ABSTRACT

In a short span of three years, the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore witnessed significant growth in the adoption of e-learning. With the use of professors-friendly e-learning applications, NTU has been able to achieve critical mass buy-in by the academic staff when the e-learning take-up rate achieved 85% of the existing NTU course curriculum. As NTU moves on to celebrate the third year of e-learning, measures were taken with the careful design considerations that aimed to “humanize” e-learning, that is, make e-learning interactive and engaging with active collaborations and student learning involvement. This includes the proliferation in the use of the video talking head format synchronized with the lecture presentation, live audio-video delivery, text chat and document annotations of a lecture presentation and delivery. This paper reviews the processes NTU adopted in adding the human touch to traditional e-learning projects and serves as a good case study for other institutions with a similar aim to achieve interactive and engaged online learning.

Keywords: distance learning, e-learning, engaged learning, media rich content, online learning

INTRODUCTION

Nanyang Technological University was established in 1970. It is one of two publicly funded universities in Singapore. Courses offered include engineering, biological sciences, business, education, accountancy and communication studies. In NTU, the service unit Centre for Educational Development (CED) is responsible for spearheading and facilitating e-learning.

The innovative brand name edveNTUre was created for her e-learning initiative in 2000: “e” represents everything electronic for the knowledge economy, and “ed” stands for education—the purpose of the platform for lifelong learning. “Adventure” in a modified form depicts the concept of learning as an experience and journey to explore new frontiers of knowledge, much like a team collaborating synergistically together in new learning environments to discover new frontiers. With the University’s name “NTU” embedded, “edveNTUre” symbolizes the e-learning initiative and aspiration for the University. Professors and students feel a sense of identity and affiliation as stakeholders in an environment where they share experiences,
knowledge and experimentations in a new learning paradigm and environment. edveNTUre is accessible at http://edventure.ntu.edu.sg and the current home page is shown in Figure 1.

Through the NTU e-learning eco-system, the University hopes to achieve the following business and educational goals:

a) to create an eco-system of lifelong learning in our students and graduates towards the pursuit and establishment of a national digital knowledge economy;
b) to facilitate, equip and enable the academic staff (who represent the beginning of the e-learning food chain in this local context) to create and enhance content, develop competence and capability to deliver effective learner-centric and pedagogical approaches and methods for the training and development of our students and graduates;
c) to “humanize” e-learning and develop quality interactive and engaging content that will facilitate and enable self-paced learning for students anywhere, anytime on any device;
d) to enhance face-to-face tutorial sessions and enable collaborative learning in such environments through the provision of effective audiovisual tools;
e) to provide robust and reliable e-learning services to a progressive community in content delivery, knowledge management utilizing synchronous and asynchronous modes of teaching and learning. This includes an infrastructure that facilitates fault tolerance systems, disaster recovery-high availability-business continuity systems, content creation and editing tools, online assessment tools, student tracking and progress tools, and so forth.

When the University embarked on its own e-learning adventure, it undertook a process of due diligence to select a suitable platform and system. It finally adopted an established courseware and learning management platform from Blackboard (http://www.blackboard.com). The Blackboard product was used by over 3,300 institutions worldwide and this large user base

Figure 1: edveNTUre Home Page
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