

System Development

Narrator: McGraw-Hill's creation of an innovative textbook publishing system created quite a stir in the higher education publishing community. Although competitors may have felt the same frustrations McGraw-Hill did, when it came to producing textbooks to meet the demands of the business education marketplace, no other publisher had embarked on such an ambitious project.

Ginny Moffatt; VP Course Content Delivery: The response of the competition was to be quite concerned. When we rolled Primus out, I was actually working for a competitor and McGraw-Hill at that point did a phenomenal marketing campaign with Primus. Full page ads in the NYT, great press releases with lots of information and at the time I thought, "Oh man, they have just turned the world of custom publishing on its head". Because it really was a system that professors could use on their own, they didn't have to interact with a human being necessarily and it was designed to make it so much simpler to do what we were all doing manually. The other thing that the competition thought was that McGraw-Hill was doing all their custom publishing through this system, in truth they were not but they were very smart to leave that impression with everyone. And the competition was also impressed that McGraw-Hill had clearly invested what was a lot of money in a forward-looking system at a time when it didn't seem obvious that you had to do that to get the business.

Narrator: What the competition didn't see however, was the very real technical challenge that McGraw-Hill was facing and the capital that had been committed to seeing this project to completion.

Ginny Moffatt; VP Course Content Delivery: There was no Web, there was no easy way of transmitting information, none of that. The biggest thing that impressed the competitors was the print on demand. They had a system where McGraw-Hill was saying, 48 hours from order to finished product and we just couldn't imagine how that was possible. And also just figuring out what is the right format this? At the time McGraw-Hill was committed to going into the product to making sure it was modular so taking out any references to previous chapters, whatever was not standalone, so that was a challenge to figure out how to do that quickly and make it available quickly. So there were just a tremendous amount of technical challenges and they have really presented themselves in a different way every year through this evolution and then when the web showed up it was really an opportunity but a challenge to figure out how are we going to migrate this system now to web-based?

Narrator: One decision involving the digital file format for storing all of the Primus content turned out to be a major one.

Cathleen Mattura; Manager Custom Publishing: The interesting thing about the technology choice that we made was that it was smart and lucky. Lucky because we could have easily went the other way – very easily because we were pressured to do that by the corporation. We were lucky we did not. Because if we would have we would not have stayed in business as long as we have or grow as quickly as we have. Because postscript has become the industry standard and it turned into PDF and PDF revolutionized the print world. It was able to then send to any printer in the world, Hp, Xerox, Minolta whatever you had, PDF could read it.

Narrator: As limitations became clear to the Primus team the functional design requirements had to be modified so that the technical solutions would work. Many hours were invested but a final set of technical specifications emerged. What had been an exhausting exercise in designing a leading edge custom content delivery system was ready to become reality.

Cathleen Mattura; Manager Custom Publishing: The RFP went out to major corporations and we realized that we went into the process of getting the money and our team had really good ideas which we filtered down between two,

Kodak and Xerox. But at that time, the only print vendor we could partner with was the biggest, RR Donnelly, and we had a long standing relationship with them and they were intrigued by this project as well.

Narrator: The system implantation took 18 months, software had to be re-written and acquired. Hardware such as system units, storage and printers were installed and the components tested. Content was loaded into the new Primus database. The big task of developing training for the sales force and technical support teams moved into full swing. Primus was ready to be unveiled to the world! With the systems implemented, the Primus team geared up for the longest stage of the systems' life cycle: maintenance.

As you consider the effort it took to implement the Primus system, consider these questions:

- Would prototyping have helped the Primus team? Why or why not?
- What role should end users have played in the development of the system?
- What change management techniques did McGraw-Hill use to increase the chances of success for this system?
- Why was it important to consider the relationship of Primus to back-end systems at McGraw-Hill?
- If you were the project manager for Primus what would you have done differently? Explain your answer.