Roger Williams University modernizes web presence with Acquia and OHO Interactive

Site performance, content management enhanced with Drupal and Managed Cloud

For Roger Williams University (RWU), its website is more than an online brochure – it's the critical recruiting vehicle and information resource for its entire community, including faculty, enrolled students, employees, alumni and, most importantly, prospective students. So when the Bristol, Rhode Island university, whose 42 academic programs combine liberal arts and education for the professions, took on upgrading its site's outmoded design and architecture, the number-one objective was clear: to build a site that won't go down. "If prospective students or parents are looking for information, the site simply has to be online and available at that moment," said Chief Information Officer Suzanne Barnes.

In addition to reliability, Director of Web Services Steven Pereira had other objectives in mind when selecting a site platform. Because the original site had been built around a proprietary CMS that was no longer functional or scalable, an open source platform that would take the university into the future was critical. As part of the project, RWU was also looking for a technology partner that would help it run and support its site to minimize operational burden on its internal staff.

RWU chose to consult the technology experts at OHO Interactive, a firm with expertise in university websites, to work closely with its team. OHO provided RWU with a complete solution including research, visual design and Drupal development, and partnered with Acquia to deliver Drupal hosting and support services. Together, OHO and Acquia delivered a robust Drupal-based site that is well architected, highly reliable and designed to meet the unique needs of the university.

"The set of tools Acquia wraps around Drupal is invaluable to us. We could have used other solutions but they were missing that Drupal expertise. That's what helps me sleep at night – knowing that if the site goes down, as web sites sometimes do, we have someone working with us to recover and get back online as soon as humanly possible." –Steven Pereira, Director of Web Services, RWU

How they did it

Through intensive interviews with RWU stakeholder groups, OHO uncovered a key information architecture challenge: the need to seamlessly integrate multiple subdomains and nearly 25,000 pages so that each of its approximately 100 department microsites could work together to project one public-facing RWU brand. OHO's solution was to use Drupal's Organic Groups module to centralize the sites into a single installation of Drupal. Each school was subsequently set up as a subsite, so that each one of the schools and university

COMPANY INFORMATION

- Roger Williams University
- www.rwu.edu
- Independent university focused on liberal arts & professional education
- Higher Education
- 1,400 employees
- Drupal user since 2010
- Acquia client since 2011

SUCCESS ENABLED WITH…

- Acquia Managed Cloud
- Acquia Support
- Drupal Design and Development from Acquia Enterprise Select Partner OHO Interactive

Acquia™

departments can independently manage content and permissions while also incorporating feeds of university-wide content such as news and upcoming events.

As development of the site progressed, Drupal continued to deliver. Drupal's modular framework allowed the team to incorporate additional functionality throughout the development process. For instance, during the project, RWU identified the need for an editorial workflow capability, to allow staff to preview and submit content for approval before it was published. Utilizing the Revisions module in Drupal, OHO was able to quickly roll out a solution to meet RWU's needs. It's this kind of flexibility that will allow the site to continue to scale as RWU grows. According to OHO Founder and Managing Director Jason Smith, "That's what's great about Drupal. Its flexibility allows us to quickly add functionality, using existing modules, to meet almost any business need – without custom coding. For RWU, we were able to roll out an editorial workflow solution in about a day."

Drupal also allowed the RWU team to begin populating content on the site even while the site build was taking place and before the final page designs were implemented. This capability was vital in order to allow the team to meet RWU's firm September deadline for the site launch. When development finished, the site became ready to migrate to the Acquia Managed Cloud hosting environment. Acquia and OHO worked in lockstep to ensure a seamless transition and test and troubleshoot any issues. "We had total confidence," said Smith. "The Acquia environment is so well built out – everything we need is ready to go."

The results

As much as the design of the new RWU site, launched in September 2011, has modernized the university's public profile, the site's new platform and architecture has improved workflow and content management capability for the university's staff. "The site is phenomenal," said Pereira. "Users are finding it so much easier to manage and maintain, and we have permissions, workflow and revisioning abilities we just didn't have before." According to RWU's experience during the user training process, 100 percent of staff who used the legacy site's CMS preferred the new Drupal implementation.

In addition, Acquia's Support and Cloud services provide RWU's communications group with vital insight on server performance while addressing any issues that arise through monitoring. "New Relic – a service available in the Acquia Network – gives us insight into real-time performance on the server, which helps Acquia monitor and debug," said Pereira. "We have so much other work to do, it's nice not to have to find back-end resources and plan upgrades and patches."

Overall, the RWU team has come to understand why, when an OHO client is "agnostic on platform," said Smith, "we always pick Drupal."

"The new site and platform have created enormous resource efficiencies," said Pereira. "And the expertise and resources brought by Acquia – the fact that they know what our site needs and when – are incredibly valuable to our organization."

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- Or call 855.430.7700