

SIIA 2009 Ed Tech Industry Summit – May 3-5, 2009

Impacting the Sales and the Delivery of Digital Content with Learning Management Systems

Session Description:

What should publishers know about Learning Management Systems to ensure their content works across a variety of these systems? This session will focus on several types of LMS (publisher specific as well as open platforms). Learning Management providers will discuss the customer benefits as well as challenges of using their systems. It will also focus on a renewed interest by school districts in purchasing Learning Management Systems and how our challenging economy may drive this change sooner than anticipated.

Moderator:

Pat Walkington, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, Sebit LLC

Panelists:

Jeff Borden, Senior Director of Teaching & Learning, Pearson eCollege

Bryan Falcon, Executive Vice President, HAIKU Learning Systems, Inc.

William Kelly, CEO, Learning.com

Ferdi Serim, South West Regional Director, Excelsior Software

Summary by Sari Follansbee, President, EdTech Design Associates

Transforming Education through Digital Learning Environments

What is the impact of Learning Management Systems (LMS) on the sales and delivery of digital content? What should publishers know about LMS' to ensure their content works across a variety of systems especially with their proliferation in schools? What are the challenges of working with the providers and with the systems? Savvy executives from diverse Learning Management providers gave candid insights.

While this session highlighted several types of LMS' (publisher specific as well as open platforms), consistency was found across the digital learning environments. They focus on integrating courses and supplementary resources, formative and summative assessments, class and content management systems, and multi-level support services. While the speakers discussed different customer benefits and challenges of their systems, they all supported blended learning and assessment, with data informing practice.

Pat Walkington introduced the panel and posed points for discussion.

1. Company's purpose behind the development of a Learning Management System

2. Brief overview and business models of each LMS
3. LMS company's criteria for working with other content providers

Jeff Borden introduced eCollege, a publisher agnostic LMS even though they are now part of Pearson (acquired about 20 months ago). eCollege gives students the confidence that they won't miss anything and that they won't have to buy expensive print books. Teachers and course developers can create content and/or add content objects, allowing more contextual learning.

eCollege courses are customizable including eBooks that are either integrated into the system or linked out to other websites. They have hidden items that are gated through the system rather than being baked into specific content. And they have tools that instructors can put in courses as they see fit. While eCollege's content-driven LMS is more flexible for users, Jeff mentioned it is harder than a folders-driven system for some publishers who would like to simply upload a "package" of files in a folder.

The fee structure is per student per seat – so as a school grows so does eCollege. Jeff noted this is in contrast to the licensing model held by Blackboard, for example, where the company gains more when the school does not grow. eCollege works with schools to be successful, using a suites of tools that do evaluations and mine assessment data with learning outcomes. They do trending and have an enterprise reporting tool for mastery analytics, satisfaction import, and portfolios.

Bill Kelly introduced Learning.com, a premier digital learning environment for K-5 – now K-8 – reaching into high school this summer. The company started offering online curriculum in 2001 and at that time had no meaningful interface to deliver it. Over time, their functionality has mimicked an LMS. Now, while Learning.com has a proprietary system that goes with their curriculum products, they support a wide variety of content. Growth has included content partners such as Sebit and their "adaptive curriculum."

Bill highlighted the value and flexibility of curriculum products from Learning.com. They include sets of units comprised of sets of learning objects that can be combined and assigned however a teacher, or anyone else in the system, wants. This includes matching to a textbook structure if desired. Their system makes it easy for teachers to incorporate digital assets into their regular teaching process, providing tools for managing classes and grades as well as assignments and the content itself.

The revenue model of Learning.com is pay per student per year for premium service. They have an access control mechanism – content made available based on rules established with partners – with a revenue share on who's doing what. For example, customized bundles can be created with a backend system. Whether it is forcing a sequence, leaving it flexible, or putting notes along with students' assignments, all is easily managed from Learning.com's clean intuitive user interface.

Ferdi Serim introduced Excelsior Software, highlighting the importance of their formative assessments and standards in Pinnacle/Global Scholar's purchase of them last year. Teacher and student data are delivered from one location and are accessible even though three quarters of the teachers do not have the competence to deal with a comprehensive LMS. Their professional development is embedded in the lessons and follows three criteria: a) just-in-time not just-in-case, b) differentiated and individualized that is mastery-based, and c) collaborative, sustained activities that are content agnostic. Excelsior teaches how to use this kind of product not this particular product – with an overlay of how to improve practice to get results.

Ferdi spoke of how Excelsior Software's open architecture enables flexible customization. Key benefits of the system he presented are aligning assessment with curriculum according to standards, and providing standards-based grading with data captures that show learning is happening. This enables change in practice in the classroom.

Promises and perils that Ferdi listed addressed content issues: providing learning materials complete with the digital rights for LEA's, making curriculum digital friendly, ensuring content is not hostage to its container, and making it easily accessible to use in multiple ways. He tied revenue to the value of what we do with the content; by underscoring demonstrable effective practices, we can free up money from old practices that don't work.

Bryan Falcon introduced Haiku Learning Systems, a streamlined content-centric LMS built to bring the advantages of the web simply and powerfully to the classroom. Haiku.com is content agnostic, a house waiting to be filled. While it makes the class creation process easy, it gives teachers the ability to arrange bite size pieces of content called blocks complete with images, audio and video with drag-and-drop ease. All that a teacher needs to have for the lesson is right there. Further this content is served on demand and so will not strain bandwidth in schools.

In discussing partnership interests, Bryan highlighted questions that may require publishers to think differently. In addition to deciding what curriculum they might want to release through this venue, content partners need to answer what is the most atomic piece of content they want to push out. The Haiku.com system learns quickly and can inform what and how people are using the materials and tools with updates every couple of weeks rather than months. Haiku can give insights into what is working and not while it promotes partners' products and services.

As a young company, Bryan described the importance for Haiku of finding partners and friends, looking for an exchange of expertise as well as marketing and sales. They can look for how best to break up the way content is packaged and delivered. With single sign-on and search that goes out everywhere and then brings results back into Haiku, there is potential for innovative and profitable exchange.

Questions:

Frank Catalano – can 2 or more LMS' talk to each other? – hasn't happened yet.

What about interoperability? Bill Kelly – the ability to easily drop things into the LMS is typically not the issue. The barrier is usually not the underlying operating system, but rather tied to people learning and changing.

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