Chapter XI
Integration of Public University Web Sites and Learning Management Systems

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ABSTRACT

Internet technology has found its way into all areas of business and research. The World Wide Web is also used at universities to achieve different goals. On the one hand, it acts as a means of outer appearance, on the other hand, as an instrument of knowledge transfer and knowledge examination. Of course other purposes in addition to those named above do exist. Often different systems are used to achieve the different goals; usually, Web content management systems (WCMS) are used for the outer appearance and learning management systems (LMS) for transfer and examination of knowledge. Although these systems use the same medium (i.e., the WWW), it can be stated that often there is a heterogeneous landscape of systems. Resultant is the object of investigation of the present chapter. The chapter analyses the challenges concerning the integration of public Web sites and LMS a typical European university has to face.

INTRODUCTION

Internet technology has found its way into all areas of business and research. The World Wide Web is also used at universities to achieve different goals. On the one hand, it acts as a means of outer appearance (target groups are potential, current, and former students, researchers, lecturers, press, the interested publicity, etc.), and on the other hand, as an instrument of know ledge transfer...
and knowledge examination (target groups are potential, former, and current students and lecturers). There exist other purposes in addition to those named above.

Often different systems are used to achieve the different goals; usually, Web content management systems (WCMS) are used for the outer appearance and learning management systems (LMS) for transfer and examination of knowledge. Although these systems use the same medium (i.e., the WWW), it can be stated that often there is a heterogeneous landscape of systems. Resultant is the object of investigation of the present chapter. The chapter analyses the challenges concerning the integration of public Web sites and LMS a typical European university has to face.

The research framework used for this investigation thus can be divided into two categories regarding the system types used: WCMS and LMS. In praxis, there is more than one system per system category implemented at a university because of the organisational conditions explained in this chapter.

BACKGROUND

To analyse the object of investigation for the present chapter systematically, it is necessary to consider the typical organisational conditions at a European university. A typical European university consists of a large number of hierarchically ordered or networked organisational units such as, for example, the central administration, library, departments, departments, research institutes, and programmes (Bajec, 2005). Each organisational unit presents itself and provides information specific to the unit on an individual public Web site in the Internet. All these Web sites can be accessed by directly entering the URL or navigating through the university’s Web portal. In many cases several hundred independent Web presences represent various levels of hierarchy within the university’s organisation. ‘Technology follows organisation!’ is the principle according to which a large number of public Web presence islands represent the organisational units of the university, which are highly decentralised and often—to some extent—autonomous (as illustrated in Figure 1) (Schwickert, 2004).

Within a university, organisational, management, and task structures are mostly highly decentralised. Consequently, the organisational units can make decisions and act at a high degree of autonomy. Resultant is that layout, design, and navigational and functional concepts of Web sites do greatly vary within a university. There is no doubt that a patchwork of public Web sites cannot project a professional image of the university as a whole to the outside world (Ostheimer, 2007). This results in the problem that a corporate design needs to be integrated into the numerous university public Web sites and aggregated information needs to be efficiently accessible.

The quality of a university is communicated by and reinforced through public Web sites to the general public. The quality, however, originates from the core business of a university: research and teaching, which can be divided into disciplines, subjects, and programmes and then can be managed in independent departments, departments, research institutes, and so forth within a university. Universities have by now realised that quality and efficiency of their research and teaching can benefit from a support programme of online elements. This requires electronic teaching and learning environments, that is, ‘learning management systems,’ which are available to students and researchers online (Claussen, 2004, Grohmann, 2006).

The fact that the university’s core business units can, as described above, largely make decisions and act autonomously has led to a situation where several LMS in the various departments and departments of a university operate separately from each other. Financial, personal, and technical resources are implemented to introduce and operate these LMS ‘islands,’ to a great extent
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