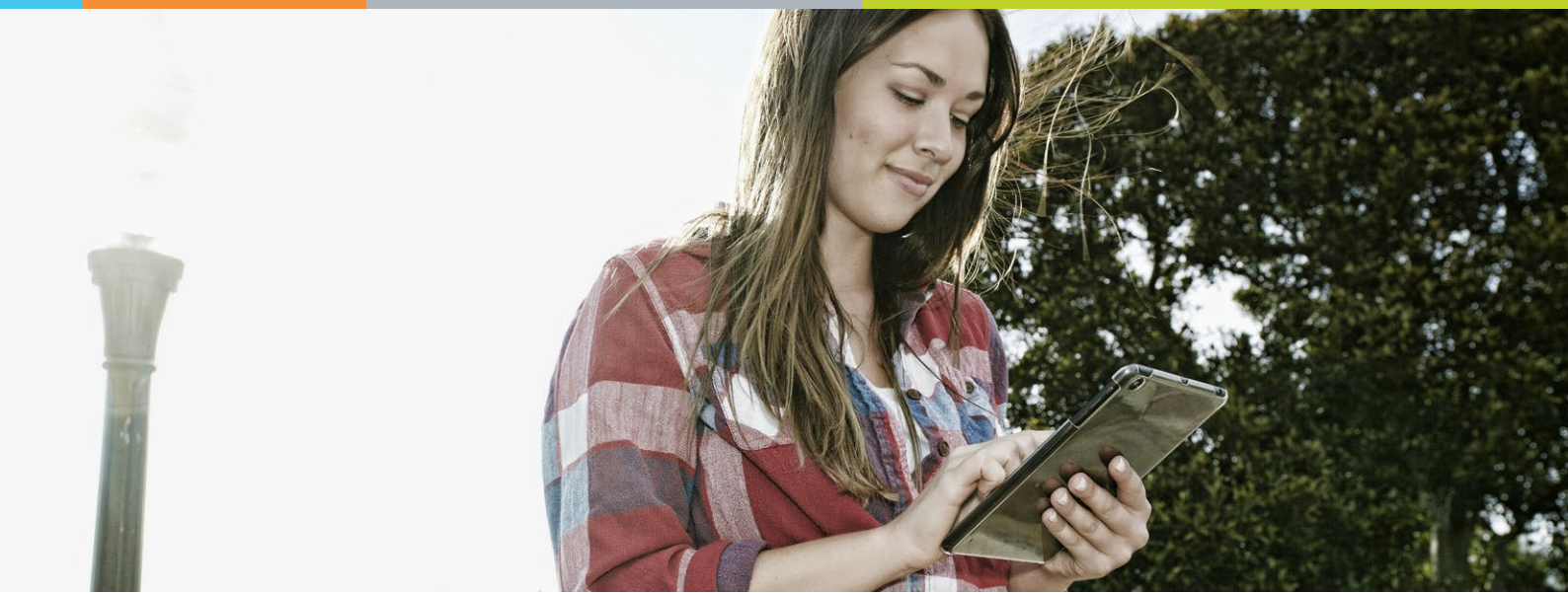# Technology to help Education Institutions grow

In light of the credit crunch and recent changes to the education funding model, many Universities and Further Education Institutions view growth as the best route to survival. In order to do this they need to be more competitive domestically, while also fending off increasing competition from global Institutions. For most, this means adopting a more commercial outlook, making service more attractive and developing a support structure for scaled expansion.

This piece does not contain an exhaustive list of technologies but a glimpse into some of the solutions that have a proven track-record in the commercial world and the propensity to be an even greater success in helping educational establishments manage and achieve growth objectives.

Business and Student Engagement (CRM)

Educational Institutions have many different customers (students, businesses, governments, even consumers), delivering many types of services (training, education, research, testing etc), often from completely separate locations and departments. Business and Student Engagement systems can increase the opportunity for growing a customer base by improving an Institutions services and helping it to better manage the complexity that comes with multiple relationships.

