

CASE STUDY: STUDENTS AS CUSTOMERS

STREAMLINING THE ENROLMENT PROCESS TO IMPROVE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

THE CUSTOMER

Orpington is a general further education college with approximately 1,800 16-18 year old students and 2,600 adults. The college was opened in 1973 and now provides education to students from several inner London boroughs in addition to its local population. Courses range from thirty academic subjects at "A" Level to vocational course at levels 1, 2 and 3.

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SUE WILLIAMS, VICE PRINCIPAL,
FINANCE & SYSTEMS, ORPINGTON COLLEGE

THE NEED

In recent years the college had suffered a steady decline in student numbers and with it, a proportionate reduction in government funding. When the new principal, Simon Norton, joined the college in 2006 he vowed to turn its fortunes around and central to his transformation program was the need to enhance the overall student experience.

Simon explains his reasoning "Students that enjoy all aspects of student life including their studies tend to stay the course and do better in their exams. As a result, the college prospers and so does the local community that employs them."

THE PROBLEM

One area where the student experience needed remedial attention was brought to light in the college's annual student and course satisfaction surveys. While most students were satisfied with the teaching, the vast majority thought poorly of the enrolment process.

Sue Williams is Vice Principal, Finance & Systems at Orpington and manages the finance, management information and IT teams.

"The survey findings came as no surprise really. Due to the volume of the data we collect, it could take some students several hours to complete their enrolment. These students were irritated by the long queues and waiting times created by an overly manual and bureaucratic process," says Sue.

More than 1,800 students are invited to enrol over a 6 day period. The college collects 8 screens of data per student on entry that includes personal information, course details, period and classes.



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"The first stage is to manually check the students ID and qualifications. About two-thirds of students meet the entry criteria and pass smoothly through the enrolment process. Traditionally, the problem area has always been the remaining third, about 500-600 students, that didn't get the grades they wanted to stay on at school and turn up in the hope of securing a place. These students need guidance on their course options and so it could take 2-3 hours to work through the enrolment process," Sue explains.

The other area targeted for automation was happening behind-the-scenes and post-enrolment.

"Staff had to spend several days processing enrolment forms to ensure we had sufficient information to claim government funding. Something had to be done."

The college set itself a target of no student taking more than 30 minutes through the enrolment process and began its search for a solution.

THE SOLUTION

Sue described her approach to the problem "I knew that if we could use new technology to speed up the enrolment process this would create a much improved first experience of the college for students. Several companies were approached to provide solutions to improve our processing time and efficiency."

Lynn Selwood, Business Systems Manager found a local supplier in First Choice Business Systems, a reseller of Formic Fusion data capture software.

"At the beginning I didn't know what was possible so discussion was very exploratory," Sue admitted. "I just knew that I wanted the enrolment process to be seamless to the student and to try and get to a point where this was not a manual process."

At enrolment, students were required to mark their exam results on a form pre-printed with the exam titles, grades and year taken. A visual check was performed to ensure that the completed form matched the student's results slip before the form was scanned and the data fed into the student records management system.

"The first assignment was to automate the verification of the qualifications on entry forms. The main difficulty of the incumbent system was the inability to read mixed batches. We needed a system that could.

First Choice worked with us to ensure that the solution was ready in a very short timescale and worked with exam boards to assist in the capture of existing qualifications. The system was implemented two months after our first meeting," Sue recalls.

"The primary benefit of the first stage is that the results checking process, which happens in front of the student, is removed", declares Sue.

In January 2008, Orpington College began using Formic Fusion software to scan enrolment forms and automatically capture the 8 screens of data that, until now, were manually keyed. The form will be used for enrolment of all 16-18 year old students from September 2008.

THE RESULT

"The measures taken to improve the experience for students through the enrolment process certainly meant that students were not inconvenienced or had to queue for long periods of time. What's more, staff were far less frazzled at the end of it. Most students passed quickly through enrolment and we achieved approximately 70% of our 30 minute target from our assessment of the level of queuing, pressure points and a straw poll taken on exit.

First Choice is a first class company, working hard to understand our needs and providing solutions to help solve our business requirements," says Sue.

NEXT STEPS

"I see other potential uses of Formic Fusion software in the college. We are already planning to use it for capturing information from invoices to improve the efficiency of our Finance department as well as handling expense claims," says Sue.