

Build it or buy it?

Building the business case for digitizing the campus.

Introduction

To be successful, academic institutions not only have to appeal to prospective students and be respected by employers, they also need to offer flexible learning options. As a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn, student numbers will rise as “people want more education because the alternatives – underemployment or unemployment – are worse and having more skills can protect you against the economic chill winds.”⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, establishments can no longer guarantee where students will be learning and, in some cases, need to deliver education remotely if students cannot travel.

Coupled with this, the changes made to higher ed and college funding continue to drive requirements for improvements, however, said improvements need to be delivered on a budget and prioritized against other projects. In response to the pandemic, there is likely to be a rebalance of projects as large capital programs shift to a focus on operational expenditure, such as investment in learning technology, to ensure that students are engaged and productive regardless of their physical location.

There is undoubtedly a need to invest in developing new and innovative approaches to meet the future needs of students, employers and society. Yet there is also limited government funding, and not all establishments are able to borrow more.

With domestic and international student numbers falling this academic year, donations on the decline, and domestic aid schemes reducing disproportionately, universities and colleges are being forced to evaluate other options. Big decisions have been made by the likes of Berkeley (scrapping plans to build a large new lecture theatre on campus) which will ricochet around the sector for semesters and years to come. Higher Ed will need to re-balance their strategies to maintain and grow their student numbers, including again appealing to lucrative international students, to fund increased investment.

Consequently, universities and colleges will need to closely address student engagement, inclusion, and satisfaction to enable them to attract the numbers required for survival and success in an increasingly competitive market.

Many institutions already understand that digitizing their campus via platforms such as myday delivers a flexible online or on campus working environment which improves student engagement. The platform enables establishments to deliver these both quickly and cost-effectively but often struggle to understand the full business case for outsourcing and due to this fail to successfully implement an in-house solution.

This white paper outlines the considerations for implementing your digital campus.

What are the main considerations when building the digital campus?

Not all education institutions are equal. Some have access to funding that others do not, some have small, but efficient IT departments that simply do not have the capacity for large development projects - others have substantial resources at their disposal.

Whatever the institution and its status, all must make a choice when digitizing their campus environments for students –

"Do we build it ourselves, or do we buy an existing solution?"

There are advantages and disadvantages to both. There is also a third consideration – a hybrid approach. Most companies opt for a mixture of both in-house and out-sourced strategies. Deciding what your IT team focus on requires attention within four key areas:

1. **Control** over the finished product
2. **Time** required and speed of deployment
3. **Resources and skills** required to define and deliver a future roadmap
4. **Costs** – immediate and ongoing

There are many points to note within each.



1. Control

Many senior leaders and project managers looking to implement their digital strategy will understand the need to be governed by appropriate controls and alerts. This is often thought easier to do by having all resources in-house.

"We want to develop it ourselves because then we have more 'control' over it."

There are many elements to creating a digital campus and many elements of a project of this size to control. For example, "How do you know the current status of your project? How is the current status of the project communicated to your organization's management team? When do you introduce change or corrective action into the project based on the project's current status? When do you decide to allow the project to continue "as is" with no changes being introduced?" (2)

Understanding what 'controls' or inputs you want, and need are vital to understand how many of the responsibilities you need to be accountable for and more importantly how much of the task you can delegate.

There are many dangers to building your student platform using your own resources alone and potentially has many lost hours to research and investigation. This requires full ownership of the roadmap to research, create and sustain.

Taking a hybrid approach enables you to optimize your IT resource. Outsourcing part or all of the project alleviates some of this pressure and allows staff to focus on their mission-critical tasks. Utilizing the myday platform means time can be allocated to customizing and building applications - with your own code. Time is then saved on initial research stages and timely ongoing maintenance. Change requests, changing priorities and keeping the platform relevant are all crucial to your institutions' success and resource to accommodate this may not be within your budgets.

Students use a vast range of tools – including their own devices and services – and how they use these tools matters. Students need a flexible environment that lets them experiment and learn from each other. A 2020 Pearson/Wonkhe survey on student expectations found that what universities most need to do to meet expectations for the new academic year, 59% chose "high quality online teaching." (3)

Students' expectations are increasing and expectations outside of the institution spill over into education, but regularly the vision or the ability of the institution to meet those expectations falls short. This is often due to a lack of strategy or a digital roadmap to follow. Ensuring you are ahead of the game helps meet those expectations sooner and continue to meet them going forward.

myday customers are thankful for the months of time saved on research as Collabco's knowledge has been gathered across many years and many education institutions, and sharing that knowledge makes the product market leading. The myday solution is praised for its high levels of security and ongoing new feature releases not being chargeable extras that you need factor into budget plans.

Having 'control' prevents learning from drawbacks. Implementing myday means you can control your future, be led by what is already possible ensuring a quick speed of deployment and easy wins with your students.



2. Hayes Munson, K. A. (2012). How do you know the status of your project?: Project monitoring and controlling. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2012—North America, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.

<https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/know-status-project-monitoring-controlling-5982>

3. <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2020/07/Pearson-Wonkhe-student-expectations-survey-published-version.pdf>

2. Time

Speed of deployment is significant when deciding on your approach. Lead time is a primary factor when implementing a digital campus and ensuring that your student platform development is aligned to your academic year is critical to its success.

