

THE NISOD PAPERS



An occasional publication dedicated to topics of interest to community and technical college educators.

Providing 24/7 Service for Students and Employees

Introduction

Every department in a community college has the responsibility to provide customer service that contributes to student success. Some may ask, “How does IT contribute to student success?” What these people fail to realize is that technology drives much of what instructors do in their classrooms. IT departments understand that students’ means of learning information and staying connected with each other and their teacher are largely dependent on technology. Consequently, having technology support available 24/7 to provide some level of service is an issue many community colleges face.

Unfortunately, most community colleges do not have 24/7 technical support due to costs, union and other labor rules, or a lack of the resources needed to provide after-hours support. Customer service often becomes unavailable once college campuses are closed for the day. Students who work full-time and have busy schedules do not always receive the technical support they need when they most need it. These non-traditional students (i.e. working adults) often complete homework after campus offices are closed. Even prospective students may not have time except after regular business hours or on weekends to apply to or register at the college. The lack of after-hours technical support was a concern of the IT department at Harper College, which prompted the department to find a solution.

Harper College’s IT department collected and analyzed data to determine how to best serve students 24/7. The data indicated that there was clearly a need for after-hours support at Harper College, but cost-related restrictions prevented us from pursuing certain solutions. The data also indicated that most of the after-hours calls were issues that current or prospective students could resolve with little-to-no help from our staff. The one idea that took hold, and was not going to be a cost hindrance, was to create short, simple-to-follow, customer service help videos. Many of us have searched for similar “How-To” videos on Google or YouTube. Today’s students are part of the technology age and are often familiar and comfortable with this type of assistance. Harper College’s IT department decided that “How-To” videos would be a quick and relatively simple way to help students and employees on a 24/7 basis.

24/7 Assistance Is Needed

Students, prospective students, and even faculty and staff want efficient ways to find answers to their questions or resolve technical issues outside of regular business operating hours. Most people have heard the saying, “The customer is always right.” We took that concept a step further by saying, “The customer is always right now!” It is important to remember that students have choices about where they go to college. If they are unhappy with the service they receive at one college, they may go to another college, one that provides answers and services that meet their needs when and how they need it.

How We Gave Students 24/7 Assistance

In order to implement the “How-To” customer service help videos, we needed to determine the most frequent topic students and employees were calling about during after-hours. Therefore, the Harper College service desk analyzed after-hours emails and voicemail messages to identify the majority of requests and issues presented while campus was closed. During the study to identify topics for the “How-To” videos, all students and employees were able to send an email and leave a voice message for the service desk after regular operating hours. Tickets were then created and marked as being received after regular operating hours, and either resolved by the service desk or sent to upper-level support groups. Reports were generated, which helped the service desk determine the top five issues for the “How-To” videos.

Harper College’s IT department also needed to determine which type of software was available to assist in recording the “How-To” videos and if any specific hardware would be required to produce the videos. The team decided to use Camtasia, a video-recording software already available at Harper College.

The next step was to discuss the top five issues and create the audio and video scripts needed to produce the videos. The videos were recorded, edited by a staff member, and uploaded to YouTube, which provided closed captioning. Links to the videos were posted to Harper College Tech Support Quick Tips web pages and on the Harper College Employee Portal. Below are examples of the video topics selected:

Quick Tips for Students

- Sign Into MyHarper Portal
- How to Log Into Blackboard
- Searching for Courses
- Registering for Courses
- Getting On a Course Waitlist

- Payment Options - Pay In Full Online
- Payment Options - Setting Up a Payment Plan
- Payment Options - Third Party Vouchers/Other Tuition Reductions
- How to Add/Update Personal Email Address
- How to Order Official Transcripts Without a Login
- Harper College Degree Works – How to Run a Degree Evaluation
- Course Selection Resources
- What Is Financial Aid?

Quick Tips for Employees

- How to Ungroup Outlook Inbox By Date
- How to Send an Email as an Attachment In Outlook
- How to Create a Group Contact List In Outlook
- How to Share Your Calendar In Outlook
- Creating Signatures In Outlook
- How to Schedule a WebEx Meeting
- How to Host a WebEx Meeting
- How to Join a WebEx Meeting

Results of the Process

The videos were featured in the monthly student newsletter and the weekly employee newsletter. The feedback about the videos was excellent, so much so that other Harper College departments began reaching out to the IT department to have videos recorded for their areas. IT has collaborated with several departments to create useful “How-To” and help videos. Registration, Financial Aid, Student One-Stop Center, and the Business Office are just a few of the high-profile offices that now have videos on their web pages for students.

Providing directions and help for students and employees on a 24/7 platform has been a major success. Emails and voicemails received outside of regular operating hours decreased by 60 percent, and positive responses in the customer service monthly report increased by 12 percent.

Customer Service Is Important

During and after the implementation of the videos, IT determined a few things. Customer service should be a key focus for community colleges. When students and employees feel that the videos were created with their needs in mind, they believe that the college really cares about helping them resolve their technical issues.

One of the biggest lessons learned was that a little help can go a long way. Something as simple as a short “How To” video can empower students and employees to resolve less complex issues on their own. This type of service not only saves time for students and employees, but also helps to prevent frustration for everyone involved.

Recommendations

Recommendations from our experience with the “How-To” and help videos include:

- If you do not currently have “How-To” videos,

start the process now, which will help reduce frustration for students and can help increase student loyalty and success.

- Remember, sometimes screen images change. Keep videos current with system upgrades.
- Keep videos as short as possible. Most people do not have the patience to sit and watch lengthy videos.
- Working with other departments to create helpful videos for their web pages has been a positive experience. Building partnerships between IT and other departments opens up lines of communication and builds strong relationships.

Conclusion

As the use of technology increases at community colleges, it is important to provide great customer service to students as a way to increase enrollment and student success. Students need to have their questions answered quickly and conveniently, often outside of regular business hours. As systems change and online registration increases, the need for quick, easy-to-find assistance is a service that institutions cannot ignore. Something as simple as “How-To” videos can change how students and employees view their college. It is also important that all departments, including the IT department, understand that they play a large role in student success. If all employees recognize the value of providing 24/7 support, students will feel more valued when their needs are addressed in real time. Providing this type of exceptional service and support creates a win-win situation—the college provides a customer-friendly solution in a cost-effective manner and students get the help they need when they need it most!

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