Ryerson University simplified website creation and maintenance while laying a foundation for new social communities and mobile capabilities using Adobe Experience Manager.

A public research university located in Toronto, Ontario, Ryerson University is home to 28,000 students, including 2,300 master's and PhD students, nearly 2,700 faculty and staff, and more than 140,000 alumni worldwide. The university offers more than 100 undergraduate and graduate programs, including Canada’s largest undergraduate business school, the Ted Rogers School of Management.

The website of Ryerson University is a true one-stop shop for the university’s constituents, serving the information needs of current and prospective students, alumni, faculty, staff, and the general public. Rather than maintaining a separate intranet, the university also publishes resources for its HR and finance departments from its main site. “Our website does everything for everyone,” says Marilyn Persaud, manager of Web Services for Ryerson. All told, the Ryerson website draws over eight million page views per month.

Given the all-encompassing mission and diverse purposes served by Ryerson’s website, the platform used to manage content and publish it had to meet two key criteria. First, it had to be easy to use for 600 potential content editors distributed throughout the university, including 150 to 200 active daily users, most of whom are basic users with no specialized web skills. And second, it had to provide complete, flexible functionality to address new web publishing needs as they emerged. Not long after implementing its initial web content management system (CMS); however, it became clear to Ryerson that an upgrade was needed. “The old system was not at all user-friendly, requiring many steps to accomplish even relatively minor tasks like modifying a navigation menu,” says Persaud.
To find a better solution for its needs, Ryerson began a complete evaluation of the available alternatives, drawing on analyst reports as well as the experiences of peers in the higher education community. “Web content management capabilities in Adobe Experience Manager not only met our current requirements for ease of use and comprehensive functionality, but also gave us a clear path forward for introducing new social and mobile features,” says Persaud. Ryerson also purchased the social communities capabilities that are a part of Adobe Experience Manager for rollout in future phases of its website implementation.

Moving to a state-of-the-art web platform
Following its selection of the Adobe solution, Ryerson’s first priority was to migrate its existing web content onto the new platform—a decision made more urgent by the fact that its previous vendor had ended support for the legacy platform. Over a ten-month period, the university’s five-person web services team began testing the content migration from the old system to Adobe Experience Manager. After seven test migrations, the team moved 134,350 assets into Experience Manager, including 86,207 digital assets such as PDF files, images, Microsoft Word documents, and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets; 42,588 HTML pages; and 5,555 folders. The team also rebuilt over 200 pages with dynamically generated content such as news, biographies, and events.

Simplifying life for hundreds of web authors
“One of the biggest benefits of Adobe Experience Manager and its web content management capabilities is the ease of use,” says Persaud. “Our content authors—most of whom have other jobs in addition to their online responsibilities—will be able to create their own sites and update their own content with minimal support, once they become familiar with the new system. This allows our Web Services team to focus on new web initiatives.” New pages can be activated with a single click—compared with the eight clicks required by the previous system. A drag-and-drop interface makes it easy to build and modify site navigation. The Experience Manager’s integrated digital asset manager provides ready access to a high volume of pre-approved Ryerson images, sparing users the need to search for or create their own and enabling the efficient reuse of existing materials. The minutes each user saves over the course of a day can add up to hours each week.
Improving manageability and efficiency
Adobe Experience Manager has eliminated the laborious management and support required by the previous system. The separation of digital assets from HTML pages has made for cleaner, more effective file management—a key benefit as Ryerson’s website continues to grow in scale. Just as users can make routine changes much more quickly, the Ryerson Web Services team can now accomplish its most sweeping initiatives much more easily. With its migration to Experience Manager complete, the group is now launching a redesign of the entire website based on new page templates.

"Instead of having to spend the whole weekend redeploying our entire site just to change a single template, as our previous CMS required, the Adobe solution can push out template changes instantly—the way it should be," says Persaud.

Taking the Ryerson website to the next level
Ryerson’s redesign will include the introduction of capabilities to meet the needs of a new generation of students. "Today’s current and prospective students spend much of their time on social media platforms, and the social features of the Adobe solution will give us a way to meet them there and be part of those conversations," says Persaud. "We’ll use social communities capabilities in Adobe Experience Manager to incorporate social features into our redesign such as opening stories to comments so people can engage with our content, allowing them to track the topics they care most about, sending alerts about class cancellations and other timely information, and letting people sign up for newsletters to follow what’s happening on campus—these are just some of the features we would like to introduce, leveraging the strengths of Experience Manager." The university is also exploring mobile capabilities in Experience Manager as a way to deliver content and functionality via the mobile devices carried by so many of the 28,000 students on its campus.

Now well-established on Adobe Experience Manager, Ryerson is positioned to accomplish its full range of web content needs more easily and efficiently than ever before. "Our user feedback has been very positive," says Persaud. "Every day, people are finding new and simpler ways of doing things, and discovering new possibilities for the way they use our website."

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Marlyn Persaud
Manager, Web services,
Ryerson University

For more information