Chapter V

Developing a Portal Channel Strategy

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ABSTRACT
This chapter provides a method for organizing a portal channel development strategy by identifying potential content, classifying it and then prioritizing it into distinct categories. Several effective ways of identifying content are discussed that include committees, focus groups and pilot projects. Representatives of the campus communities that will be using the portal are important to poll, ensuring they describe their actual needs versus what they think they need. External resources aggregated into the portal must be appropriate to the institution and reliable. Channels that streamline your institution’s business processes will be the most valuable parts of your portal; the bulk of your portal development work should be spent in creating them. Understanding your portal vendor’s programming interfaces to create custom, integrated applications is vital, as well as their philosophy in distributing new portal channels.
INTRODUCTION

Using Yahoo!, a person can search the Internet, send e-mail, manage finances, join an interest group, create a Web page, track personal calendars and chat with friends. At least half a dozen other sites offer similar functionality, and all are continuously adding new services in an effort to outdo each other. At any given higher education institution, it’s likely a large number of people have accounts with and actively use such a commercial portal.

On the flip side, many campus communities aren’t using consumer portal services at all—asking a non-traditional student who was nervous about a home computer requirement to use online, self-service applications can be a ridiculous proposal. For even a daily user of the Internet, it’s a large cognitive leap to log in and start customizing a portal from the static homepages to which he or she may be accustomed.

From advanced users who have a myriad of choices available to them, to the first time user of the Internet, what would motivate someone to use an institutional portal? One of the main factors in attracting users is available content that can’t be obtained from another source, or at least not as easily. A university portal’s success and wide adoption hinges on a blend of useful services that enable users to organize information pertinent to their roles at the university and accomplish daily tasks.

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

In the higher education context, institutional information portals are applications that integrate campus-specific information and applications with other sources of information from on and off campus and provide a single, intuitive and personalized gateway through which to access it (Gleason 2001). An institutional portal must fulfill the informational needs of students, staff, faculty, alumni and visitors, as well as potential employees and students. Users of the portal may also include staff from other institutions who require access to certain services, or communities of users that the university serves through grant and community relationships.

It’s easy to get caught up in trying to redefine the way people use the Internet. Certainly lines blur between the operating system, the Internet and a portal, and the methods in which users interact with them—cell phones, pagers, PDAs and even instant messaging. The point of an institutional portal should not be to take over a user’s Internet experience and provide a wrapper or gateway for all Internet content, or, to use an industry term, to “attract eyeballs.” Too often university developers get caught in the commercial doctrine of making sites that are “sticky” and entertaining, equating large numbers of page views with success. Users of an institutional portal should come to the site because it is the most convenient way of...
Dynamic Taxonomies and Intelligent User-Centric Access to Complex Portal Information
www.igi-global.com/chapter/dynamic-taxonomies-intelligent-user-centric/17880?camid=4v1a