

Does Your Software Drive Your Learning Program?

In his article “Does Your LMS Drive Your Learning Program?” Greg Marsello gives his thoughts on how lifelong learning programs can harness their business management system to free up staff time. The author states that valuable staff time is taken up by inefficient but necessary tasks such as promotional mailings, and class communication. Marsello believes that web-based management systems are the best way to find “hidden” efficiencies by automating these communication and data gathering tasks. The author concludes that choosing a web-based business management system results in lifelong learning staff time being freed up for more important tasks.

Abstract

To survive and thrive as a lifelong learning provider in the 21st century you must have a business management software system that actively assists your organization with running your programs. Although many software systems do a good job helping you reduce costs, they often miss out on many basic efficiencies that can save you many staff hours each week. Presently, the only real option for reaching these efficiencies is a web-based software system.

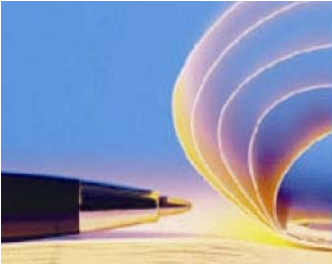
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The most obvious efficiency that a web-based system provides is online registration. Programs that have online registration capability from a web-based software system are reporting a minimum of 20% and a maximum of 90% of registrations coming in online. It is reasonable to expect that within the next three to five years that over 60% of your registrations will come in online. Any student initiated registration that comes in online saves your staff time.

If your software system is designed to take those online registrations and immediately enroll them in classes and send out a confirmation without staff involvement, you save even more time. In learning programs that use web-based systems to automate these basic registration and paperwork tasks, staff time savings often amount to 20 hours a week. This time can then be spent elsewhere, developing and marketing programs.

In addition to saving staff time through enabling student registrations, a web-based software system creates many more savings. With web-based software students take an active role in guiding their own learning. They can update their own profile information and look up what classes they are scheduled for and get important information for the class. Students can review grades and attendance at classes they have completed, and can communicate freely with program staff.

Instructors can review and print their own rosters, and communicate with their



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students via email. If staff work at multiple locations they have access to all the same information and do not have to wait for a central office to send room schedules, class rosters, etc.

When using your web-based software system to build a class, you can automatically schedule rooms at any location that you are associated with. If necessary, this can be done electronically, in conjunction with your organization's master scheduler.

Effective software systems let you be self-sufficient with regards to the upkeep of your site. With web-based systems, web pages can be updated as needed. You control the information and have simple, familiar tools for updating the information.

Web-based systems help you promote your site more effectively. Information for printed promotions can be extracted in any form by anyone anywhere. The time required for building a printed promotion is cut by 50%. E-mail messages can automatically be sent out to update students or instructors and/or to promote upcoming classes.

The time you save will allow you to focus staff on money-making tasks. Now program directors can spend more time developing new programs. Marketing staff can spend more time doing "think marketing" and analyzing information gathered by your web-based system instead of having to gather this information themselves. Frontline staff can follow-up with inquiries and make sure customer service is being provided.

Learning Connection, a lifelong learning program based in Providence, RI, also has an affiliate program in Boston, MA and Newport, RI. All three programs have been running on a web-based software system for three years.

Between the three programs each year 13 catalogs are produced; 2,300 classes are developed; and 22,000 students are registered. The three programs are supported by a total of three staff!

Having a web-based software system that supports the three programs allows registration to be centralized; classes to be developed at anytime for any location; catalogs to be developed/produced in five weeks or less; and transfers/cancels to be taken care of in less than one minute.

The efficiencies are enormous and all lifelong learning programs will need to be thinking web-based if they plan on competing and operating in the 21st century.