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The National Association of College and University Business Officers

NACUBO offers members unparalleled opportunities to learn the business of higher education with Community Brands

The National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) specifically acts on behalf of chief business and financial officers through advocacy efforts, community service, and professional development activities. The association's mission is to advance the economic viability and business practices of higher education institutions in fulfillment of their academic missions.

And, just like the colleges and universities it serves, NACUBO is facing a new model of success that requires nimble, knowledgeable teams and resources. It's with this requirement in mind that the association set out to find a more flexible, cost-effective, and convenient approach to providing members with professional development opportunities.

NACUBO is a membership organization representing more than 2,500 colleges, universities, and higher education service providers around the globe.

Challenge

Even extraordinarily stable institutions like colleges and universities were not immune to the impacts of the recent recession. When budget cuts became necessary, travel expenses were an obvious target. This lack of travel resources within the higher education sector impacted the attendance rate of NACUBO's workshops and conferences.

Solutions

Freestone® Learning Management System

Solution

The association developed a distance learning program and upgraded to Community Brands' learning management system, Freestone®, which conveniently integrated with the association's AMS, Community Brands' NetForum Enterprise™.

Benefits

NACUBO is now able to offer its members a variety of resources and virtual methods to access professional development, saving them travel expenses and providing them with convenient learning opportunities.

Finding the Right LMS

"For NACUBO, the most important factor in considering a learning management system or any other external tool, for that matter, is the integration with our AMS – NetForum. Single sign-on is king," explained NACUBO's Director of Online Learning, Tadu Yimam. "We're a longstanding client of (Community Brands') NetForum Enterprise. The software is easy to use, offers a variety of customizations, and allows us to pull specific data to help better understand our membership and their needs."

When shopping for a new LMS the association looked at more than 15 products that offered a variety of features. "The functionality on both the audience and administrator side of Freestone, coupled with the fact that it integrates with NetForum, made it a no-brainer for us," she said.

"Throughout the entire transition, we found our members were immediately receptive to the idea of online education," continued Yimam. "Most of them were familiar with the concept since their own campuses had adopted online courses and curriculum. And, the idea of cutting costs is always appealing to finance and business officers."

Benefits of Your LMS Playing Well with Your AMS

"By using both systems together – NetForum and Freestone – our customers enjoy a very user-friendly experience. NACUBO members use their normal NetForum 'My NACUBO' log-in to register and attend Freestone programs. Staff can easily track who has attended what program, credits earned, and time spent in the programs. All of these data points are critical to determining whether or not a program is a success," explained Yimam.

"In addition, NetForum is a significant investment – so it's critical that with single sign-on, we have access to more information about our programs and membership. Who registered? Who continues to register? Who doesn't register? With all this data, NACUBO is in a better lane to make decisions that drive our online education program," Yimam continued. "Data helps us develop targeted marketing strategies, create new online content and new workshop content, and improve overall member engagement.

"Separately, our staff has commented that Freestone's functionality is incredibly easy to navigate. Staff members appreciate the ability to more quickly uncover valuable data, and are also pleased with the variety of options to better meet their topic needs. For example," explained Yimam, "some sessions don't require polling or check points, and other sessions may not have slides. All of these options are easily worked into a program with a few simple clicks."

Addressing Widely Varying Needs

Because each institution it serves is different and has a unique set of demands, it was important for the association to offer a variety of resources and methods to access professional development. So, one learning tool may work very well for one institution, but not at all for another.

"For example," Yimam said, "a live, real-time session may work for a large institution with an ample business office. Staff members can watch sessions individually, earn credits, and meet to discuss different points covered in a session. Whereas, staff members at a smaller institution, in which individuals are wearing many hats, may not have time to watch the real-time session. In this case, the on-demand or recorded version is better, because it allows them to watch at a time most convenient for them."

Freestone Gives the Freedom to Educate

NACUBO has managed to retain 98 percent of its membership for most of its existence – 50-plus years. Members clearly appreciate the work the association performs on their behalf. By moving into the online space, NACUBO is meeting members' needs on many different levels, evidenced by the fact that it's seeing an increase in registrations for online programs since bringing Freestone onboard.

"The biggest challenge we have," said Yimam, "is managing expectations. Our staff and members have seen almost all aspects of Freestone's platform – and now they want it all the time! It's a good problem to have. We're now working to build a content calendar that inventories all our communication channels so that topics and sessions are released with a manageable frequency.

"Working with Freestone has provided NACUBO with freedom," she concluded. "Consider any hurdles you've had to clear in the past with integration between an AMS and LMS; any technology issues you've had with dropped signals, etc. Now, imagine a life without those problems. Once the reality of working with a user-friendly platform like Freestone sets in, educators can really focus on the content and learning path of their audience. They're free from technology constraints, free from limited tools, and ultimately, free from organizational stress."

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