Chapter XI

Building a Campus Portal—A Strategy that Succeeded

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ABSTRACT

In 1997 Wake Forest University began the project of building a suite of personalized Web services that is now known as a portal. By July of 1998, we had a fully implemented and successful intranet that delivered almost one hundred personalized, filtered Web services to all students, faculty and staff, plus those alumni and parents who applied for a free account. Being on the leading edge of such an effort meant that we discovered on our own what works and what does not, without influence from portal vendors or benefit of advice from our peers at other institutions. This paper discusses successful design and implementation strategies that may be useful to others who are considering a portal solution.

The term “portal” has become so widely used that its very definition has become a major challenge for institutions that are beginning to discuss whether or not they should have one. Software vendors have developed their own definitions as part of their marketing strategies. Combining observation with experience, I
define a portal to be a secure application that provides a single personalized gateway to institutional information and services. The personalization feature sets a portal apart from websites that merely specialize in their focus. Personalization is achieved through requiring authentication and using information from the university’s data stores to tailor the content uniquely to each individual.

At Wake Forest University, we embarked in 1997 on the project of building an extensive suite of personalized Web services. By the time portal vendors began arriving on our doorstep in 1998 and 1999, we already had a fully implemented and successful intranet that delivered almost one hundred personalized, filtered Web services to all students, faculty and staff, plus those alumni and parents who applied for free accounts. Rather than research and statistics, this chapter contains a frank discussion of challenges, issues, successes, failures, and what we have learned about implementing and maintaining a portal. Though goals and environmental factors vary across institutions, our experiences can provide valuable lessons for those who are now evaluating vendors’ offerings and trying to develop a portal strategy.

BACKGROUND

When the idea for WIN, the Wake Information Network, was conceived in the fall of 1996, there were no definitions to either guide us or limit our vision. Wake Forest was in the first year of its ubiquitous computing plan, having distributed IBM ThinkPads to every entering freshman, more than half of the faculty and many staff members. The plan called for continuing this distribution to each entering class, so that within three years every student, every faculty member and all staff members who used a computer would have a ThinkPad with a full-featured suite of standard software. The plan included replacing student and faculty computers every two years, so the university’s ongoing commitment to enabling the use of technology on campus was clear. Though the plan was focused on the use of technology in academic areas, these abundant resources created a fertile environment for the growth of bold ideas.

The idea for the portal was triggered by our university president’s mandate to eliminate the long lines at our arena-style class registration. Students were already using their ThinkPads for class work and communications with their instructors and each other. Extending computer use to other facets of student life was a natural next step, though a challenging one. As manager of administrative computing services, I was pondering the complexity of this task when our student records software vendor, Software Research Northwest, Inc. (now part of Sungard Bi-Tech, Inc.), announced a product that provides Web-based class registration. The product, IRISLink, included other Web services such as class rosters, class schedules, grade reports and demographic information with the personalization and filtering capabili-
Green Web Services Integration and Workflow Execution within Next Generation CEMIS
www.igi-global.com/article/green-web-services-integration-and-workflow-execution-within-next-generation-cemis/123174?camid=4v1a