University empowers community with Plone & Enfold Desktop

About the University of Louisville

The University of Louisville is a state-supported research university located in Kentucky's largest metropolitan area. The university has a student body of nearly 22,000, a faculty and staff of nearly 6,000 and an operating budget of $680 million.

The university has three campuses, including its prestigious Health Science Center. Recent work there making international headlines includes development of a self-contained artificial heart, research paving the way for successful hand transplants, and development of a more affordable vaccine for human papilloma virus.

Moving to a new Web environment

The university's Web team needed to retire outdated Web services hardware and harden security. A migration addressed both issues by supplying redundant load-balanced services and a tighter security model. The migration also gave Web staff the opportunity to implement a content management system with a goal of making Web publishing as easy as managing e-mail.

Giving Plone the edge

Colleges and universities, with large communities of Web content authors and decentralized publishing authority, have distinct content management needs compared to other industries. Large numbers of low-tech users need to be able to build and manage their own sites, which Plone and Enfold Desktop empower them to do.

According to Web team lead Kurt Bendl, Enfold Desktop made the difference in the university's choice of Plone. By giving users an interface they understood, Enfold Desktop "pushed the acceptability over the edge in a big way," he says.

When updating their sites, units now have the option to continue using static Web pages or switch to the more accessible and easier-to-use Plone-based content management system. A few months into the migration process, 150 departments were staging or publishing in Plone.
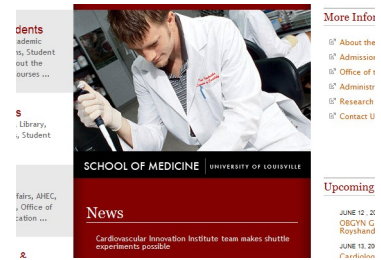
"For them, it's a miracle"

As an example of where Desktop came in handy, Bendl points to the faculty and staff directory for the School of Public Health and Information Sciences. In a perfect world, such a directory would be generated dynamically with information from a human resources database. But Bendl says that with hundreds of departments on campus, "they all can't afford to have a coder." The staff member who built the directory is not a Web designer. He made an HTML file for each directory entry, then dragged those files and the staff members' photos into Plone with Enfold Desktop.

Bendl says he gets many requests for alternatives to Kupu, the Plone WYSIWYG editor. Enfold Desktop provides another option by letting users easily edit simple HTML pages in the program of their choice, whether it's Adobe Dreamweaver, Microsoft FrontPage or a text editor. Bendl says often an IT staff member will make a department's front page with Dreamweaver, then someone in the department will be responsible for the rest of the site.

He says users often drag folders into Plone "en masse" via Enfold Desktop when "fleshing out" a new site. Bendl points to the Graduate Council, where the content maintainer easily posted scores of PDF files containing six years of meeting minutes. Conversely, users also can perform what he calls "a poor man's backup," dragging folders out of Plone with Enfold Desktop, onto their local machines.

"Enfold Desktop makes a world of difference," Bendl says, giving another example: the intramural sports department's photo albums. "For them to be able to drag a bunch of photos onto the site—for them, it's a miracle."

Overview

Business need: The university needed to create a degree of consistency in the visitor experience across its hundreds of individual Web sites, while empowering nontechnical staff members to publish content easily and ensuring sites meet federally mandated accessibility rules, all within a reasonable budget.

Solution: Plone 2.5 with Enfold Desktop 3, plus Web site development, Plone customization & integration, and technical support services

Benefits: University Web sites are easier to use and project a more unified, clearly recognizable, professional image, increasing the likelihood of name recognition and message reception among target audiences. Visitors with disabilities can access information more easily. Nontechnical staff members can manage their own content, making more of the university community's knowledge available online, more quickly.

"Right now my biggest cheerleader is Marketing. And that is a miracle."

Kurt Bendl
Web Team Lead
University of Louisville

For more information

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enfoldsystems.com/Products/Desktop