Developing your solution in-house requires you to correctly estimate the length of the project and all that it entails, and people often underestimate the amount of time needed to implement projects, particularly when they are not familiar with all that it includes.

"Only 37% of teams in the U.K. reported completing projects on time"⁽⁴⁾

For instance, they may not consider unexpected events or urgent high priority work; and they may fail to allow for the full complexity of the job. This is likely to have serious negative consequences further down the line. Costly consequences.

When implementing myday, Collabco will assist on the project's integration scope and pre-requisites and review the timeframes and tasks for the implementation in detail. You can expect to go-live within six months if not sooner, our go-live plan is based on a three-month trajectory to getting your minimum viable product live. It can be done faster (and has been), and in some instances may take slightly longer based on the establishments' request, but six months is a 'best practice' guide regardless of the size of the university or college, the number of campuses or users. This means that you can expect to start seeing a return on your investment within the same financial year. Pleasing key stakeholders and members of the Senior Leadership Team.

By comparison, leading a project of this nature without previous learnings will take considerably longer. Two years to design, plan, research, roadmap, develop, test, soft launch, tweak and go-live isn't an overestimation and does not take account of any unexpected setbacks encountered along the way.

Ongoing time also needs should be factored into budget requirements if you choose to build your own solution. Maintenance and delivering the future roadmap must be consistently delivered.

Time is a commodity. If you are a small IT department with finite resources, then other projects that require your team's attention needs to be factored into your overall requirements and priorities. teams attention needs to be factored into your overall requirements and priorities.

4. <http://www.wellington.co.uk/the-state-project-management-survey-2017/>



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3. Resources and skills

An in-house team project would require most of the following skills (all on-going) to take a digital campus project through to completion (assuming an establishment of 5,000 students):

- A solutions architect
- Approximately four developers (front and back end)
- Server maintenance and support
- Server hardware or cloud capacity
- Server software licences
- Maintenance/amends/updates

One of the biggest costs is that of a solutions architect. Finding that particular skill for many education institutions is difficult and expensive - it is a premium skill, and it is very much required to put in place the all-important roadmap.

Importantly a project manager must also give the team time to develop. Academic institutions with infinite resources suffer the consequences of staff turnover less but still benefit heavily from deploying these skills to 'value-added' components rather than building the platform itself.

"The Project Manager must acquire suitable skills to firstly identify the skills required [and then] build the project team by motivating the team members by providing leadership and inspiration in order to achieve high performance in order to achieve the project's objectives."⁽⁵⁾

Collabco have built and transitioned many digital campus environments and understand where the opportunities and challenges lie. This saves customer's expensive consultancy advice at the outset of a project. Market knowledge is imparted without the in-house premium skills requirement or the associated costs.

Having a team of developers behind myday working continually on updates ensures the product delivers a premium level of functionality. The heavy development work has already been completed.

Even if you have the resources to deliver a project of this size from the ground up you have more to gain from re-deploying your resources to customizing your platform, adding content to your digital campus, and accelerating the benefits.

5. <http://2020projectmanagement.com/resources/role-of-project-managers/project-managers--developing-your-project-team>

4. Costs

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Control, time, and resources all have cost implications. Many of which have been suggested throughout this white paper.

Every educational institute is different and every set of requirements for each digital campus will be individual. The below table provides a broad summary in terms of the resources and hardware needed in considering the costs for each scenario.

BUILD IT COSTS

A solutions architect

Avg \$70 per hour

Pre-project consultancy (plan, design, research)

Approx. 300 hours

Server maintenance & support

Ongoing

Approx. 2 developers front end

Avg \$55 per hour

Approx. 2 developers back end

Avg \$70 per hour

Testing

Ongoing

Server hardware

Various

Server software licenses

Various

Support and enhancements

25% of 1 FTE

BUY IT COSTS

Pricing starts at \$2.75 per student depending on establishment**

Onboarding is a one-off implementation of starting at \$13,500 depending on the requirements of the project

**Average minimum pricing starts at \$20,000 per year.
Shortest contract term is 3 years.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

myday has:

- A large and continual growing team of product experts, developers, and testers
- Industry expertise with over 10 years of experience
- Regular updates, full maintenance, and 24-hour support
- Highest levels of security
- Highly scalable deployment with over 99.9% availability

Conclusion

Your decision on whether to 'build or buy' your student platform will come down to cost. Cost to build, affordability of the time taken from the initial investment made to the expected returns realised, and lastly, the ongoing maintenance expenses.

Infinite money and resources internally would enable a successful in-house implementation but would not seem prudent in today's cost-cutting environment. It would still prove difficult, slow and be unproven in its objectives.

Buying a solution from a provider such as Collabco ensures swift delivery of a platform that is experienced and proven to meet student and staff expectations. It's been created from customer feedback over many years and provides access to a researched roadmap and a diverse and highly skilled team.



Taking a hybrid approach with a bought solution that is configurable enables your developers to deliver the value added components meaning you meet student expectations faster and continue to deliver on them addressing some of the most pertinent questions included within the National Student Survey.

Deliver your institutions top priorities via a digital campus in a user friendly way.

**Learn more about myday at
www.myday.collabco.com**

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