

SEMtek Case Study: The University of Alabama

In the world of higher education, competition isn't limited to the athletic field. The University of Alabama's College of Continuing Studies (CCS) also competes against many other institutions as it aggressively markets its professional development and non-credit programs to prospective students in the southeastern United States.

Based in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the CCS's charter is to extend the resources of the University of Alabama to provide comprehensive educational opportunities for adults. To successfully meet this challenge, CCS engages in a wide range of sales and marketing activities to attract students to its non-credit educational programs.

Yet the need to combine direct marketing activities with information fulfillment and registration services results in a plethora of documents that must be actively tracked and managed on a student-by-student basis. CCS determined that the ability to quickly generate, track and process prospective student inquiries - from initial direct marketing activities to information requests, application services, course registration and scheduling - would clearly provide the college with a significant competitive advantage.

So this is exactly what CCS set out to accomplish with the help of Entrinsik, an IBM Software business partner based in Raleigh, North Carolina, and IBM's UniVerse relational database system.

Aging Systems Hamper Growth

For most of the previous decade, CCS had been getting by with a bare-bones registration package that could register students and print a class roster, but not much more. According to Reggie Smith, a retired University of Alabama associate dean who came back to oversee the installation of a new system, "As we grew, this application began to slow everything down. We needed something with a lot more functionality, especially in the marketing arena."

An Easy Decision

The college examined several packages before settling on SEMtek, a program management software package from Entrinsik. SEMtek, which is used by continuing education schools around the world to create and deploy high-performance business applications, runs across both the UNIX and Windows platforms. It incorporates IBM's UniVerse relational database management system with the System Builder toolset to provide a complete solution for program management processing, marketing and operations management, registration and accounting.

According to Smith, "We were impressed by SEMtek's ability to provide a single, integrated database for managing everything from marketing programs to the scheduling and registration of students. This includes all the documents and letters that go with such a process - acceptance and confirmation letters, cancellation notices, receipts and so on. It's very comprehensive."

Marketing Comes First

The need to generate correspondence, however, directly results from successful marketing programs, which explains CCS's desire to integrate its direct mail initiatives with management and tracking programs. Specifically, CCS recognized that it needed to be able to actively manage and update its mailing lists, including collecting, storing and reporting on the massive amounts of demographic and

geographical information these lists produced over time. With the UniVerse-based SEMtek, this task was a breeze

'Out of This World' Flexibility

Today, everything goes into the UniVerse database - titles, occupational codes, previous class attendance histories, geographic locations and such - all segmented on a student-by-student or prospective student basis. This level of flexibility allows CCS personnel to evaluate marketing campaigns for their effectiveness.

"SEMtek's flexibility is just out of this world," says Smith. "Not only does it provide wonderful standard reports, but through Informer, we can also quickly build our own, highly customized reports. It's a very powerful tool."

In addition to seamlessly integrating marketing functions with comprehensive program management tools, SEMtek has also dramatically cut the time required to perform many repetitive tasks. Previously, three or four students worked all day to type confirmation letters. Now, one person can complete the entire operation in about half an hour. Letters and certificates can, for the first time, be easily tailored to reflect individual tastes as well.

Smith says that the system, which runs on IBM RS/6000 computers using UNIX, has never failed. Today, it hosts more than 100,000 records: a number that will eventually grow to more than a million records. He adds that a graphical user interface (GUI) will be a major feature of the next system upgrade. "I'm a big UNIX fan because of its reliability," he says, "but it's a Windows world out there, and we definitely need the GUI."

IBM Business Partner Provides Expert Advice

Doug Leupen, president at Entrinsik, notes that her company did considerably more than merely sell CCS the SEMtek package.

"We assigned a project manager to work with CCS throughout the implementation phase," says Leupen. "In addition to providing expert advice, our consultant helped CCS migrate all of its existing program data into the new SEMtek system, eliminating the need to re-key information and substantially reducing transition costs."

The SEMtek application is now being implemented at the University of Alabama campus in Huntsville as well. Buoyed by his experience setting up the new system in Tuscaloosa, Smith says, "they'll probably have it up and running in six months or less. You can't ask for better than that!"

About Entrinsik

Entrinsik, Inc. headquartered in Raleigh, NC provides software and services focused on the IBM U2 family of database products. Entrinsik's Informer Web Reporting System is the industry leader for reporting systems for UniVerse and UniData. Their SEMtek product is an enterprise solution for continuing education, training, and conference providers. Founded in 1984 and in the multi-value market since, Entrinsik aims to provide leading edge technology and unsurpassed service to their customers. For more information visit Entrinsik at <http://www.Entrinsik.com> or call 1.919.848.4828.