



CASE STUDY



GRINNELL COLLEGE

Product

Xythos Drive

Why Xythos?

- Easy to use
- Offline access to content
- Ability to work in native applications
- Seamless integration with Blackboard Learning System

Benefits

Users can easily manage and store files in the Blackboard Content System using familiar desktop applications.

Leveraging existing infrastructure for better collaboration

Grinnell College is a private liberal arts college in Grinnell, Iowa. Founded in 1846, it is ranked eleventh of the top liberal arts colleges in the nation by US News & World Report, and received the “Best All-Around” college rating from Newsweek magazine in 2004.

Challenge: Maximize CMS adoption and utility

As existing users of the Blackboard Learning System, Grinnell already enjoyed the benefits of an easy-to-use and robust course management tool. The Blackboard Content System is an integral component of the Blackboard Academic Suite intended to provide advanced features to assist educators in creating, modifying and sharing content. The Content System appears as an integrated web application accessible through a web browser just like other applications in the Suite.

While Grinnell faculty were able to improve how they managed course materials using the Content System the IT team wanted to expand its use so that it would become the true repository of record for the school’s course content. This would require a more natural connection between faculty desktops and notebooks than a web-only solution could provide. Ideally, content created in desktop authoring tools would need to be saved directly within the Content System regardless of the type of application being used.

Most content development and editing took place in desktop applications from Adobe, Microsoft and others. “We tried to get faculty and students to use the embedded Blackboard Content System, which runs on Xythos server technology,” said Wayne Twitchell, Applications Integrator/Developer at Grinnell. “Users could drag and drop files from some applications, but not all and we didn’t want to limit their choices. Instead we wanted to encourage the use of new media, however instructors wanted to create it. Being able to save files from desktop design and authoring tools directly within the Content System would be the easiest way to promote expanded use.”



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Wayne Twitchell

*Applications Integrator / Developer
Grinnell College*

As a result, Blackboard representatives referred Twitchell to Xythos Software to determine if there was an easier way for Grinnell’s faculty to manage and store files in the Content System, ideally using already familiar methods. For several years, Xythos had been offering its customers a Xythos Drive intended to act as a desktop access point to its own ECM products. The Xythos Drive even provided offline access to content for mobile users, but it had never been tested with Blackboard’s products.

The Xythos Drive is designed to create mapped drives on user’s desktop that connects to content stored within the Xythos system. Using HTTP and WebDAV protocols it allows them to easily access files stored in Xythos from common desktop applications as well as manage those files from their desktop. For example, a file can be opened from Microsoft Word or Adobe Dreamweaver, edited and saved back to a remote Xythos system by simply using standard file “open” and “save” commands.

“This solved our problem of files languishing on desktops rather than being stored in the content management system where they belong,” said Twitchell. “What’s even better is that the Xythos Drive provides offline access to files in the Content System. That means our faculty, staff and students can continue working in familiar applications wherever they happen to be and still save to the Content System. When they are back online, they simply synchronize their systems. It’s the best of both worlds,” he remarked.

Xythos Drive pilot program

Twitchell and his team wanted to make sure that the key benefits Xythos Drive provided to Xythos system users would work just as well in the Blackboard environment. They decided to run a pilot program in October 2007 and recruited participants from around the campus to help test their new Xythos Drive / Content System combination. To gain access, users just had to register for the pilot through the Grinnell LMS portal where they could access the content management system environment and download Xythos Drive.

Once users had installed Xythos Drive on their computers they could easily select content stored in the Blackboard Content System and begin editing it in its native application with a single mouse click. “It’s so easy to use that we decided to provide limited user training,” Twitchell said. “Feedback about this solution has been positive because they can get any type of document in and out of the content system without downloading it to their desktop and then uploading it when they’ve finished. It really saves us a lot of time and hassles.” For Content System customers with hundreds or thousands of course folders, having the desktop application remember where to replace updated files with the help of Xythos Drive can be a real productivity boost.

Future plans

Grinnell expects to introduce the combined Blackboard Content System / Xythos Drive application to the entire campus for the Fall 2008 semester. They also plan on providing access to the Content System to the entire campus through the FireFox browser and look forward to becoming beta testers of the upcoming Xythos Drive for MAC. “One student remarked, ‘this is the way we should be going’. I couldn’t agree more,” declared Twitchell.

**For more information please call 1.888.4XYTHOS
or visit www.xythos.com**

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