

Though most content providers were generally unhappy with the old approach, there were still concerns with the implementation. Some providers did not see the necessity for change; the current arrangements had worked "well enough". A few were concerned that it would not be easy for them to learn this new application. Others felt that the burden of learning something new AND the pressure of needing to get their content updated expeditiously would prove to be too much.

All successful technology initiatives need a good public relations campaign. The library focused our campaign on the product's ease of use and emphasized that its use in our situation would completely erase the old "bottleneck". There would be no more waiting until someone else could get your content coded and loaded. To ensure full adoption, the Dean added web page maintenance to the responsibilities of all identified content providers (librarians and library public service coordinators).

A Team Approach

Previously, the library's successful technology initiatives were handled by "teams" and this case was no exception. We found that the team approach to implementation—combining power users, trainers, and IT support personnel—encouraged quicker and painless product adoption. In this case the implementation team was made up of two librarians (the web site content manager and a librarian who would become the primary "trainer") and the technology strategist.

First, *OmniUpdate* personnel demonstrated the application to the implementation team members. The team then organized the implementation, developed training materials to supplement those provided by the vendor, offered three open training sessions for content providers, and made themselves available to do follow-up "one on one" visits with content providers after training.

Back-end Activity

Before training was scheduled, the team reviewed the web site and made some structural changes. All directories and most sub-directories that used mixed case names were renamed so that they would sort logically. Any directory that was named using blank spaces was renamed using underscores. This made the site appear alphabetical and easier for users to navigate when locating the directories and pages they need to update.

Although our web-site was backed up nightly by campus central computing, having selective restores performed was difficult so we had instituted an internal method of “backing up” our site by saving to a local network the previous copy of any page being updated. *OmniUpdate* has a feature for backing up web pages and we encouraged content managers to use it as well. Ultimately, library systems scripted a procedure to perform a full site backup nightly to an internal server against the event that we needed to make any selective restores.

The web site content manager built a spreadsheet listing of all of the site’s subdirectories and the HTML files within each subdirectory, reviewed the files, and assigned responsibilities to individuals or groups who would ultimately be assigned to update the page.

Username and Passwords

Secure usernames and passwords are important regardless of the application. Since the implementation team had decided to implement the *OmniUpdate* “page updated” feature, secure logins were even more important. The “page updated” feature adds a “hidden” link at the bottom of each page updated in *OmniUpdate* that can be clicked to bring up the *OmniUpdate* login page. This feature is a convenience for content providers plus puts page users on notice as to the last date on which the content was updated.

However, the implementation of this feature made it doubly important to create easy to remember, but secure usernames and passwords for each content provider. In our case we decided to use employee initials with phone extension for the usernames (all lowercase). Passwords were created using words that were familiar to the content provider and where numbers could substitute for letters (all lowercase); for example, the password “Dogbert” became “d0gbert1”.

Practice and Preparation

In advance of the training sessions, the implementation team created a test directory on the web site which was designed to give everyone attending the training an opportunity to practice using the application, without forcing them to actually edit a “live” page. The library’s systems group also visited individual offices to update browser software to Internet Explorer version 5, sp2 which, at the time of our implementation, was the recommended browser.

The implementation team developed a customized packet for each content provider that included 1) their *OmniUpdate* username and password, 2) information about how to access the application via the library’s intranet, 3) a training guide to supplement *OmniUpdate*’s online help screens, and 4) a “checklist” that included information about the site structure with the pages they have rights to update. An email distribution list was set up to provide a mechanism for all content providers to ask questions and get answers from their peers using the application. It also gave the implementation team a venue to provide information on shared problems and system upgrades. Content providers initially used the list to make suggestions for

new features in *Omniupdate* and those suggestions were forwarded to (and usually immediately acted upon by) the vendor's technical support.

Training

Working with our established and successful in-house training model, the implementation team scheduled three training sessions and invitations were sent to all content providers. Library management informed content providers that the sessions were required so 100% attendance was assured. The following topics were addressed in training:

- Where to find online help
- How to get help via the email list
- A demonstration of features and functions to edit existing pages
- How to get new pages into *OmniUpdate*
- A reminder to use Internet Explorer browser only! No exceptions.

Following the demonstration/lecture portion of the training session was "hands on" training. Each person had a page from the newly created test directory on which to work, while implementation team members were available to help with questions and problems. Any questions that arose during training that couldn't immediately be addressed by the team were answered via email after the training sessions ended.

Post Training

The implementation team had designed post training one-on-one with each content provider in his/her workspace. This was planned in advance; however no person asked for the post training sessions as the general attitude was that the application was so simple that additional training was not required. The team made sure that emails to the content provider group were answered in a timely fashion with complete information. Team members were called out by individual content providers for occasional desk-top support and assistance, but overall this has been an infrequent occurrence.

Organizational Satisfaction

Library management, the implementation team, and the library systems group all share the opinion that our implementation of *OmniUpdate* application has been a success. Administration expects literacy in use of *OmniUpdate* much the same as the expectations for any productivity software. Even though having this expectation, by default, forces 100% participation, we believe that we have 100% buy-in as well. The library needed a product that was low cost, low threshold, delivered high quality results, required minimum support, and required no additional hardware purchases. The application addressed every concern, need, and issue.

Return on Investment – It's Not Just the Bottom Line

Though the library experienced real financial savings since we solved our problem without needing to 1) purchase hardware, 2) hire or reallocate IT personnel, and 3) continue to use library faculty to deal with what was essentially a clerical task, the real return on investment was the enthusiastic adoption of *OmniUpdate* by content providers. User empowerment is a powerful incentive. Empowering our providers

with a tool appropriate to their needs for which there was a very short learning curve has been our *OmniUpdate* success story.

The information contained in this document represents the current view of OmniUpdate and WebsiteASP, Inc. on the issues discussed as of the date of publication. Because WebsiteASP, Inc. must respond to the changing market conditions, it should not be interpreted to be a commitment on the part of WebsiteASP, Inc., and WebsiteASP, Inc. cannot guarantee the accuracy of any information presented after the date of publication.

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