

CASE STUDY



Smooth Conversion to Online Records

Idaho Virtual Academy Tames Paper Tiger with EZContentManager

At Idaho's largest public charter school, kids and teachers are often hundreds of miles apart. That's because the school is virtual. Students study at home, connecting with teachers online, over the phone, and at regular get-togethers.

Idaho Virtual Academy (IDVA) started six years ago with 500 students; it's now grown to 2,526 students, 63 teachers, and 12 administrators.

Despite the fact that the teaching happens online, the record-keeping did not --- until recently. That change was prompted by the need to buy another filing cabinet.

"These filing cabinets are five feet tall, three feet wide, they're fireproof, and they cost about \$10,000 each," says Kerri Pickett-Hoffman, IDVA's Academic Services Director. The school already had five cabinets, and no space for another.

Cost was another issue. Whenever a new student arrives, the school must request a cumulative file of their entire records. And whenever a student leaves, IDVA must copy the entire record for itself, then ship out the file to the new school: a time-consuming chore that can easily take 10 minutes a file.

"Sometimes these records are two inches thick, so it's a problem to have that much paper to copy and ship," says Pickett-Hoffman.

But the main issue was that IDVA's teachers needed better access to student records to help make timely and effective decisions on their students' education. Since teachers are legally responsible for maintaining student records, and the school is responsible for keeping them in one place, teachers often had to fax or mail updates to the school headquarters in Boise.

"After an incident where a teacher needed a student's file to make a decision and couldn't get it, we realized we needed to get that information into teachers' hands more quickly," says Pickett-Hoffman. "So space was one issue, cost was another, and the teacher's lack of access to records was another."

...teachers can now access any student's record over the web from anywhere, any time.

Checklist shows ACOM twice as easy to use

The school sent out an RFP for a paperless records system in January 2007. Naturally enough, officials wanted to do business locally, if they could find an Idaho-based company.

But when Pickett-Hoffman reviewed the bids, the EZContentManager (EZCM) system from ACOM came out on top. For example, on the checklist of features the school needed, ACOM scored "easy" or "very easy" on 16 tasks; twice as many as the competing system. So IDVA decided to go with California-based ACOM.

"What attracted us was the interface, and how it was naturally intuitive," says IDVA Technology Manager Chase Trapp. In fact, he compares EZCM to Windows XP, which his staff and teachers already know --- while the competing system reminded him of Windows 3.1, a hangover from the 1980s.

"EZCM didn't try to re-invent the wheel. It just took the best parts of the interface we were already familiar with and incorporated them," he says.



IDAHO
VIRTUAL ACADEMYSM

THE CUSTOMER

Idaho Virtual Academy, a public charter school whose 63 teachers and 2,526 students are located all over the state.

THE PROBLEM

The virtual school needed to make student records more accessible to far-flung teachers in a more timely way.

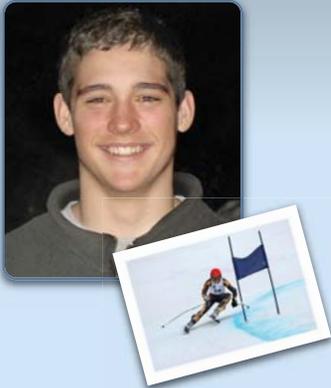
THE SOLUTION

EZContentManager document management system from ACOM, which replaces paper files with a secure, web-based repository for instant access to information through a familiar browser-based interface.

THE RESULTS

No more photocopying, faxing, and shipping thick paper files around the state. All files converted to easy-to-share electronic format. And no more need for costly fireproof filing cabinets and the space to house them.

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Idaho Virtual Academy provides public school education to students such as competitive skier Scott Snow. This means he can pursue his athletic goals while he studies at home, with help from his teacher and his parents.

In fact, one of the first teachers to learn the program didn't need any help. "I set her up and was busy at the time, so I said 'Go poke around, and then I'll walk you through it,'" recalls Trapp. "Later that afternoon, she e-mailed to say she didn't need my help. Without any formal training, she figured out the interface, was able to use it, and then went on and started training other staff."

"I learned more in one hour of EZCM training than I got out of all these phone calls and personal visits from the competition,"

Administration is faster and lighter

With EZCM, paper files are scanned and converted to PDF files. And teachers can now access any student's record over the web from anywhere, any time.

If a student leaves, IDVA simply burns a CD and mails it out: a far cry from photocopying and mailing

a two-inch stack of papers. IDVA is creating a tutorial for the CDs, so that anyone who receives one will know how to pop in the disc and quickly open the files they need.

"Some of the secretaries receiving a CD have been working with paper files for 40 years. All of a sudden, they will get a CD. That's another reason that we chose EZCM, because we could imagine a traditional secretary actually using it," says Pickett-Hoffman.

As someone well-familiar with online learning, she was impressed by the clarity of the online tutorials from ACOM.

"I learned more in one hour of EZCM training than I got out of all these phone calls and personal visits from the competition," she says. "I think that if you are going with electronic records, you'd better be open to virtual training. We got service and training that met and exceeded our expectations, and it all happened online."

The school's Boise office recently moved to another location, and Pickett-Hoffman says they didn't even take those five giant filing cabinets with them.

"We are all electronic now," she smiles, "thanks to ACOM."

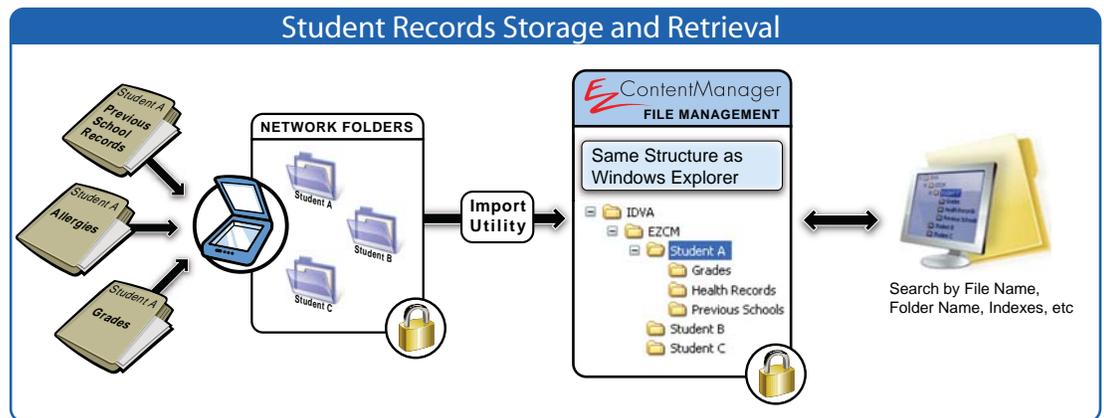


Listen to:

Her thoughts on the EZCM solution and their experience with ACOM's tutorial and training

Kerri Hoffman, M.S. Ed.

Director of Academic Services
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EZContentManager is a document management system that makes student information available to dispersed employees through a secure, familiar, browser-based interface. Teachers and staff from Idaho Virtual Academy can now access and update the information they need anywhere, anytime.



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