The Sallie Mae Fund Case Study

THE CUSTOMER

The Sallie Mae Fund, a charitable organization sponsored by Sallie Mae, achieves its mission—to increase access to higher education for America's students—by supporting programs and initiatives that help open doors to higher education, prepare families for their college investment, and bridge the gap when no one else can. In addition, The Fund supports employee volunteerism and community service in the communities where Sallie Mae employees live and work.

THE CHALLENGE

A Unique Program Structure

In the spring of 2008, The Sallie Mae Fund launched the Kids2College (K2C) program. Through The Fund's partnership with private and government organizations across the country, the K2C program is aimed at developing and implementing a college awareness program for sixth-grade students across the country. The Kids2College program includes a six-session curriculum that exposes students to the value and availability of higher education. To facilitate this process, The Fund provides the full curriculum and related tools such as training and an online resource to support a qualifying organization's effort.

Multiple Levels of Interaction

The Sallie Mae Fund's Kids2College program uses a partnership model between the school district, local colleges, universities and a program coordinator. This structure requires each of the Sallie Mae Fund's hundreds of partners to have unique access permissions to scheduled events and meetings, shared documents, shared tasks and shared links specific to their engagement while concurrently limiting access to no-associated neighboring region's groups, all while maintaining a common area where different regions can discuss their unique ideas and approaches.

THE JOURNEY

In managing a full-scale, regionally dispersed program with multiple levels of partnerships and events, an organization would typically require regional offices or an accelerated travel schedule to coordinate in organizing projects and events.

Low Overhead and Limited Resources

As a non-profit organization with limited overhead, The Sallie Mae Fund had only two courses open to it: they could either delay the program long enough to raise additional funds allocated towards managing the program at a full scale in a traditional manner, or the program could be temporarily approached as a limited engagement in one of the selected regions. This was true until they discovered the power of online collaboration through HyperOffice.

THE DISCOVERY

The IT resource support for The Sallie Mae Fund was tasked with finding a solution that would allow The Sallie Mae Fund team to manage the K2C program remotely and with limited administration.

The Initial Solution
The initial search produced Microsoft's Sharepoint as a viable option, but the huge implementation and maintenance costs were a prohibiting factor. Further research produced a web based collaborative suite called HyperOffice, which was shown to provide a full collaborative solution with all the customization and functionality of Sharepoint, but at a fraction of the cost. The choice was clear - not only did HyperOffice manage to meet the initial requirements of the project, but as part of its offering, also assisted with consultation in developing a structure for how the program was implemented and managed.

A Review by the Managing Team
Following the decision to recommend HyperOffice as a means to manage and track the K2C project, the management team of The Sallie Mae Fund was called to review the product. In conjunction with a number of product demonstrations by the HyperOffice staff, a number of consultative meetings were held in-person and via web conference to discuss in detail the process for applying the offerings of HyperOffice to the K2C program's existing and approaching needs. It was clear by the end of these sessions that HyperOffice would prove to be the long-term solution required to manage the K2C program and potentially other Sallie Mae Fund programs down the road.

THE SOLUTION

With HyperOffice, The Sallie Mae Fund is able to organize their users in groups separated by region and affiliation. For instance, a group for each of the 50 states in which the program was active would be built, as well as a common group for partners. In addition, multiple subgroups detailed by internal departments for internal Sallie Mae Fund employees were envisioned. Within each self-contained group there was to exist a fully customized homepage, calendar, project management tool, and complete document repository. Based on their individual role and "profile" within the program, the HyperOffice experience would be differentiated and unique for each user.

With No Mention of HyperOffice: A Fully Branded Solution
A fundamental requirement in building trust within a member-based organization is the need to maintain a look and feel consistent with the organization's existing image and culture across all mediums. One of the factors in The Sallie Mae fund's hesitation to move towards an outside solution was that most solutions did not offer the ability to customize the product to appear as if it was seamlessly a part of the existing Sallie Mae Fund website, but instead had the jarring appearance of a third party solution. With HyperOffice, The Sallie Mae Fund was able to maintain the format of their existing site, with no mention of HyperOffice in their implementation. In fact, the login fields to the collaboration solution were embedded directly on The Sallie Mae Fund's existing website.

A Seamless Integration

Through the use of the fully integrated HyperOffice page designer, Publisher, a member of the Sallie Mae Fund team with no web design experience whatsoever was able to design and build their collaboration portal. It consisted of an extranet for the client groups and an intranet for the internal groups. This structure allows each group to function independently within the intranet on their own unique "intranet workspace", a dedicated area within the intranet based on specific group needs. For instance, a "New York" group would highlight upcoming events associated with College grants or informational events in the NY State, or even statistics associated with the region. The ability to customize the portal's homepage allowed the Sallie Mae Fund to create direct links to the curriculum and highlight applicable documents on the homepage itself. When used in conjunction with the ability to customize the user experience based on "profiles", they are able to completely influence the navigation of a group and the way it is presented, thus customizing the experience for each user on the individual level. In short, the Sallie Mae Fund HyperOffice collaboration portal existed as a seamless, yet secure component of their existing site.

THE IMPLEMENTATION

A Structure for Enhanced Communication
The ability to maintain a sound structure to mirror their regionally displaced teams and partners was an important factor in managing the program as a whole. HyperOffice was able to place the structure of the program in perspective, giving them a means to effectively manage their programs as they ran concurrently.

Unique Permission Levels and Interaction
The Kids2College program interacts with many different levels of partners and members, thus, it is important to designate their access accordingly. Permissions may be set at the group level, as well as the individual user level- getting deeper into the document permission options. It is also possible to limit or grant access at the folder level, the subfolder level or even down to individual documents. This approach enabled the ability to provide different levels of permissions to documents and folders to members, even within the same group. In its most common usage, the project manager associated with each region has an entire folder structure with many levels of folders and documents within the group that only they (and whoever else they designate) have access to. Not only does this secure sensitive information, but it also is used as a means to simplify the portal for usability and enhance adoption.

A Hyper Kick-Off
A phased roll-out plan was developed. This included multiple kick-off sessions for their users and a structured method to effectively approach managing their user base with just one portal administrator. The sessions went well and without even knowing it, the K2C participants were successfully using HyperOffice on a daily basis through The Sallie Mae Fund website.

THE RESULTS

Moving Forward

As the K2C program continues to be a success, the Sallie Mae Fund plans to apply a similar concept to some of its existing programs. By using HyperOffice to manage a program involving multiple organizations all with varying standard methods of communication, the Sallie Mae Fund was able to centralize all communications into one platform. This allowed all of their partners, regardless of their level of technical experience or physical location to work as a collaborative team.