

OmniUpdate
Web Content Management

Breaking Down the Barriers to Maintaining The Institutional Web Site

A white paper addressing the unique web management challenges faced by colleges and universities during a time of explosive growth of institutional web content.

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Introduction

If there is one constant in the last 50 years, it is that technology evolves to address some of life's biggest challenges.

In the 1970's the power of computer landed on the desktop to empower individual users to access computing power to solve productivity and research problems. Those of us who stood in line to turn in our punch cards only to receive error results the next day could appreciate this quantum leap of technology.

In 1985, Apple introduced the world to desktop publishing by producing the LaserWriter and attaching it to the graphic-intensive, user-friendly Macintosh. They partnered with Aldus to create PageMaker to provide the application that empowered individuals to assemble publishing documents. The result is history now; but at the time, Apple delivered the power to create typeset documents and print them in literally minutes. This impacted everyone from newspapers to people holding garage sales on the weekend who needed flyers to advertise the event.

As we enter a new millennium, we are still reaping the rewards of individuals who are solving problems that emerge as technologies improve. The advent of the World Wide Web created more than just a need to find information, it created a need to publish information in the new medium. But the complexity of the creation and maintenance of individual as well as institutional websites has proven a barrier to proliferation of useful information and its utilization.

Now with the introduction of WebsiteASP's OmniUpdate, this barrier is removed.

The Importance of the Web

When asked about the important communication and marketing tools a college or university has, one that is always listed is the institutional web site. They have quickly become focal points for information access by students, alumni, faculty, staff and the community at large. They articulate the brand, culture, and credibility of the institution, as well as provide useful access to and information on almost all topics from registration to alumni giving. The value of a web site is felt by everyone from recruiters seeking to reach out to prospective students to researchers who depend on posted academic research to keep their information current. The thousands of external "hits" per day attest to the power of this medium.

Problem – Overwhelming Content, Limited Resources

However, over the last several years, institutions of higher education have been faced with challenges on all fronts—including their web site. The typical institutional web site has **ballooned in size and complexity** beyond the point of being easily maintained by a web manager or even a small group of web

administration staff. Compounding the problem further, budget cuts, limited IT resources and today's focus on larger system requirements (e.g., ERP and automated administrative processes), have left core web sites and their critical information with insufficient systems, tools and manpower to fulfill their basic educational mission.

The web site challenge is further complicated because there are **increased expectations** from prospective students, students, faculty, staff, and alumni about what the web site should provide. The web site is expected to contribute to the educational experience both on-campus and off-campus. The web site has rapidly become the institution's most valuable place to obtain information and communicate about the institution.

With the increased usage, there are also **increased costs** in the entire web enterprise effort on campus. There is the initial cost of hardware as well as the periodic upgrades in processing power, RAM, and hard disk space to house the site. There are applications for design, maintenance, security, and a host of other functions. And the human element may be the most costly. There are either dedicated individuals with a cost associated with them or there are not enough people to maintain the site which causes frustration and underutilization of the site.

Over the past 7 or 8 years, web sites have typically grown from ad hoc sites that were nice-to-have's for posting random information to **essential sources of marketing and academic information and communication**. As the web sites of the typical institution grow, the tools and policies used to maintain them must evolve to assure that timely, accurate information is presented to its audience, with minimum work and frustration from information contributors. A cost-effective and compelling solution is to involve more of the everyday players as content contributors so that they can make direct and meaningful contributions to the web sites.

There is clearly a *conflict between the expectations of the users and the capacity of webmasters* to keep pace with the quantity and currency of information that institutions must deliver.

Recent technological advancements have begun a revolution in web content management that offers a powerful, low-cost solution to the overwhelming challenge of maintaining higher education web sites. This paper presents an overview of the specific solutions designed to reduce maintenance costs, while improving the quality and timeliness of the content. Finally, a proposal will be presented with steps that can be taken today to take advantage of advances in web content management that are helping colleges and universities reduce their IT costs while assuring that their web site is more responsive to the needs of their constituents.

Technology Evolution—More than Just a Promise

In order for a new software technology to succeed in today's higher educational institutions, it must offer a solution to a real problem and, most importantly, it must be as straightforward and simple to use as an appliance. This type of solution has been dubbed a "low threshold application." Steve Gilbert, President of the Teaching and Learning Group, defines a low threshold application as follows:

"A low threshold application is a teaching/learning application of information technology that the potential user perceives as not challenging, not intimidating, not requiring a lot of additional work or new thinking."

Faculty and staff embrace new technology that achieves the goal of providing empowering, low-threshold applications. At today's colleges and universities, web browsers and email programs have become the most common low-threshold computer applications. Fueled by low-threshold applications such as word processors coupled with laser printers, the desktop publishing revolution empowered faculty and staff to create and publish printed content.

Similarly, fueled by low-threshold applications such as web browsers and email programs, browser-based web content maintenance systems are revolutionizing the way institutions overcome the challenges of managing the growth and maintenance of their web sites.

There is a solution today that is revolutionizing the way that we create and maintain web sites. It is called OmniUpdate and it delivers the power of web creation and maintenance to the content owner while preserving the look and feel of the institutional web site. In addition, the solution is literally as simple as "browse, point, and click."