Student Engagement

With the introduction of tuition fees, students represent the largest revenue stream for Institutions. A reliable, efficient and seamless student experience needs to be offered to grow application numbers and revenue - Student Engagement systems can do just that. Modern students are digital natives and appreciate the familiarity of the on-line and mobile interaction delivered by Student Engagement, from course research, to application, to paying, to module management, to results, graduation and alumni. A two-way, modern exchange and delivery of information in one place, on their terms, when they need it, delivered via laptop, PC, phone or tablet is now expected. Students' lives will become easier and their academic studies enriched. This can rapidly improve the Institution's brand and in doing so boost course applications.
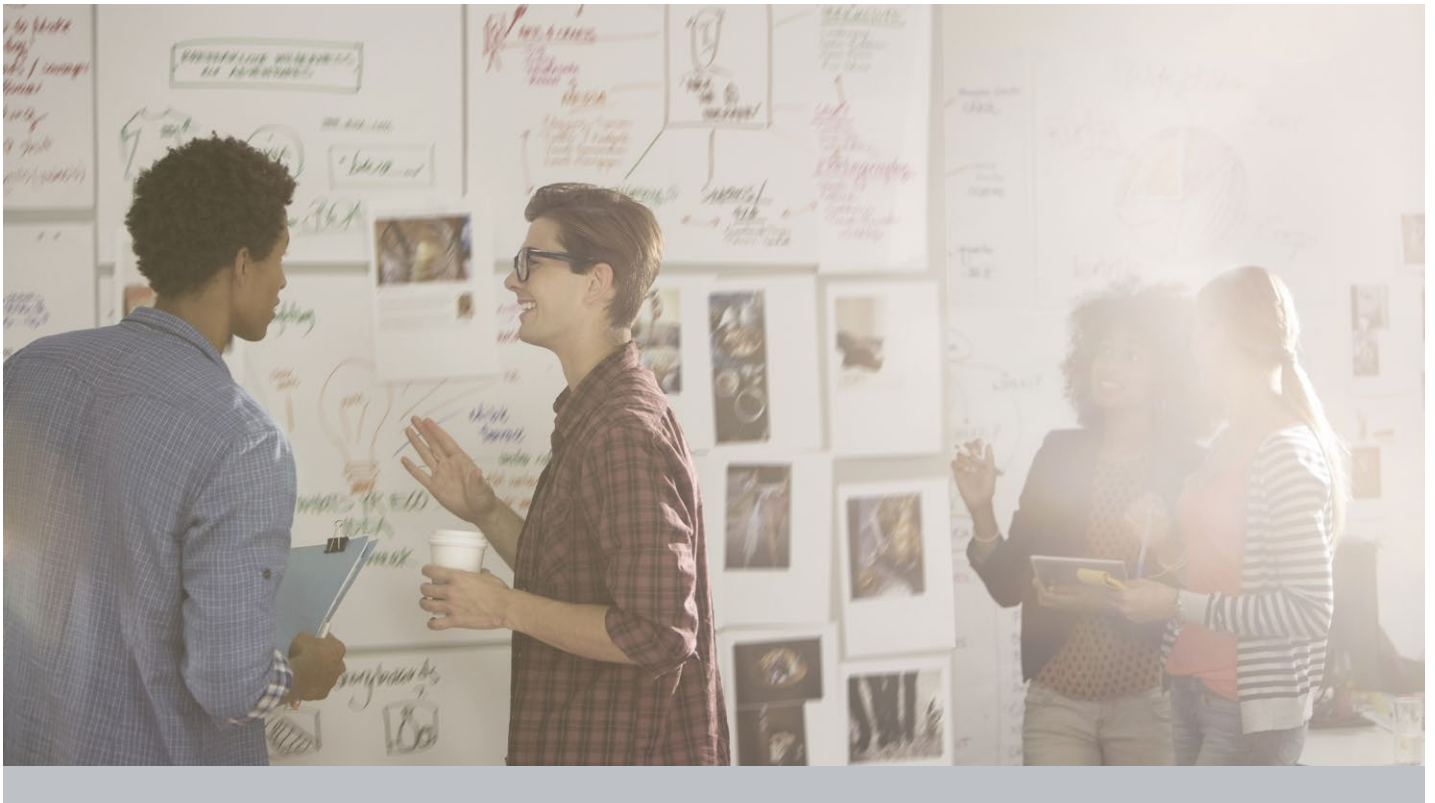
Business Engagement

Many Institutions are also looking to increase and diversify commercial, business and research activities. Managing business relationships can of course be complex. A large organization like BT for instance may take advantage of multiple services from the same educational establishment, which could involve different staff, in separate departments. Business Engagement can centralize these relationships to provide a single point of contact for a customer, build a pipeline of opportunities, track success over time and provide visibility on the success of projects.

