The University of Oklahoma

Campus life goes online

A leading public university uses Adobe Experience Manager to distribute content authoring campus-wide easily and efficiently while delivering a brand-consistent online experience.

With nearly 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students—participating in classes, numerous daily events, and extensive research programs—as well as facilities spanning three large campuses, The University of Oklahoma has much to communicate. The OU web presence is one of its most important channels for informing and engaging with students at every stage of their interaction with the university, from prospect to enrollee to alum, as well as with the broader community of faculty, staff, family, and supporters.

To keep its online experience as rich and timely as possible while controlling costs, the OU Web Communications team has to give both technical and non-technical staff members throughout the university a simple, efficient way to share content ownership and update their own web content. At the same time, OU has to maintain consistent branding and navigation across dozens of individually maintained websites to provide a coherent, high-quality experience for visitors.

The initial OU web presence evolved before the university had established its central Web Communications department. Explains Erin Yarbrough, director of Web Communications at The University of Oklahoma, “In the past, every department had its own webmaster and developed its own site in what was essentially a vacuum. A prospective student would come to the site for information on admissions, housing, recruitment services, and a few colleges, and they’d run into a completely different user experience as they navigated through the site. It could be highly disorienting and made for a non-unified brand experience.”

After evaluating alternative technologies, OU chose Adobe Marketing Cloud, including the Adobe Experience Manager solution, to bring information and resources from throughout the university into a more visitor-friendly web presence. Rich functionality from calendaring to an interactive map to award-winning social media capabilities now provide a rich experience spanning every aspect of OU life. Behind the scenes, process automation, centralized brand control, and high ease of use help ensure both efficiency and consistency.

Over the past year, the upgraded OU websites that live on Adobe Experience Manager—currently 89 and counting—drew nearly seven million visits with an average time on site of more than two minutes. More than 25% were first-time visitors, and fully half represented direct traffic. Measures from social media engagement to video usage to search engine rankings—as well as the sheer volume of content being authored and updated—all show a dramatic increase in the effectiveness of the OU website as a resource for its community.

Allowing freedom within a framework

More than 200 active OU authors now use Adobe Experience Manager in tandem with content creation tools in Adobe Creative Suite® such as Adobe Photoshop® CS5, Fireworks® CS5, and Acrobat® Pro, to contribute to websites maintained independently—but managed centrally—by OU colleges and departments. Integrated digital asset management capabilities in Experience Manager make it simple to access, manage, and share brand elements, photographs, images, and other assets, helping maintain a consistent look and feel across sites.
The OU Web Communications team follows a philosophy of “freedom within a framework.” Since the OU Museum of Art has different needs from the College of Engineering, for example, Adobe Experience Manager templates provided for each OU website include a basic navigational structure, page grid, and essential branding elements, but allow ample stylistic leeway within this structure. Departments with their own technical staff are free to create their own applications, use an iframe to display external content within Experience Manager pull forms created with Wufoo.com into an OU website, or paste in JavaScript code.

“As long as people stay within our framework in terms of branding, user experience, and web guidelines, we like to give our departments the flexibility to bring in external applications to create the best websites for our audiences. The flexibility of Adobe Experience Manager makes this simple for us to allow,” says Yarbrough.

Providing tools for managing campus life

Before the adoption of social communities capabilities within Adobe Experience Manager calendaring at OU could be a complex and time-consuming matter. Each department maintained its own calendar separately, and coordinating listings across calendars involved endless emails and phone calls—especially when times and places needed to be changed. As often as not, students simply relied on chalked messages on campus sidewalks to learn about events.

Now, social communities capabilities link more than 20, and counting, individual department calendars as well as the central campus calendar in a common environment. Departments can easily create their own event listings and share joint listings with other departments—for example, a speaker co-presented by the College of Engineering and the College of Architecture—and submit events to an approval workflow to be considered for publishing to the campus calendar.

Departments can also subscribe to syndicated information from the campus calendar, such as school holidays, major academic deadlines, and closures due to weather—helping to ensure that such information appears consistently across all campus calendars while eliminating the need for individual updates. Filters and keyword searches make it simple for students to find the events that interest them most.

OU departments use Adobe Experience Manager to collaboratively author the campus map, from building histories provided by the Visitor’s Center to markers for wheelchair ramps and entrances maintained by the Accessibility Office. Integration with Luminis portal software from SunGard Higher Education makes the OU web presence a true one-stop shop for students. Roughly half the student body logs into the oZONE portal each week to enroll in classes, pay tuition, check their grades, and conduct other business, using some of the content authored and syndicated by multiple departments using Experience Manager.

Challenge
- Maintaining a consistent online experience across diverse colleges and departments
- Empowering dispersed content owners with self-service web authoring and publishing
- Integrating social media to reach new audiences in new ways

Solution
The University of Oklahoma is using Adobe Marketing Cloud, including the Adobe Experience Manager solution, to provide its global community with information and tools for every part of the student lifecycle, from prospect to enrollee to alum.

Benefits
- Combined consistent branding and user experience with flexible authoring and functionality across dozens of department and college websites
- Provided high-value features—including interactive maps, calendars, and slideshows—within a seamless online experience
- Enhanced communications with prospects, alumni, and friends with award-winning use of social media
We’re passionate about having one tool that lets people do everything, and we’re trying to utilize Adobe Experience Manager for this purpose since it makes it simple to author content for our calendar, map, and portal—as well as individual websites—all without having to change interfaces.”

Erin Yarbrough
Director of Web Communications,
The University of Oklahoma

Toolkit
Adobe Marketing Cloud, including the Adobe Experience Manager solution. Capabilities used include:
- Web content management
- Social communities
Adobe Creative Suite 5 Master Collection, Design, Web, and Production Premium

“We’re passionate about having one tool that lets people do everything, and we’re trying to utilize Adobe Experience Manager for this purpose since it makes it simple to author content for our calendar, map, and portal—as well as individual websites—all without having to change interfaces,” says Yarbrough.

Building connections through social media
As part of an innovative strategy to extend and amplify its global brand loyalty and communication reach through social media, OU integrates feeds from Twitter, Facebook, WordPress, Foursquare, Delicious, Flickr, and other platforms into its web presence as a way to foster conversations and empower brand advocates throughout its community.

“When prospective students learn about OU directly from another student, not just a guidance counselor or recruiter, it’s that much more authentic and compelling,” says Yarbrough. “With Adobe Experience Manager we can create the opportunity for those social media conversations to be a part of our main web presence.” An OU channel on YouTube—featuring contributions from many departments that also embed YouTube players on their sites—has proven highly popular both on campus and beyond.

OU’s social media efforts have not gone unrecognized; the university has received several awards and accolades for its social media efforts, and was recently ranked third in the nation for universities using social media on the Fan Page List maintained on the popular social media news site Mashable.

As OU reaches out to new generations of students while maintaining ties with those already part of the family, Adobe Experience Manager helps the university showcase the full richness of its campus life while helping every member of its community make the most of it.

For more information