



CAL POLY POMONA

CASE STUDY

In 2005, the Division of Student Affairs at California State Polytechnic University Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona) setup a new department responsible for supporting the internal information and technical support needs of the division's 24 departments. With more than 400 full-time staff members and a similar number of student assistants, the division had been struggling with gaps in their support of technology, as well as barriers in the effective sharing of information across departments. To address these challenges, the division created Student Affairs Information & Technology Services (SAITS) to ensure compatibility and common functionality across the division. Through the use of server virtualization, standardization of personal computers and the technical support teams, SAITS has helped the division advance their use of information and technology resources and services at the department, division, and university level.

Cal Poly Pomona is one of 23 campuses in the California State University system. With eight colleges and a student population around 20,000, the university offers 65 undergraduate programs, 23 graduate programs and 18 teaching credentials/certificates.

For the first few years of its operation, SAITS employees struggled with ways to create and share effective user and technical documentation. Their first approach was to use Microsoft Word to create very large documents - often linked with others - in an attempt to create a library of system and procedural documentation. Over time it became clear that Word was too cumbersome, so they looked to their existing website's content management system (CMS) as a second option and tried to create internal web pages. It was quickly apparent that a web- based approach was the right direction; but a traditional CMS was geared towards traditional web site content and not well suited for building and maintaining a collaborative knowledgebase.

These common approaches had a number of problems, according to Kevin Morningstar, executive director of SAITS. "With Word, the documents were not very searchable, and we had limited ability to share these documents at the same time. We tried to use a CMS system to create internal web pages, but it wasn't set up to manage dynamic pages with multiple contributors at multiple times. It was unwieldy and simply not friendly for collaboration."

Word documents and CMS systems are not the answer for this type of dynamic content where there is a need for multiple contributors, interconnected and searchable content as well as both public and private access to information. With the problem clearly identified, Morningstar quickly recognized that wikis, by their very nature, offered a collaborative environment to build content, as well as supporting the critical search, linking and information accessibility that were key elements in compiling and sharing his department's knowledge.

There are lots of wikis on the market, Morningstar acknowledged. So his team did their homework reviewing and considering the Wikipedia-style format and freeware solutions and asking for recommendations from their vendors about wiki products they use. After doing some research they found SamePage, which Morningstar said quickly proved itself an obvious choice for his department. "We jumped on it. SamePage came pre-packaged; it was already executable to be immediately up and running," he noted. "And we had it up and running in 24 hours with one staff member taking care of the set up."

SamePage deployment is typically rapid. It can be just minutes for software as a service (SaaS) deployment and less than an hour for an on-premise deployment, which SAITS selected. After deployment, SAITS branded the wiki and customized it. SAITS does use the SamePage support package and is happy with the service it receives.

The department's leadership team has led the roll-out of the wiki, but no training was necessary. Morningstar noted that "the editor is fairly familiar and intuitive. From a text editor perspective, it was very similar to our experience with our CMS," he says of the homegrown SamePage interface. "No training was involved. It was more about task delegation."

The challenge, he notes, is taking the time to create the pages and develop a logical structure. "It's very easy to move content and reindex. We've changed the structure a few times as we've gone along. It's a dynamic thing, but you don't have to recreate your content."

Conversion tools built into the system helped ease the transition to the wiki. SamePage also utilizes a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor that is easy for even non-technical people to edit and work with. The security features of SamePage are a key

benefit and work very well. "It depends on the project as to how open it is," explains Morningstar. "There is certain content we may want student assistants to see or not see. We can easily set those levels." SamePage prides itself on its security features at the instance, project and page level for both individuals and groups.

Collaboration within SAITS is operating at a whole new level. "What we enjoy is the ability to have any number of us collaborate on documents. We have operational documents; our own technology/knowledge-base documentation; and we're trying to build self-help pages. There's a lot of information we're working with."

And the results? "SamePage wiki has been a great lifesaver," states Morningstar. There are 13 content contributors in his department, and over time their hope is that it will become a widely used resource for their 400 users in the division with access to the wiki. After one year of working with SamePage, they have been focusing on their internal technical documentation and are still in the early stages of developing their public "how-to" pages.

SAITS' primary goal has been to focus on technical documentation - great amounts of it. There are numerous systems in operation within the Student Affairs Division, all with technical, procedural and functional knowledge that needs to be documented and protected. They are moving Word documents to the wiki; building out new documentation as wiki pages. In one year, they have documented about half of what they need to; and Morningstar is comfortable with the pace and progress. "We've done pretty well so far," he says. "We've used it selectively. We're not marketing it heavily....yet. We want to eventually distill it down to trying to make our wiki relevant to our users."

Should SAITS continue to escalate its marketing of its wiki resource to other departments and units at Cal Poly Pomona, SamePage will prove scalable. In fact, it is one of the most scalable wikis on the market today and can ultimately support tens of thousands of users. It can effectively cluster across multiple nodes without additional investment in databases, data centers, etc.

"The finish line is when anyone can come into our department's knowledgebase with any question about our systems, type that question in the wiki and get an answer," he continues. "It will take us years to get there."

As a result of the features, as well as the simplicity in administering SamePage, the total cost of ownership for SamePage is much lower than competing products. "I can't imagine we could have made a better choice. This one did not take us a lot of effort to start up and work with. It's very well done; and works very well for us. I'm a very happy customer. I definitely feel we made the right choice. We didn't do any training, but everybody can jump in and use the product with zero start-up time. It's that intuitive."