BP LOGIX ALIGNS IT AND BUSINESS USERS FOR COLUMBUS TECHNICAL COLLEGE

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Columbus Technical College is one of 28 colleges in the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). Founded in 1961, the college is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) to provide programs ranging from business to healthcare to manufacturing. Columbus Tech is focused on providing education for the 21st Century technological workplace, and has seen enrollment jump significantly over the past several years.

Georgia's 28 technical colleges offer 600 programs that lead to in-demand jobs and careers. Almost 40% of all TCSG students are enrolled in healthcare programs, and thousands more are readying themselves for careers in areas ranging from aerospace, energy, the environment and life sciences to more traditional trades like electronics, automotive technology and cosmetology. Like other colleges in the TCSG system, Columbus Technical College (CTC) offers many online courses. Five (5) degree programs and several diploma and certificate programs are available completely online.

ROBERT SZABO
Director of Information Technology

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Georgia's technical colleges are uniquely positioned to react to changing workforce needs. In response to the significant workforce shortage in healthcare and high demand for medical careers, Columbus Tech will open the Robert L. Wright, Jr. Health Sciences Center in fall of 2010. A joint project between the State of Georgia, the college, and the Columbus Technical College Foundation, this state-of-the-art facility will allow the college to introduce new programs and expand existing ones, doubling

enrollment in many of their most popular programs.

In addition to core academic programs, CTC also provides training and professional development services to local organizations and individuals. In 2008, the College provided training assistance to 407 companies and in 2009 it provided training services to 12,000 people. In support of its neighbor, Fort Benning, Columbus Technical College promotes affordable educational and training opportunities for service members and assists individuals with the transition from military to civilian careers.

A NEED TO AUTOMATE

As Director of Information Technology for Columbus Technical College, Robert Szabo is responsible for managing all IT infrastructure, including the Banner student information system, the campus network, document imaging systems, and classroom instructional technology. Reporting to Szabo is Britton Powers who maintains the College's various web sites and online systems that keep the college moving forward everyday.

Like many colleges and universities, Columbus Technical College found that significant amounts of information were being moved manually around campus. As a result, it was difficult to determine the disposition of items, especially those requiring many levels of approval and/ or needing coordinated work by people in different departments. The IT department recognized a need for automation to streamline the flow of business on campus.

Not only was manual routing time-intensive, tracking was a challenge. "Requisitions were my nightmare," Szabo said. "If I ordered a SMART Board two years ago and wanted to remember the vendor, finding that vendor was difficult and time-consuming." Szabo recognized that an automated system would enable him to find previous requisitions, vendors, answer questions -- and provide

enormous benefits in terms of information access, efficiency and cost savings.

FIRST STEPS

Szabo and Powers began meeting with shareholders to white board their processes and slowly convert the paper trails into online applications. The initial applications they developed were successful, but as a result, more and more departments saw the benefits of automation and wanted workflow for their processes. Szabo and Powers quickly realized this "one-by-one" approach would never keep up with the pace of requests and started searching for a system that would allow them to quickly develop electronic forms and workflow applications.

Szabo and Powers knew that they wanted software that would provide a common interface for all college electronic forms – as well as easy delegation and administration of workflows. In addition, Powers noted that the

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software needed to be web-based, extensible to other systems and mobile-friendly for Blackberry and PDA users. She also sought a vendor with previous experience with colleges and universities and a track record of providing excellent support.

RESPONDING TO PURCHASING AND HR

Another challenge was the Leave of Absence and Purchase Order systems. Those older systems were functioning but the staff wanted enhancements -- and the IT department was unable to address all of their requests.

"We also had a budget review process that needed to be addressed," commented Powers. There were between 130 and 150 separate budgets; each one the responsibility of a different individual. Once those budgets were developed, they then needed to be rolled up and submitted to the state.

"We knew we needed to work more effectively with workflows. We had too much elapsed time and not enough access to documents - so I made the pitch for a workflow product – and gained the backing of HR, Purchasing and Administrative Services," Powers remarked.

Szabo and Powers agreed that a visual, web-based process that enabled people to look at their processes quickly and make changes more easily would be critical. In addition they wanted a product that did not require IT programming to support user requirements -- a product that would enable users to access the information and reports they needed to be self sustaining.

ALIGNING IT WITH BUSINESS USERS

With the selection criteria in place, the IT team began its evaluation process, narrowing the initial list of 22 products to a short list of seven (7). Being a cost-sensitive institution, a number of the short-listed products were open source products.

"We had to find a product that would meet our needs, provide good value and be easy for our users to learn and apply," Powers recalled. After four months of working with the short-listed products, Powers and Szabo recommended BP Logix Process Director to the Vice President of Administrative Services, to whom HR and Purchasing also report.

"It was important for us to demonstrate that we had conducted the evaluation properly and fairly," Szabo observed. He finalized the purchase while Powers worked with the trial copy of Process Director to begin developing forms, workflows and training users.

IMPROVING EFFICIENCY THROUGH AUTOMATION

Academic Affairs, Student Affairs and Administrative Services were all ready to automate their processes. Requests were coming in from other areas within CTC as well - even custodial moves and time sheet automation were requested. That validated the need, and approach, that IT had taken.

Szabo noted that Powers did an outstanding job with their early attempts at automation through in-house applications, while she acknowledged that retiring the home-grown systems she developed will be a plus. BP Logix Process Director enables faculty and staff to handle their processes more efficiently and effectively, while freeing IT to work on projects that require more technical proficiency.

FEATURES THAT USERS LOVE

"Process Director has a function we call 'Save for Later.' It enables users to find a task in their task list, work on it, then be able to put it aside and continue to work on it at a later point in time. Our users just loved that!" Powers exclaimed. Szabo concurs. "With our requisitions, for example, the ability to transfer work and not have it fall through the cracks is important. Save for Later enables us to stay on top of what needs to be done. And the manual six (6) page budget form, historically a challenge for our users to complete, was no problem at all with that capability," he said.

The staff at Columbus Technical College also commented that the forms in Process Director were easier to use than previous online forms, due to the ability of the forms to dynamically update as information is being entered. The Budget Request form, for example, populates division goals in real-time as users select a corresponding department and calculates necessary withholding expenses when estimated salary costs are entered.

The ability to generate real-time reports on budget data was also important to departments throughout the college. Process Director enabled non-IT staff to access the information they needed. Initially, the biggest beneficiary of Process Director's initial implementation was the Budget Manager who was 'slicing and dicing' information 'every way possible.'

BUSINESS USERS KNOW THEIR BUSINESS BEST

"Part of our criteria was to allow staff to have a greater role in designing their applications, and even develop some of their own workflows. They had tried unsuccessfully to do that in the past," recalled Szabo. "The graphical process design canvas in Process Director is a huge step forward in working with business users to develop process requirements. Everyone can participate in the process of designing the application using the point-and-click web-based interface."

Armed with Process Director, Columbus Technical College is moving forward. Szabo appreciates that more people can access information easier and see where documents are in the system. Being able to delegate and administer workflows is exactly what Szabo wanted. "That raises the bar towards getting things done. Having information available online, knowing who submitted what, who needs to take action and having the ability to look up anything is critical. That's why the business process approach was needed," he remarked.

"Our initial decision was to recognize the need for BPM - and there was complete alignment with the senior staff and IT," Powers recalled. "Then when we spoke with other educational institutions and heard how much they liked Process Director and how they appreciated BP Logix exemplary support it made our final decision an easy one," Powers concluded.

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