Learning Portals: EMC Paves the Way for Higher Training Revenue

By Mohana Radhakrishnan

When it comes to training, nothing frustrates learners more than difficulty in finding and registering for the courses they need. That was one of the challenges facing EMC Vice President of Education and Performance Tom Clancy and his team, who were determined to run their company's learning organization more like a business to support EMC's product sales.

In order to achieve that goal, however, Clancy said, "We needed to provide customers and channel partners with an easier way to use and manage all aspects of their learning needs, including news, training unit status, registering, searching for training, transcripts and certifi-

made it more difficult for EMC to increase the level of product knowledge among customers, which ultimately proved to be a deterrent to the higher revenues the company was seeking. Something had to be done.

A Portal in any Storm

Clancy and his team found their answer in the form of a Web 2.0 learning portal that enabled them to extend the functionality and usability of their LMS to increase registrations. They found that a flexible learning portal allows organizations to bring the core functionality of their LMS to customers — rather than requiring customers to navigate their way through the LMS to get the information they need. If done right, portals don't require any prerequisite training or job aids, and they make it easy for users to find and register for training — in the

"Your learners are there to learn, not to learn how to use your training registration tool."

– Tom Clancy, VP, Education and Productivity, EMC

cation, and learning path tracking. EMC had a robust learning management system (LMS), but the user interface was difficult and not intuitive for prospective learners. And we found that it cost too much time and money to customize the LMS to make it more user friendly."

As a result of these interface issues, customer satisfaction of the learning experience was not what it should have been and training registrations were not high enough. This

format they want and with a look and feel that's consistent with their Web 2.0 expectations.

Aside from ease of use, some portals are agnostic to any particular LMS vendor or technology. As a powerful application platform that overcomes the pitfalls typically associated with traditional LMS customizations, they reduce maintenance and upgrade costs. Navigation flow isn't bound to the LMS and can be developed with minimal impact. And because

portals usually aren't affected by patches to the LMS, they reduce costs and overhead.

Partnering for Progress

The EMC team realized the best way to proceed would be to partner with an expert on both portals and the learning domain. They needed someone who could work closely with his business units to identify needs and requirements and implement the right technology. It chose Expertus, a company that had a solution for customer portals and the skills to bring forward the pertinent learning elements EMC needed.

After working with EMC to understand business requirements and develop the appropriate architectural and technical designs, Expertus implemented what it calls SmartPortal technology to build a fresh, user-friendly portal that effectively made the complexity of the LMS transparent to learners. The SmartPortal relies on a combination of Web 2.0, AJAX and Web Services, XML and SOAP protocols to accomplish these capabilities.

The new portal immediately overcame the shortcomings of working within the application framework of the company's LMS. Now EMC has a scalable solution for integrating its enterprise LMS with any corporate knowledge portals, HR Career Center portals or any other intranet Web site. It also had the ability to manage its portal information efficiently by exposing LMS functions as learning widgets. That's because the framework was designed from the outset on newer Web 2.0 technologies that eliminated needless complexity at the architecture and API levels.

The Numbers Tell the Story

Within three months, the results of the new learning portal have been clearly measured by EMC. Across all three home pages on the company's learning site, customer, partner and guest traffic increased by nearly 65,000 visits. Training purchases and credit card usage on the site increased by 30 percent. At the same time, there has been a 20 percent decrease in instances in

What CLOs Think About Training Portals

Expertus asked 11 CLOs and training directors about their top challenges without a training portal. They said:

• Poor LMS usability hurts training searches, registrations and sales of training.

• The image of the learning organization is damaged due to comparisons with "modern" Web sites.

• LMS customization is expensive and rarely necessary.

They recommended:

• Fight the urge to customize your LMS.

• Develop a portal as soon as you can.

• Make sure actual users are extensively involved in the design of the portal.

The Big Numbers

65,000 Increase in Web site visits.

30% Increase in Web site purchases.

20% Decrease in number of visitors who left after visiting only one page.

which visitors came to the site and immediately left due to frustration or lack of clarity.

Equally important are the statistics associated with users who clicked on just one page, indicating they were able to find the information they needed with a single click. These instances increased by more than 20 percent, while instances of potential learners clicking two, three or more times — a sign of cumbersome navigation — decreased by more than 30 percent.

Most significant of all, Clancy said, "EMC's field sales organization now promotes the learning site — a far cry from the days when they actually steered people away from the site because of poor usability."

By any measure, portal technology has improved EMC's learning processes and customer satisfaction — and with it, paved the way for higher revenues and better business results. ❖