

Oregon State University's Digital Platform Strategy

To enable world-class content distribution solutions

Overview

Please note that digital technology is rapidly changing, along with the language to describe it. The intent of this report is to provide a durable strategy to address current needs (such as mobile platforms, web applications and content management) and to respond to emerging needs and opportunities, as yet barely imagined.

Oregon State University possesses all of the ingredients to be an international leader in digital communications for higher education. Our renowned Open Source Lab hosts a cluster for Drupal.org's websites, the world's most popular open source content management system. We deploy both Wordpress (a blogging system) and Drupal (a content management system) on a scale found at few institutions. Our faculty share massive science databases with colleagues around the world. Our staff includes some of the most talented programmers and web developers in the state. And our students are engaged with world-class online tools for learning. We should be recognized as a center for excellence when it comes to digital communications for higher education.

But we're not.

OSU community members are increasingly accessing digital content using a variety of uncoordinated platforms. Attempts to upgrade systems to support new mobile platforms, for example, are quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of non-standard, custom approaches developed individually over time. This digital Wild West has certainly resulted in the creation of innovative solutions, but these solutions are isolated and unavailable to others in the community. The power of an open-source, collaborative ecosystem is lost without a connected community network.

The digital communications needs at OSU have profoundly outgrown the capacity for a central service to create custom solutions. Instead, units have sought individual solutions, with uneven and unsustainable results. We've created a digital landscape of disconnected islands, making collaboration difficult and brand identity confusing.

To address these and other challenges contained in the December 2014 audit report, "Assessment of Campus Needs," we outline an overall campus-wide strategy for digital communications and web-based technology that provides focus and alignment for a community of users.

Vision Statement

Oregon State University is recognized as a leader in digital communications for higher education. We provide a full range of services where users easily engage with

learning, research, and outreach, and where they can access creative solutions for collaboration across the university and the world.

Target Audiences: who they are; what they need; and what's happening now

Internal

Developers

- They are OSU's engine for innovative web-based solutions; they represent a wide range of skill levels, from basic to high-level web programmers.
- They need flexible, extensible platforms along with guidelines, handbooks, templates, technology decisions and best practices to guide their work in the web communications space; and they need coordination in order to collaborate and share solutions with colleagues.
- They reside in units across campus and centrally in IS; many identify as a Drupal community.

Content Producers

- They are OSU's strategic communicators, at the front line in delivering university information, engaging participation, supporting students, and creating the first impression for many online visitors including potential new students..
- They need a seamless, full-range, painless suite of content publishing tools.
- They reside in units across campus and centrally in URM; several have recently created a community for OSU content producers and meet quarterly.

Current Students

- They are a diverse group of undergrads, grad students, campus-based, online, part- or full-time students who depend on OSU's online services for their academic success. Online students depend on digital communications technology for their entire relationship with OSU
- They need access to learning tools, advising, tracking academic progress, and a sense of participation in the OSU experience that increase their chances of meeting OSU's retention and success goals.
- The current landscape provides an uneven, disconnected experience as they move from academic sites to enterprise tools in terms of branding, mobile accessibility and user experience

Staff and Faculty

- They are the corps who delivers OSU's land-grant mission of research, teaching, and Extension. They are researchers, teachers, Extension faculty, grant recipients, national program leaders, and the staff that support their work.
- They need to get their work done efficiently. Many research faculty need to collaborate with external communities (universities, researchers, etc) to share extremely large science databases. Teaching and Extension faculty need to provide learners with access to educational material and engage participation. Staff need to know what tools are available to support research and teaching and how to use those tools effectively.

- They are entrepreneurial, and will (and have) directed the creation of online solutions to fit their individual needs, identities, and grant requirements. Many of these solutions currently reside in an unregulated, largely inaccessible frontier, but they could be the source of much progress and innovation if they could be coordinated university-wide.

University Administration

- They are the leadership that oversees OSU's operations and budgets toward the university's strategic goals.
- They need to see a relationship between effective, coordinated digital communications and excellence in teaching, research, and engagement.
- They have recognized technology as a strategic asset and an essential part of institutional and administrative function (*from pg 15 OSU Strategic Plan*)

External

Alumni and Donors

- They identify collectively with OSU and/or individually with specific departments
- They need to re-engage with the university as participants, ambassadors, or as donors
- The uneven user experience across OSU's web presence can be a missed opportunity to build a deeper connection to the overall institution. Barriers to a seamless user experience can prevent engagement and participation.

Prospective Students and Parents

- They are the people we hope to engage as participants in the future
- They need to feel enthusiastic, confident, and safe in their choice of OSU and seamlessly enter the recruiting funnel
- The current suite of recruiting tools and tactics requires solutions that are only partially met by the currently deployed central web architecture.

General Public

- They are the people we want to engage as supporters: legislators, reporters, community members, K-12 teachers, potential partners, business and industry, international community, etc
- They need to easily find what they are looking for and have a positive experience engaging with OSU. They need to recognize OSU as a credible source of expert information and a reliable partner for solving problems.
- OSU creates many opportunities for engaging the public, with varying degrees of success despite the high quality of the efforts. There is an admirable effort to strengthen the integrity of the OSU brand using shared templates and digital content.

