South Nottingham College: Implementing SharePoint 2007

Summary

This case study looks at how a Further Education (FE) college has utilised Microsoft SharePoint software over the last two years to provide an ‘all-in-one’ solution for both its academic and business needs.

About South Nottingham College

South Nottingham College is a general FE college with a range of further and higher education courses and training opportunities for business and industry. It has a Mission Statement of "Success Through Learning".

The challenge

Many learning providers that have developed SharePoint software to help manage information in their organisations have run this software alongside a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) or Learning Platform that focussed on the learning side of the organisation. However South Nottingham College have taken a different approach to this.

Prior to 2006 the College did not have a VLE, but it did support e-learning, for example through its e-learning co-ordinator and six e-learning champions. So in 2006-07 a pilot of SharePoint SPS 2003 was run across the business support side of the organisation and three academic areas (Community IT, Teacher Training and full-time IT courses) to see if this would be a suitable tool to adopt in helping the organisation make use of e-learning and at the same time manage its business support functions.

Following a management re-structure in May 2007, a Management Information Systems (MIS) / Information & Learning Technology (ILT) steering group was created to co-ordinate the use of technology in learning across the organisation.

One of its first decisions was whether to continue using SharePoint SPS 2003, which it had been trialling, whether to switch to the new version, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007, or alternatively to find an entirely different approach. Unlike most new editions the new 2007 version wasn’t a straight upgrade but rather an entirely new system.
The activity

The College decided to adopt Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) 2007, or SharePoint 2007 as it is more commonly known.

It did this because of the advantages it had to offer:

- Inter-operability with both EBS (the College’s MIS system) and the Microsoft Office package;
- Off-the-shelf product – thereby avoiding expensive design costs;
- Greater potential and business benefits - future proofing;
- Benefits of developing sooner rather than switching later if they continued with the 2003 version;
- Integration of web 2.0 learning tools e.g. wikis and blogs ; and
- Potential to develop with SharePoint Learning Kit (SLK).

The College had a budget of £60k, primarily for infrastructure costs, to start the new system and allocated the different responsibilities to both existing and new staff in the College to successfully implement SharePoint. See the image below for a full break down.

Here is a brief resume of some of the key steps taken at South Nottingham College. The 2007/08 academic year was ear-marked as a planning and implementation year, with full usage by learners beginning in 2008/09:
May - August 2007

- Target launch date for staff set as 1st September 2007.
- Consultation with stakeholder group on architecture and image.
- A structure was devised for the site (see image below).
- Technical considerations included permission rights, setting up active directory user groups, metadata, ensuring reliable back-ups and scaling for future expansion.
- “Rolled-over” business side of existing portal run in SharePoint 2003.

![Structure of SharePoint 2007](image)

September 2007

- The rest of the site went live to staff – but needed life breathing into the academic sites.
- SharePoint Developer & E-learning coordinator met with all Heads of School, or a named substitute to support and advise on developing their own academic sites.
- Appointed a Content Developer.

October - December 2007

- Content being developed alongside architecture of areas – rolling programme.
- CPD events + focus groups to “share the vision” of SharePoint, showcase best practice and prompt teachers to think how they would use the system.
January – August 2008

- SharePoint embedded into other parts of the organisation e.g. adding it to Lesson Observations forms; linking it to the appraisal process.
- Robust tracking systems linking the above to CPD.
- Informed and focussed IT budget spend to support SharePoint and small investment £5k in SharePoint champions.
- Continued staff training to ensure competency in both use and inducting 2008 student cohort.
- Hosted a demonstration day in conjunction with RSC East Midlands to show other learning providers how the College were using SharePoint.

September 2008

- Launch to students.
- Revised learner IT induction programme that incorporated SharePoint.
- Continued monitoring and reporting of usage.
- Continued training and support for staff in using SharePoint.
- Encouraging of sharing of best practice through the peer observation process and e-learning champions having an “open classroom” to demonstrate how the portal can be used to support learning and teaching 24/7.

The outcomes

Monthly monitoring of content population at meetings by the MIS/ILT group helped to shape the direction of the project and ensure that progress was being made all the time.

Statistical analysis of SharePoint, such as number of files available and site “hit” rates were shared with Heads of Schools.

Budget allocation by the MIS/ILT steering group for e-learning resources was tailored into a transparent process to reward those individuals and departments that were using SharePoint.

The impact

Real learner impact started from September 2008 so at time of publishing this case study it is too early to tell. Although anecdotally learners are ‘driving’ lecturers for content development!

Elaine Martin, Strategic Development: Teaching and Learning at South Nottingham College, gives the following tips for other organisations:

- “Secure support from Senior Management.
- “The MIS/ILT Steering Group membership of both academic and technical working together was a critical success factor in this project. Ensure the right
people with the right skills are involved in the project rather than necessarily taking a hierarchical approach. However, the group must have the necessary ‘power’ to drive the change process. This will speed up progress.

- “Communication – have clearly defined timelines and adhere to them! Be realistic to ensure that you maintain your credibility.
- “Monitor your progress and demonstrate it to Senior Management.
- “Communicate your progress to all staff using a range of media e.g. (newsletter, committees, staff e-noticeboard)
- “Evaluate your stats – they can be a really powerful tool for friendly competition in your organisation.
- “Use of champions/enthusiasts to drive through change (‘change agents’) – don’t necessarily choose the same people who are your e-learning champions as this can overload people.
- Embed SharePoint throughout the corporate infrastructure e.g. Lesson Observations, appraisal, CPD days, associated CPD requirements relating to contracts of employment and/or Institute for Learning (IfL) membership.
- “Launch to the learners with as much content as possible in your site – necessary to ensure that they return!”

At the time of writing, SharePoint has recently been launched across the College for learners, however further improvements on the horizon include:

- Continue to develop, test and embed content;
- Survey of learners to assess where are they now and then repeated during the year – the feedback collected will help shape how resources are allocated;
- Acting on training requests at individual level identified through either lesson observations or appraisal processes;
- Use web 2.0 technologies; and
- Continue to manage and direct resources based on utilisation statistics – to support those areas successfully using SharePoint as well as those areas that haven’t yet fully embraced the vision.

Useful links

South Nottingham College

Microsoft SharePoint website

Jisc RSC East Midlands

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