

HP helps NIE staff stay connected and informed



As part of the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), NIE is the sole teacher-training institute in Singapore. A world-class institute of higher learning renowned for its excellence in teacher education and educational research, NIE's vision of the future is to be an institute of distinction.



Providing information to thousands of teachers, staff and students spread out all over Singapore can be a daunting task. With different departments running their own intranets that often couldn't communicate with one another, the National Institute of Education (NIE) turned to HP to build a portal that will centralise staff communication as well as provide online services and applications. In building the US\$1.3 million staff portal, HP provided an end-to-end solution with its consulting and technical implementation, servers and related infrastructure services as well as its partnering with leading portal and content management application partners. NIE staff can now access a personalised portal, where they can find individualised information and services related to work.

Business challenges

With approximately 361 academic staff members, 5,374 full-time equivalent students and 300 administrative staff, NIE found itself in a situation where different departments were often using different software over individual intranets.

This often caused software conflicts as different departments could not communicate and share information efficiently, resulting in many manual processes. Users also had problems remembering passwords for up to 10 different applications and for security reasons, they were often prompted to change these.

The management realised that, to improve productivity and efficiency, they needed to create a standard across all departments that would help bring different departments and staff together. This would enhance communication and reduce costs through employee-centric, self-service processes. After doing a careful study of their user requirements, they determined that NIE needed to create a staff portal that would serve as a one-stop information source to enable staff to locate and access timely information.

The overall goal was to achieve a user-centric experience that would provide staff with fast, easy and secure access to corporate information, wherever they may be working.

NIE began by looking at the business improvements it hoped to achieve. Staff should be able to log into the portal from any location at any time, and be able to have access to the information that they need. NIE also wanted to enhance its e-services, bring departments closer and improve inter-department communication and cooperation.

It was also vital that access to critical systems and information, such as the e-learning modules, were never down. The system would also have to be scalable to any possible future needs for both hardware and software.

Having decided this, NIE began the tender process in January 2003. NIE was not only looking for a vendor who could meet its stringent requirements, but one who could partner with them for future projects.



How HP helped

Faced with a short time frame for the tender process, HP Services invited NIE to take a look at previous portal implementations it had developed recently. Together with software partner BEA, the original five-hour presentation stretched into eight hours of consultation and a lively exchange of ideas.

The HP team spent time finding out the requirements of the people who would be the ultimate users of the portal to understand what they hoped the portal would be able to do for them. HP's structured methodology helped them determine what would be the best way to achieve what NIE wanted to do while remaining firmly within NIE's budget. With this knowledge, they evaluated all possible alternatives including those from third-party vendors.

HP Services finally partnered with BEA Systems and Interwoven to provide the software support to build the portal for NIE. They also went the extra mile by obtaining the license for the software used by NIE at a more reasonable price.

Overall implementation took eight months to complete over two phases. HP was able to complete the first phase in a mere five months rather than the original implementation timeframe of seven months.

Having provided portal solutions for many clients in the shipping and manufacturing industries, HP was able to help NIE implement their staff portal quickly and efficiently. Shankar Sivaprakasam, e-Business Practice Principal of HP Services South East Asia said, "We planned for the porting of applications so that there would be no major disruptions to the workflow of the NIE staff. This employee portal will simplify applications and systems in NIE, and give staff timely access to information. This is an example of how HP is focused on helping our customers achieve an Adaptive Enterprise by reducing complexity in their organisation."

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- Associate Professor Philip Wong,
Divisional Director of the Academic Computing and
Information Services, NIE



The portal was officially launched to NIE staff on 6 Feb 2004, and has now become a single channel of communication and a personal desktop to all NIE staff. It allows NIE staff access to information related to work, social and personal matters, as well as news and events. They can even track the whereabouts of colleagues through the staff movement tracking system in the portal and create their own personal photo albums and web pages.

Associate Professor Philip Wong, Divisional Director of the Academic Computing and Information Services, was very pleased with the results. “We see this portal as a major tool in communicating and providing e-services to all our users no matter where they are. Even when they travel overseas they can still get access to whatever information or communication they need from this one-stop information hub.”

Many of the staff found it so useful that it is the first thing they log into at the start of each working day. It has also made the assimilation of new staff from overseas easier as they can be given access to the portal and make use of the information there to familiarise themselves with NIE and the campus.

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Over the long term, NIE hopes that this portal will grow to fully become an Enterprise Knowledge Portal – one that will eventually manage NIE’s collective intellect and turn knowledge into useful assets.

Value delivered

While the real value of the project can only be realised at a future date since it has been less than a year since the portal was introduced, Associate Professor Wong said that most of the gains have so far been intangible but definitely heartfelt.

“We can’t really measure the full benefits of the portal so far since not all applications have been ported over. We are still in the midst of doing so in order to reduce disruptions and major stoppages,” Associate Professor Wong said. So far, the main measurement that NIE has been doing was to track the number of people logging into the portal each day.

Associate Professor Wong then went on to say, “But while we may not be able to fully judge the success of the portal, I can say that feedback so far has been positive and extremely promising. Many of those using the portal have told us that they have now made it the first thing that they log into when they start work.”

Industry

Education

Hardware

Unix and NT servers

Software

BEA Systems, Interwoven

Challenges

- To create a portal that would bring together disparate hardware and software used by different departments and allow them to share information and communicate effectively.
- To improve e-services and allow access anytime, anywhere.

Solutions

- HP Services used BEA Systems and Interwoven platforms to build the staff portal together with its web content management solution. NIE staff can use this portal to personalise and access their work/social/personal related portlets (applications) for their day-to-day needs in NIE.

Benefits

- The portal provides NIE staff access to information related to work, social and personal matters, as well as news and events.
- NIE staff can track the whereabouts of colleagues through the staff movement tracking system in the portal and create their own personal photo albums and web pages.