

Teach First Improving Education through Collaboration

CASE STUDY

Creating community and resource sharing among teachers

Teach First is an independent charity that is working to break the link between low family income and poor educational attainment in the UK. Since 2002, Teach First has placed more than 2,520 teachers in schools facing challenging circumstances to work with students to raise their achievement, access, and aspirations.

Following its successes and rapid growth in the past 10 years, Teach First decided to review how it keeps members connected online and investigate how it could improve the engagement of members, in order to share best practices, experiences, and feedback. With a network of around 2,500 participants and 2,000 Ambassadors, Teach First was finding it difficult to reach out effectively and consistently to a diverse group. An efficient community site, which offered both intranet capabilities and an external customer community, would enable Teach First to reach its member groups and improve communications and innovation with its direct employee base.

Teach First had been reliant upon a proprietary solution, which hadn't been adopted extensively, nor was it scalable. As a result, it had become time consuming to manage and operate.

The organisation faced a significant communications challenge, and it now urgently needed to identify a less resource-intensive way of promoting its services. Creating a more advanced online presence made good business sense. Goals included creating an engaging environment for its user base and enabling organic groups to be formed where resources could easily be shared and social interactions started. The ability to leverage Drupal as a fully functioning web content management system as the base platform for a social business solution was a key requirement.

Scalability and usability were critical and formed the base criteria upon which any system would be evaluated.

How they did it

Working in partnership with digital agency BrightLemon, Teach First undertook a review and due diligence process, to assess a number of potential options. Prior to the RFP process, they outlined project goals and set criteria to benchmark against. Compared directly against five solutions, which had been short-listed from nine, Drupal Commons scored highest on the functional



COMPANY INFORMATION

- Teach First
- www.teachfirst.org.uk
- Teach First trains and supports people with leadership potential to become inspirational teachers in schools, in low-income communities, across the UK
- Industry Sector: Charitable Organisation in Education
- Drupal user since 2012
- Acquia client since 2012

SUCCESS ENABLED WITH

- Drupal
- Acquia Network & Support
- BrightLemon™ design & development services

ACQUIA™

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requirements and quickly became the front-runner. Built on Drupal, Drupal Commons enables digital businesses to achieve breakthrough results with social applications for customer communities, brand advocacy, social commerce, and employee collaboration.

“We were very motivated by what Acquia told us,” said Christopher Beales, business analyst and project manager at Teach First. “It was going to be, without doubt, a fundamental step-change for our business, and once concerns about support, stability and scalability had been comprehensively addressed by the Acquia team, we were certainly keen to explore more.”

Search functionality on the website was a focus for the redesign, and Teach First was happy to be guided by both BrightLemon and Acquia on what would work best for their business needs. “We allowed for consultancy hours as part of the wider project,” explained Beales. “Having access to such a wide knowledge base was something we intended to take full advantage. We wanted to get it right, first time.”

The new site was then built to unify all existing communities, and existing users were imported with their privileges intact.

The results

Opting for a soft-launch approach, Teach First paced its migration to ensure that the community wasn't disrupted by any changes “but we needn't have worried,” said Beales. “User-generated content such as blogs is already increasing, and this is certainly thanks to the ease of the interface and the fact that no training is required.”

A key objective of the new website was to ensure that information could be shared faster, and in a more interactive way—so user-participation levels could build as a result and ensure improved collaboration—and Teach First is already seeing that. The organisation has experienced a positive change, reflected in the increasing number of event registrations, and there have also been more blogs created on the website; with noticeably higher numbers of people commenting on them. Community users are also now viewing the same site, and benefiting from its full functionality, whether using a PC, tablet, or mobile device.

Accessing the website with unique user ids and log-on details also now gives Teach First increased visibility of the website traffic, and this will become increasingly important as the intelligence behind the website evolves further, enabling users to share specific materials with specific contacts based on relevance and interest.

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