Technology Solution for Colleges and Universities

OmniUpdate™ has become a leader in this revolution by offering web content management solutions that are tailored to the needs of higher educational institutions and fit easily into their existing architectures and restricted budgets. A combination of easy to use browser-based editing tools and traditional web content management principles has given rise to several systems that help better manage college and university web sites.

OmniUpdate solutions were developed to empower higher education administration, faculty and staff, of any department, to quickly and easily create, update, and maintain designated areas of the college web sites. This easy to use Web Content Management Solution enables faculty and staff to update pages on departmental and campus web sites without HTML or programming knowledge. OmniUpdate dramatically simplifies the process of keeping higher education web

sites up-to-date by allowing those responsible for the web content to make the changes themselves when they need to make the content available, rather than funneling work through a central IT process.

OmniUpdate offers multi-user access in a controlled environment with workflow and approval capabilities built in. Eleven privilege levels provide a suitable matrix of editing capabilities vs. user need and role. Designed to save time and money while improving web communications, OmniUpdate has become the web content management system of choice for colleges, universities, and educational foundations nationwide.

OmniUpdate is designed specifically to work with the institution's web sites as they exist today. As early adopters of the Web, college and university web sites often are filled with legacy content and static files that date back as many as 10 years. It's not uncommon for a small community college with a few dozen-faculty members to have thousands of web pages, and larger universities can have tens, even hundreds of thousands of pages. OmniUpdate adapts to and works with the existing institutional web site, no matter how large or small, and without modification or re-engineering. This characteristic assures rapid deployment with immediate satisfaction and dramatically lower costs when compared to traditional web content management systems which require time-consuming conversion of web content into a database.

OmniUpdate uses well-designed technology resources to provide ***simple solutions*** to web site creation and maintenance. With a browser-based application that requires only word processor level skills and an approval process that piggy-backs on an existing email system, OmniUpdate provides an extremely easy to use web content management system to faculty and other institutional content contributors. OmniUpdate, in effect, provides the power behind a very easy-to-use interface that requires little training and support.

No system, regardless of how simple is effective without widespread participation. OmniUpdate's track record of ***high acceptance*** by faculty members is in part due to the immediate gratification realized by those who are given access to edit web content. Training is minimized too, due in large part to the natural parallel with the desktop publishing processes that have become commonplace in the institution.

Compliance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, as it applies to the web site design standards of most higher education institutions, is facilitated. Tools and procedures used by corporate America are no longer an acceptable solution to assure Section 508 compliance in higher education. The OmniUpdate e-education suite offers a solution that helps content contributors create new content that is Section 508 compliant, as well as an easy way to bring older and legacy content pages into compliance.

IT Managers remain in control of the core web site. The system administrator, usually the webmaster or a member of the IT department, assigns privileges and

access to faculty and staff or he delegates this responsibility to a subordinate. OmniUpdate offers additional approval features and workflow processes that are customizable by the system administrator to ensure accuracy and appropriateness of content. Consistency and web site design are easily maintained.

Typical costs for traditional corporate web content management solutions for large numbers of users can easily run between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000. OmniUpdate's price for colleges and universities is typically an order of magnitude lower! OmniUpdate excels on a cost per user basis, thus promoting the benefits of increased participation.

Proven Results

The institutional mission is advanced through ***better and timelier web communication***. OmniUpdate allows each department the ability to instantly update their respective web pages, so that core web sites can always be up-to-date for the institution's students, staff, faculty, alumni and community that rely on this information on a daily basis. Likewise, faculty members can easily maintain individual web pages to better serve their students. The institution easily and affordably maintains competitive web sites that live up to the increasing standards expected by higher education constituents.

OmniUpdate ***eliminates the IT bottleneck*** and not only saves hours of coordination and production time with more timely updates; it also ***saves precious IT dollars***. The use of IT staff to update the web site is very costly and inefficient. With OmniUpdate, the burden on the IT staff and need for additional technical personnel is reduced.

OmniUpdate is in use in a number of higher education institutions including California State University Long Beach, the Los Angeles Community College District and Copper Mountain Community College. In these institutions, the OmniUpdate users have found that more information is provided, its quality is better and it is delivered faster at a lower overall cost. Content contributors are no longer frustrated and the load on critical IT resources is reduced. And above all, the entire education community including administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni and other in the community benefit from improved communication.

"OmniUpdate has been phenomenally successful, and our dean is happy everyone is using it! With the statewide budget cuts, this is the one thing we know we want for next year. We can never go back to not having OmniUpdate," says technology strategist Jill Horn, of California State University Long Beach.

OmniUpdate and Your Institution

OmniUpdate's low cost solution is helping higher education institutions, save time, money and training resources while helping to improve web site effectiveness and communication.

Additionally, OmniUpdate provides a much wider reach and relevance to the web for higher education institutions. Optional OmniUpdate extensions offer the institution the ability to provide additional value by giving each department, faculty member, administrator, staff member, and student on or off-campus the opportunity of updating their own web pages. This provides a dynamic presence with current, up to date information and an environment where educators and students can better interact and communicate.

OmniUpdate can be implemented at your institution in a matter of days and will quickly become your vehicle to enhancing the overall education process.

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