

Problem

Need for multiple products

Like most virtual schools, Richard McKenna Charter High School first purchased a student information system to track student details and transcript data and purchased a separate on-line courseware product for the student to take online tests, turn in homework, and for instructors to grade the homework.

Maintaining multiple products created the following difficulties:

- Training/support for two products
- Maintaining security accounts in two systems
- Entering student data in two places consumes time and invites inaccuracy

Working around systems designed for Brick & Mortar schools

Richard McKenna found first hand that most student information systems and on-line courseware tools are designed as a classroom enhancement. They lacked the flexibility necessary to accommodate self-paced study. Many features were simply in the way and needed be tricked, avoided, or worked around.

Solution

One complete solution

The Acquire™ Learning Management System is both a Student Information System (track students, grades, transfer credits, charges/payments, print transcripts) and an Online School (Students read lessons, turn in work, take tests, and communicate with teachers. Teachers design courses and grade homework. Office staff track progress and use reports for teacher payroll and reports to the state)

With our unique custom development model, Acquire™ can either replace or seamlessly communicate with other systems your school may be using. Contact a sales representative for more information.

Acquire™ is made from the ground up with 100% on-line courses in mind

Some of the unique flexibilities offered by Acquire™ include:

- Courses may be offered in standard blocks, with an administration interface capable of easily handling a new block every week.
- Courses may start on any date, and move at any pace. For example, one student might take a course at half pace, while another student may take a course at three times the normal pace.
- A school calendar gives standard breaks to all students no matter where they are in the course.

Problem

Abandoned student e-mail accounts

Students who are asked to provide their own e-mail account often wound up using shared family accounts or free Hotmail or Yahoo accounts. These accounts become unreliable if other family members are reading the mail or if the student only checks e-mail once per month. Hotmail and Yahoo accounts are also highly susceptible to spam and when their box fills up, it stops accepting new mail.

Unfamiliar e-mail addresses

Prior to using Acquire™, instructors had trouble managing communications from their many students. An e-mail might arrive from “princess_skatergirl7@hotmail.com” and ask a generic question like “Why did I get a B on my pre-test?”

Instructor junk mail

Most secondary education students are new to e-mail and have not learned the frustration of e-mail forwards. They happily forward any hoax, inspirational story, or scam to their instructor.

Unfamiliar instant messenger accounts

Instructors who use MSIM, AIM, or Yahoo Messenger have difficulty matching up a messenger screen name with a student, this makes it more difficult to know who you are chatting with or to know if a particular student you want to reach is online.

Solution

Offer student e-mail accounts

Richard McKenna students are automatically given e-mail accounts as part of registration. Because the student e-mail is integrated with the learning management system, the student is notified of new e-mail anytime they log into their course. Instructors have a record of whether or not a student read their e-mail and when. Acquire's™ e-mail is more convenient and works faster than free e-mail accounts because no advertisements or pop-ups are displayed.

Tracking e-mails and students

The integrated e-mail system delivers messages to instructors with the student's name and applicable course. For example: “Amy Wong (Eng 12B)” Now the teacher is only one click away from Amy's Gradebook to know what pre-test was in question.

Internal e-mail accounts

The Acquire™ e-mail system is for internal use only; students can only e-mail other students and staff. This also makes the system 100% spam free, which saves staff time.

MSIM, AIM, and Yahoo integration

Students and instructors using Acquire™ may enter their messenger usernames into their profile. Online/offline indicators proactively inform you if your student or instructor is currently online and enable you to start a chat with just a click.

Problem

Time-consuming administration

Richard McKenna found that some tasks required accessing many functions of a student information system. When this “navigating time” was multiplied across the number of students they needed to support, Richard McKenna began to look for ways to accomplish repetitive tasks with fewer clicks.

Instructors needed to check multiple places to find homework to grade

Richard McKenna’s previous learning management system provided instructors a list of assignments ready to be graded, but only for one course at a time. Many instructors taught four or more courses and were required to check every inbox many times throughout the day.

Growing office staff required customized security access

As the number of job roles increased, some staff members only mailed course materials, while some only received materials and book deposits. The need arose for a variety of logins with different access privileges.

Solution

Task-based interface

Acquire™ provides an intuitive, task-based interface that accomplishes repetitive processes with minimal effort.

For example, after a student registers on-line and faxes a permission form, office staff simply enters the student number into Acquire’s™ “receive permission forms” page which not only records the permission form as received, but also instantly finalizes the registration, marks the student as needing a welcome packet, sets up the student’s e-mail account, and enrolls the student in their orientation course. A book deposit can also be marked as received from this same page.

Instructor in-box

All homework waiting on instructor attention for all students and all courses the instructor teaches are listed in one location. The streamlined workflow makes it easy to grade one assignment and move on to the next with minimal distraction.

Roles-based security

Currently, each staff login may be granted any combination of over 100 rights and preferences to customize their on-line experience and authorized actions.

Problem

Difficulties with technical support

Many service providers used previously by Richard McKenna provided impersonal or ineffective support. Automated helpdesks asked for customer IDs and offered trouble ticket numbers and slow response times.

This problem is compounded when multiple systems are used. The courseware provider might point the finger at the web hosting provider while the hosting provider might insist the problem is with the courseware product.

Difficulty administering a standardized test

To meet the No Child Left Behind Act qualifications, Richard McKenna needed to test 95% of their students. The testing software was intended for traditional schools where they could simply ask every student to come in and be tested. The software must be installed on the computer lab's PC and communicate with a central database.

Solution

Catalyst's "Platinum Support"

With Acquire™, you're known on a first-name basis and you are assigned a knowledgeable project manager, so you always know who you're calling. Problems are resolved by a caring staff motivated to get you back up and running as soon as possible.

With Acquire™ as your all-in-one product and Catalyst as your web host, there's no passing the buck. All you will hear is "We'll solve it!"

Testing server utilizing the Remote Desktop Protocol

A testing server was setup which could support multiple virtual workstations. The student used an Internet Explorer plug-in which connected to a virtual testing workstation. The plug-in displayed the testing station's screen and allowed full interaction which allowed the student to take the test just as if they were sitting at a computer lab PC.