

:: Your Webmaster

TYPO3 Case Study – College of Saint Elizabeth

I. Profile

The College of Saint Elizabeth (www.cse.edu) is a private 4-year Liberal Arts College located in Morristown, NJ. CSE enrolls approximately 2,000 full and part-time students in 27 undergraduate and seven graduate degree programs.

II. Market

Academic

III. Challenges

The first version of the College's website had been developed by students. The second one, launched in May 2002, was designed, hosted and maintained by a web development company based in Akron, Ohio. In 2004, the College wanted to retrieve the freedom and flexibility that comes with hosting its website on campus.

The main challenges were to rebuild the existing web services (course search, faculty/staff directory, alum online community/directory, admission information request form, online contribution form, volunteer opportunities & online calendar with registration, news module) and transfer more than a thousand web pages to a new platform and server within a window of 3 months. The CMS implementation and the website transfer had to be completed before the start of the new semester and the end of the contract with the previous vendor.

IV. Solution

After analyzing different options, the decision was made in March 2004 to rebuild all web services using an open-source content management system. "We chose typo3, a web platform used in many universities and colleges in Europe, the US and Canada, because it offers a professional solution that meets our web requirements without breaking our budget. Our goal was to make the transition as smooth as possible by preserving the same functionality. Small improvements were made whenever it was possible within our budget and time-frame" explains Brad Morton, CSE Chief Technology Officer.

What the College was responsible for:

This project was initiated by the Information Systems and the Marketing and Communication departments.

“After a bidding process, a committee composed of the VP of Administration and Finances, the VP of Institutional Advancement, Brad Morton and myself retained the most competitive bid, a proposal made by Your Webmaster, a web consulting firm based in Montreal, Canada,” explains Donna Lindemeyer, CSE Marketing and Communication Director.

Technology:

OS: Linux RedHat
HTTP server: Apache
Web pages: +1,500 (and counting)
Database: MySQL
Content Management System: Typo3

What worked well:

Despite a tight budget and an aggressive timeline (just 3 months), the project was completed on time, on budget and even ahead of schedule by the web consulting firm.

What did not work so well:

When the bidding process was launched back in March/April 2004, it was very difficult to find firms with typo3 expertise in the US that could accommodate the deadline and budget. The College ended up choosing a company it had been working with on other web projects. At that time, this company didn't have any typo3 resources on its team. But, it managed to hire a typo3 coder and has always been able to find the right fit for subsequent projects' requirements and budgets.

Road blocks/challenges Overcome:

Given the special circumstances around the project (budget & timeline), the College was fortunate to find the right web consulting firm. Thanks to the company's "can-do" attitude, the College didn't have to deal with any major road blocks. The official launch was even done a week ahead of the date originally scheduled in the project plan.

Lessons learned:

At the time of this project, the typo3 documentation was very “sketchy”. Again, given the deadline and budget, the College couldn’t afford to lose too much time by adopting a “do-it-yourself” approach.

Another lesson learned was that testing is definitely not optional, especially when using the latest releases of public extensions made available on the extension manager.

V. Results

Thanks to typo3 flexibility, the change was almost transparent for the end users, as the design was kept the same. Moreover, the training of the College’s 25+ web content creators took less than 2 hours. Some of them couldn’t believe how simple it was to use typo3 compared to the web interface of the commercial solution used previously.

Online donations, admission information requests and alum registrations have increased steadily since the transfer of the website to typo3. The College has also been able to get a new web module customized to its needs at a very competitive cost.

VI. The Team

Co-project champions: Donna Lindemeyer (CSE Marketing) and Brad Morton (CSE IT)

Server setting and typo3 installation: Brad Morton

QA: Nina Wadhera, CSE student

Project management: Karine Joly, Your Webmaster, Inc.

(www.yourwebmaster.ca/highered)

Content transfer & Typo3 integration: Your Webmaster, Inc.

Typo3 extension system analysis, design & testing: Your Webmaster, Inc.

Typo3 extension coding: Zach Davis for Your Webmaster, Inc.