Long-term strategic objectives

- *Create User Delight*: digital interactions should be simple, effective, and add unexpected value to each user's experience.

- *Be accessible to all users*: OSU's digital space should be an inclusive community, with attention to the accessibility standards (such as WAI-ARIA and WCAG 2.0) and ADA compliance.
- *Create future-facing solutions*: Increase OSU's reach and design for device agnosticism: desktop, mobile, wearable, tablet, etc. Create a communication highway rather than a source of information. Data should be pulled from the authoritative sources and presented on multiple digital platforms and formats.
- *Engage the internal audience community*: Develop and seek input from OSU's digital developers and communicators. Empower internal audiences by providing a complete range of support, from self- to full-service options that assist them in achieving their communications and teaching goals. The cost, level of support, and level of customization allowed by each tier will vary. (See Appendix 2)
- *Foster a culture of continuous improvement*: Regularly address fundamental needs for sustainable growth; explore emerging technologies; improve the reliability of network infrastructure throughout the service layers.
- *Enhance OSU's reputation for excellence*: OSU's digital presence should advance the reputation of OSU and build an affinity for the institution. OSU's digital content should support excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and collaboration; it be visible worldwide.

Short-term goals/strategies/tactics/actions/stuff to do - immediately or within 2 years

To create User Delight:

- Fix search
 - Improve findability, visibility, effectiveness
 - Increase Search Engine Optimization
 - Consider search appliances or services
- Streamline deployments, updates and migrations to eliminate disruptions to content producers / owners while adding value to end users.

To create future-facing solutions:

- Deploy the right content management/self-service model in the right way.
 - Look beyond the current problems with *implementation* to find resilient solutions in the *platform*, if they exist.
- Leverage services and infrastructure provided by 3rd party vendors.
 - This allows our OSU developers to focus on custom code development needed to help achieve the SP 3.0 goals.
 - Engage the full community of developers and content producers to create the right agile and dynamic teams to address long-term and short-term goals.
- Create a comprehensive mobile strategy that will evolve over time and include:
 - Mobile-First - All web based development is with mobile access in mind first

- Web Before Apps - Where possible, mobile development should be web based and specific application creation should only be used when necessary from a device or use case perspective.
- Enterprise Services - Our enterprise services should be accessible via a transactional interface into ERP and other systems of record

To engage the internal audience community:

- Build/create/sustain a web content creator/developer community
 - Improve internal communications and customer service
- Proactively identify, orient and educate a network of representatives from every major unit
- Assemble menu of services/resources for our audiences; assess and fill gaps; publish for users
- Create a robust suite of training options to empower site builders, share best practices, and develop their skills
- Optimize content management/self-service model
- Develop a sustainable full-service support model

To foster a culture of continuous improvement

- Establish and charge a steering committee with strategy oversight/implementation.
 - Create a governance structure to maintain a strategic direction and to perform annual reviews and updates of the strategy (see Appendix 3)
- Develop a structure to regularly assess the extent that evolving needs of users are being met; continually push for optimal performance while seeking input from stakeholders and audiences.
- Conduct a campuswide audit of redundant digital services in colleges and units and build toward collaborative efforts and economies of scale
- Draft a resilient strategic direction for long-term goals, supported by a separate document with specific tactics and actions and recommendations to meet short-term goals for the next two years. The action plans should include project timelines, staffing requirements, and intended outcomes.

To enhance OSU's reputation for excellence:

- Provide platform-agnostic branding tools for content creators
 - Consistent, appropriate and licensed branding should be used in all mobile/web applications and should be updated regularly to reflect current standards

Resource needs

The OSU Strategic Plan 3.0 states that “we will invest in information technology to enable educational innovation while enhancing a collaborative and engaged learning environment.” *[[from OSU SP 3.0. pg 15]]*. Part of the investment in a more effective digital strategy could be made through increased collaborations and shared

responsibilities across campus. Not every investment needs to be in the form of a new hire, although some new hires will be necessary.

- *Raise the expectation that colleges and programs will build capacity within their ranks* to effectively use digital communication technologies that are appropriate to their needs. This will free our most creative developers to focus on truly innovative tools for collaboration, rather than fixing an endless stream of individual problems on unrelated platforms.
- *Consider cost recovery* for custom support and solutions, using an intake process to deliberate what projects are within the scope of web support. Develop a spectrum of tools and modules available for a range of uses, and provide consultation to help users choose solutions they can use and maintain themselves.
- *Leverage the talent that currently exists.* Encourage and reward collaboration among the university's high-end developers.
- *Enlist existing user groups on campus* (developers and content producers, for example) to identify gaps in service and suggest opportunities to fill those gaps.
- *Create a university-wide governance model and empower a steering committee* to advocate for university-wide support for an effective, collaborative network of digital communications and technology.
- *Develop with a "device-agnostic" approach* to mitigate ongoing costs associated with the creation and maintenance of dedicated applications on multiple platforms. By focusing on a device-agnostic solution, OSU will offer interactions that reach the broadest possible audience while remaining focused on usability.

Appendices

1. SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
2. Digital Service Offerings: Flexibility, Cost, and Support
3. Governance/Steering Committee Structure and Function