Chapter IX

Begin with the End (User) in Mind: Planning for the San Diego State University Campus Portal

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a case study of the campus portal planning process at San Diego State University. The authors describe the use of participative decision-making strategies that capture the voices of key stakeholders, identify their concerns and priorities, and facilitate a successful portal rollout. Data was collected from faculty, students and campus leaders through a series of focus groups, interviews and online surveys. Findings were examined in light of the literature on technology adoption and the authors' familiarity with portal initiatives at other large public universities. Participants described their vision of the ideal portal solution in terms of features, user interface and functionality. While faculty and students expressed enthusiasm about a campus portal, they also had concerns regarding training, support, reliability, security and standards. The authors make recommendations for addressing user concerns such as providing direction and leadership, segmenting the rollout, communicating the benefits and providing organizational support.
INTRODUCTION

At San Diego State University (SDSU), we are currently midstream in the portal development process; that is, we have begun to experiment with a portal development approach but we have not yet built or implemented a portal. We will most likely choose a solution that combines buying off-the-shelf and building portions ourselves. We strongly believe that in developing a portal solution, decision makers must always begin with the end users in mind. It is their needs and concerns that should drive decisions at every step of the process.

In this chapter, we will:
• Present a rich description of a particular phase in the development of the San Diego State University campus portal, from Fall 2000 to Fall 2001.
• Focus on the planning process and decision-making steps that must go into the portal’s deployment before roll out.
• Summarize our findings based on data gathered from various constituent groups, focusing first on the needs and concerns of faculty and students.
• Highlight priorities and make recommendations for those whose portal implementations will follow ours.

BACKGROUND: OUR PORTAL VISION
Why a Campus Portal?

Many colleges and universities feel pressured to get a portal up and running (Frazee, JP., 2001). Gilbert (2000) suggests that a college or university must first ask itself why it wants a campus portal. Dynamic and individualized Web systems are essential for institutions of higher education and as customer expectations grow, these institutions must further develop their Web-based technologies to distinguish themselves from their competition (Connolly, 2000). Today, faculty, students, staff and administrators have access to an ever-increasing number of databases and ways to interface with them. Most people have multiple usernames, passwords, login locations and interfaces. Furthermore, it is difficult to disseminate information to targeted groups, and duplication of effort and inefficiencies plague the storing and retrieving of some information. The portal aims to simplify these processes, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of a number of functions by making information available through a single access point. The overarching goal is to improve communication and engender an increased feeling of community.

Our Definition and Vision of a Portal

At SDSU, we define a portal as a customizable entry point into campus-wide administrative functions, information, resources and Web-supported courses,
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