Portals: An Antidote to IT Invisibility

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University of Saskatchewan
April 13, 2010
Session ID: 1101
“If we’re doing a good job IT should be invisible”

Is invisibility all that it’s cracked up to be?

Why might we want to be invisible?

- Best to stay under the radar.
- They can’t hit what they can’t see.
What’s wrong with being invisible?

• “Out of sight, out of mind” doesn’t work at budget time.
• Squeaky wheel gets the grease.
• Success goes unnoticed.
• No appreciation of the challenges we face.
• We don’t build a base of supporters.

Outline of our presentation

• Challenges for campus IT
• Overview of our portal project
• Portals as an antidote to invisibility
Our challenges are truly mythical in their scale

Central IT sails the dangerous waters of campus culture — battling storms, monsters, temptation — to bring new technology to our colleagues.

Storms:

The sea god Poseidon lashes the sea into a storm with his trident ...

• Storms of mistrust:

Some of our colleagues mistrust technology and those who provide it.
Monsters:
Scylla the 6-headed monster that’s hard to kill ...

• IT’s credibility damaged by experiences with unsuccessful technology projects in the past.

Other Dangers:
Charybdis swallows the sea in a whirlpool ...

• Scope explosion can suck projects into the abyss.
And sweet singing sirens lure sailors to their doom …

• Sound like vendor promises?

In 2003 we began a project to build a campus-wide portal (PAWS).

More than a technical project

• We had non-technical issues to address as well.
Our “aha” moment

• Implementing technology is a social exercise as much as a technical one.
  —Campus-wide IT projects are community projects.
• Communities share common interests, common goals, a common purpose.
Working together to achieve a common goal

- For our portal project we adopted a new model
- Co-development
  - Local unit develops the application, central IT integrates
  - Highly successful approach
Some of our co-developers

Student & Enrolment Services

- Employment and Career Services
- Events and Career Services
- Graduate Programs

Committed to providing students with information and resources to support their academic and professional success.

- Workshops in Canada
- Career Services in the UK
- Research Opportunities

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Some of our co-developers

Financial Services
Human Resources
Library
Alumni Affairs

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Why is co-development effective?

• Offers everyone on campus a voice.
• Captures ideas from the broad campus community.
• Provides local units the opportunity for business-specific, value-added applications and content.

Why is co-development effective?

• A deeper sense of ownership and engagement in the project and its outcomes.
• Improved standardization and campus-wide acceptance.
• Frees up central resources.
• We share success.
Why is a portal an effective antidote to IT invisibility?

• Central IT works hand-in-hand with service providers in developing and deploying their applications.
• Clear delineation of roles.
  —Local unit responsible for the service, central IT responsible for the delivery.
• Provides a mutual sense of accomplishment.
How has our portal made us (central IT) visible?

- PAWS is the common gateway for accessing campus online services.
- A campus meeting place where 18,000 users gather every day.
  —No other place, real or virtual, can say this.
- Everyone now wants their service to be on PAWS.
  —And they understand better what that entails.
How can a portal reinforce central IT’s role?

• Campus IT standards.
• Scale efficiencies.
• Consistency in service delivery.
• A place to go for help meeting their business needs.

How has our portal reinforced our (central IT’s) role?

• The login ID used for the portal became the campus standard.
  —Single-sign on to services is a requirement.
• The portal became the common gateway to access online services.
  —Provides consistency for the community.
• Visibility of portal provides opportunities to solve business needs of units.
  —Online elections, surveys
Once central IT becomes visible how do we stay visible?

- Continue to demonstrate that their interests are our interests.
  —Balance the needs of local units and central service providers.
- Keep the engagement going.
  —Encourage co-development in campus IT projects.
- Build on joint success.

How does the portal contribute to visibility?

- Monthly meetings of PAWS stakeholders and one-on-one meetings for proactive relationship building.
- We seek out opportunities to partner with others on campus to provide services in PAWS.
  —We embrace our supporting role.
- We redefined our definition of success.
  —When our partners succeed, we succeed!
Questions?

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