

Portals are Subversive

(or at least they ought to be)

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Context and Conclusion

- A portal allows IT to fulfil its destiny
- To be transformative in the interests of users
- To become invisible (no longer extrinsic)!
- We'll know we are making progress when we stop using labels and “e” prefixes
- IT has not yet transformed HE
- One reason: a portal is more a management than a technological challenge
- Far too important to be left to the IT Dept.

Structure

- What is a portal?
- Why have a portal?
- Why are they subversive?
- How: management issues
- How: technical issues

What is a Portal?

- Integrated computing environment that is built around individual students/staff
- It is personalised according to:
 - Known and predictable needs (e.g. courses)
 - User-defined needs
- Capable of increasing convenience and enhancing efficiency
- Not just a Website

Features

- Single, integrated, computing and communication environment
- Single sign-on
- Tie back-end systems into common front end
- Inverted information retrieval model
- Customisation: role based access
- Personalisation: by the user
- Transactional: self service
- CPAD

Functions

- Information access
- Email
- Calendar
- E-learning
- Groups (communities)
- Business processes
- Content management

Why are Portals Subversive?

- Moving from a producer-centric to a consumer-centric service model
 - Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
 - You have to believe in the empowerment and convenience of individual students and staff
- Not merely the application of technology to existing business practices
- Facilitate new business practices
- Imply re-engineering: form follows function

The Major Challenges

- To re-design processes with the student at the centre
- Foster cohesion through a unified communication strategy
- Increase efficiency through better access to information and decision support systems
- New business: prospective students, alumni
- CRM: from the cradle to the endowment

Management Issues

- Portals affect all aspects of university activity
- Transformation requires clear vision and strategy, from the top!
- Conundrum: who leads?
- Technology-led or technology-influenced?
- By the book or by stealth?
- “Skate to where you think the puck will be”
- Don’t ask for permission
- Is a business model appropriate?

Management of Support Services

- Attitude to re-engineering in Information Services departments
- Is convergence implied?
- Does it at least make portal planning and management easier?
- Convergence is a means to an end
- The need for learning technologists, and where should they be located?

Some Technical Issues

- Build or buy?
- uPortal
- Single sign-on: at logon and beyond
- Real-time integration
- Security (from home too?)
- Available skills (Java etc.)

uPortal Framework

- Access to all information through single graphical interface
- Support single sign-on to all information resources and applications
- Provide framework within which all elements of the university and all business applications can be integrated
- Provide convenient set of communication services
- Provide one-stop place for all business transactions
- Provide ability to personalise information delivery
- Provide users with the ability to customise content, layout, etc.
- Be available at all times
- Be flexible and able to absorb new technologies and new applications
- Be vendor-independent

And finally ...

- Don't expect gratitude from the newly empowered!
- At least not straight away
- Empowerment means extra work and responsibility
- You don't win friends by being subversive!