

High School enjoys advanced collaboration capabilities

Sir Thomas Boteler

industry:

Government and Education

country:

United Kingdom

business challenge:

The school wanted build a virtual learning environment and improve communications between pupils, staff, governors and the local community

solution:

Upgrading its online education portal to ensure that pupils and staff can benefit from enhanced collaboration features and online, personalised learning courses

services:

- Integration and deployment services for Microsoft MOSS 2007

results:

- A virtual learning environment is established with anytime learning for pupils as content is available 24/7 to any pupil with an internet connection
- User experience has improved with advanced search functionality, as well as improved collaboration features

Executive Summary

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School wanted to **create a virtual learning environment** and realised that it had to upgrade its Microsoft Office Sharepoint Services (MOSS) 2007 to provide the foundation for this initiative.

Client Overview

Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School is a voluntary-aided mixed comprehensive school located in Latchford Village, part of the borough of Warrington, Cheshire. The school has 725 students on role, aged 11-16, making it one of the smaller secondary schools in the area.

Business Challenge

The school was seeking to embrace its role as a leading participant in the Latchford Community whilst building a state of the art Virtual Learning Environment, with emphasis on communication between pupils, staff, governors and the local community as an indispensable and vital aspect in the creation of the Latchford Community Gateway. Microsoft Office Sharepoint Services (MOSS) 2007 provides the backbone for that gateway.

Previously, Boteler was using MOSS 2003 as its Virtual Learning Environment. The VLE had a small amount of content, but this was limited due to the constraints of MOSS 2003. The main limitations included:

- The search feature was often unhelpful for finding content
- Multiple logins: every user had to log on in addition to their Windows login
- The site was full of document libraries for all different topic areas that needed constant individual attention. These documents could be edited by different users at the same time, causing versioning problems
- All users could see links for all aspects of the site, even those to which they did not have access, making the site cluttered and overwhelming
- Any support requests had to take the form of email as form-based submissions were not possible

Solution Provided

Boteler concluded that an upgrade to MOSS 2007 was the best solution and worked with trusted partner Teksys to arrange the implementation. Once underway, the transition from MOSS 2003 to MOSS 2007 was seamless and trouble-free. Boteler took the opportunity to recreate many of the content pages to take advantage of the new features available. Four departments (English, History, ICT and Mathematics) took the role of pilot developers in the first stage of content creation

Two of the key aspects in the development of content were,

1. Anytime learning; content available 24/7 to any pupil with an internet connection
2. Personalised learning; course specific content that allows every pupil a unique and fulfilling learning experience

“Implementation of MOSS 2007 has given Sir Thomas Boteler the platform to **base the majority of its teaching and administrative tasks for years to come.**”

Simon Taylor-Jones, Boteler Network Manager

Audiencing, a new feature of MOSS 2007, provides an integral aspect in the realisation of these two vital goals. Audiencing allows developers the flexibility to upload and convert massive amounts of content whilst giving pupils only the subject matter directly related to their course of study. From a single Windows logon, MOSS 2007 detects what each client needs to see and filters out all unnecessary content, thus preventing overwhelming the users with content whilst increasing the security and control of data-flow. This is a central new feature not only for pupil content, but for every single user of the Learning Gateway, whether teaching and administrative staff, parents and governors or the wider community.

The Mathematics department capitalised on the new audiencing feature and embarked on the long process of transforming the foundation and higher tiers of the GCSE syllabus into an e-learning resource. Using Microsoft Class Server, homework resources were converted to an electronic format, available online to pupils, and then audienced through Active Directory class members.

Head of Mathematics, Colin Murray, utilises setting homework in this way and, once pieces of work have been set, pupils have a limited amount of time to log on to the VLE to complete and submit the work for marking.

“Answers are embedded in each resource, so when homework is submitted, the piece is marked instantly, and the homework mark is available immediately to the pupil” explains Murray.

Using the VLE in this way is vital to Boteler in its e-learning mission. Firstly, it provides a personalised experience, as homework is set by class, so each pupil only receives homework assignments they have been requested to complete. Secondly, it allows anytime learning, with assignments

available on any PC with an internet connection, with instant feedback showing how well the pupil has completed the task, backed up of course by personalised feedback from the teacher during lessons.

Meanwhile, the English department has decided to look at the multimedia aspects of MOSS 2007. As well as the usual departmental information on their site area, podcasting has become a priority as the department takes advantage of the new generation of technology-savvy, media-driven students. They have created new and individual content; initially available as a Windows Media Video download.

Future plans include: the implementation of Windows Media Streaming Services, removing the need for large file downloads for browser-based utilisation of video podcasts; files available in Quicktime iPod compatible format for use with a new generation Video iPod; and standard MP3 audio podcasts to ensure the widest compatibility possible with all types of media player. These plans are only in the early stages, but MOSS 2007 allows the flexibility to provide anytime resources such as these, utilising a web-based platform for multimedia content without the need for additional software or support.

“It is not only the students who are benefiting from the MOSS 2007 implementation. The VLE will eventually signal the end for most paper resources, shared network resources and network drives for teaching and administrative staff”.

Explains Boteler Network Manager Simon Taylor-Jones.

“By the end of 2007, the school plans to abandon a paper bulletin in favour of a completely electronic VLE-based version” he concluded.

Meanwhile, Microsoft WebDav software allows each user to access their own homedrive directly from SharePoint - as well as any shared network resources they have permission to see. This is achieved through the audiencing feature, a secure way of ensuring that people only have access to files and folders they are allowed to use.

Eventually, shared drives will be transferred to the VLE as part of a document library, the benefits of which include keywords allocated to each document as it is uploaded, allowing quick search in areas such as the pupil shared drive and custom views. Typing in ‘Churchill’ for example will find every document and resource categorised as being related to Churchill, removing the need to browse through endless files and folders.

These document libraries are another essential part of MOSS 2007. A complete document library can be divided into views depending on parameters selected or forced upon the user. For example, the History department can upload hundreds of files on a variety of topics to one central folder. This folder can then be divided into custom views depending on what the pupils need to access. For example, a ‘Churchill’ view can be created through keyword allocation, and can be selected either by URL or by manual selection in the ‘views’ dropdown menu. This same principle will be applied to all administrative and teaching documents. For example, a search for ‘absence’ will display every document template related to pupil absence, or a custom ‘absence’ view will limit the documents shown in the library to just those related to the topic. Keywords are given simply by tick box as documents are originally uploaded, and each document can be given numerous keywords. This means that as document libraries grow, files can still be found quickly and easily.

Business Benefits

Installing MOSS 2007 has benefited Boteler in many ways. In the six months following installation, with many more new features yet to reach their full potential. Each department now has a single main document library, which with metadata makes viewing and searching as easy as one mouse click. Users get their own unique VLE experience from their Windows login, without any additional user input, and site members only see the parts of the VLE they have permissions to view. New features such as automatic breadcrumb trails allow easy navigation throughout the site and Boteler are beginning to take advantage of forms by using form-based support requests and as part of their School Development Plan.

The Future

Future plans at Sir Thomas Boteler include the consolidation of the Learning Gateway as local community resource. There are already local businesses keen to make use of the VLE audience. In summary Simon Taylor-Jones comments "The potential to use the VLE as a communication resource between pupils, staff, parents, governors and the local community is astounding, and something that the school is very eager to capitalise on as much as possible." He adds "In conclusion, implementation of MOSS 2007 has given Sir Thomas Boteler the platform to base the majority of its teaching and administrative tasks for years to come, whilst providing a quality, personalised, anytime learning experience for every one of its pupils."

For More Information

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