Institutions need to be increasingly able to compete on the world stage for research opportunities. A Business Engagement system ensures an Institution is aware of the best opportunities; matching each prospective project to the most suitable academics and researchers.

Through best-practice, workflow technology creates a more consistent sales and marketing approach. Critically this is a fast-track means to change the culture of Institutions so that individuals begin to think more commercially – essential to competitive advantage and ultimately growth.

Human Resources (HR) and e-Recruitment solutions

Traditionally, Institutions considered staff a cost. Now, however, they are rightly viewed as their greatest asset. To compete on the global stage educational establishments must attract and retain the best academics to provide the best services, which draw in the best students and commercial customers, improving reputations and league table positions – this creates a virtuous circle as Institutions continue to attract the best staff, and even retain the best graduates as the next generation of prized academics.

Centrally managed e-Recruitment technology allows organizations to more easily access international talent 24 hours a day and manage the recruitment process more effectively. Aside from reducing costs, best practise recruitment immediately creates a positive experience for candidates, making the successful appointment of the skilled people you want more likely.

HR technology can positively contribute towards organizational expansion. Thousands of employees operating under strict regulations can create an administrative mountain for HR professionals. Through the use of employee self-service much of this administration can be removed from HR departments so that they can concentrate on more added value activities - the growth in the number of employees can be managed and planned, and existing talent can be nurtured and deployed in the appropriate role to deliver world class services.

Corporate financial solutions

The pace of sector change and the internal and external factors that impact performance are staggering. Finance Directors, department heads and other budget holders

need a clear picture of real time financial performance to navigate change and adapt finance and business strategy accordingly. Relying on spreadsheets to do this is not acceptable; errors, reporting inconsistencies and the sheer time it takes to extract information means that information may be out of date and inaccurate.

Enterprise-wide, consistent financial reporting and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can focus individuals on expansion and provide the instant visibility that budget holders need to make more informed decisions on growth strategy – where can finances be re-apportioned to foster growth? Which revenue streams are growing/ declining? What's the rate of growth? What does the new fee-based tuition model mean for my Institution?

For Institutions involved in competing for commercial research projects, specialist solutions allow project leaders and finance professionals the ability to calculate the full Economic Cost (fEC) of any given project. Achieving transparency of costs at an individual project level leads to the best chance of cost recovery, better financial control and improved stakeholder confidence.

Technology Platforms

Historically Institutions, and the departments within them, have operated in isolation, holding information in 'silos'. In the new education landscape this poses a significant risk. Day-by-day and exponentially, valuable data will create excess administration and become difficult to access – it becomes an obstacle to growth. Separate departments need to work as a team, to become greater than the sum of their parts.

Vice Chancellors, sales and marketing, HR, Finance Directors and academics need a seamless, real time flow of information between departments to forecast, plan, execute and analyse activities. Sector-specific Technology Platforms connect solutions (HR, Finance, Research, CRM etc) so that stakeholders can collaborate across relevant business processes. For instance, it is not just the sales and marketing team that are interested in the pipeline for research funding. The Finance Director can use this information to project revenue and budgets, the HR team to plan any necessary recruitment or training and the academic faculties to plan projects.

Happily, the Technology Platform need not mean purchasing a huge unwieldy solution three-quarters of which may not be used. Institutions can purchase and connect solutions which are relevant to them and their activities, whether it be managing academic research costs, growing student intake, or both.

Conclusion

Enterprise business technology has arguably been shunned by the educational establishment in the past, but now, more than ever before, it must play a crucial role in promoting growth through the provision of more attractive and well run services. Additionally, the same technologies must be deployed to bring together individuals, departments and even separate organizations so that growth can be scaled more effectively.

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