

Higher Education

Overview

Profile

Rock Valley College is a public, two-year community college located in Rockford, Illinois, a progressive community of 150,000. Founded in 1964, Rock Valley has more than 9,000 students enrolled in undergraduate programs each semester.

Situation

Rock Valley College officials knew that the college's Web site needed a facelift, but they wanted a solution that was more than skin deep. Rock Valley faced a common situation among educational institutions. Its previous Web site was a loose confederation of individual sites, each with its own look and feel, inconsistent navigation tools, and information that was sporadically updated or, in some cases, obsolete. The College also knew that it needed a content management system. However, Rock Valley's previous Web site contained several sophisticated custom applications that had been developed in ColdFusion, which they wanted to continue using.

Solution

Because Estrada was originally developed in a university setting, it is an especially appealing product for the higher education market. One of Estrada's particular strengths is balancing the need for university's marketing and business goals with the equally important need for academic freedom. Estrada includes a host of features that enable efficient centralized oversight for an entire university Web installation. Yet Estrada also makes it easy for the college to securely enable any number of designated individuals or departments to build and update their Web pages on their own, without relying on a webmaster or needing to learn Web programming.

Additionally, the Estrada Development Kit for ColdFusion provided an efficient and convenient way to preserve the custom applications from its old Web site—and develop new functionality.

Technology

Estrada® Web Technology Web Content Management & Development System
Estrada® Development Platform
Estrada® Smart Templates
Estrada Development Kit for ColdFusion

Two Web Servers: Microsoft Internet Information Server (IIS)
Hardware: X86
Operating System: Microsoft Windows 2000
Database: Microsoft SQL Server 2000

Rock Valley College

Rapid Web implementation includes custom-developed applications and convenient content management

ColdFusion Adds Custom Functionality

One of the most exciting aspects of the new Rock Valley site is its custom applications that were rapidly developed using the Estrada Development Kit for ColdFusion. (ColdFusion is a popular toolset for developing dynamic Web pages that connect to databases.) Because Estrada is a development platform as well as a Web content management system, it can be used to develop corporate infrastructure, create custom Web applications, and integrate legacy systems

Most remarkable is how rapidly Rock Valley programmer Joshua Curtiss was able to not only integrate applications that had been on the old site but also develop some new functionality. He completed the work in just two weeks, counting from the day that he was trained.

Curtiss said, "My Estrada training was very effective, short, and to the point. They gave me exactly what I needed to know in an efficient format."

The College's most popular custom ColdFusion application is Career Services—which Curtiss compares to a "mini Monster.com"—where students can post resumes and search job listings, and employers can advertise openings, all through user-friendly online forms. Another application allows online registration for health care professional education seminars.

Curtiss also developed a News application that creates one central location where Rock Valley news staff can post and manage press releases and events, using online forms. The articles and events are then syndicated, or published in other areas of the Web site, such as the home page. The application also makes it easy to set the number of stories to appear at a time, add and change photos, adjust how much text to display at a time, track the number of times each article is viewed and, if it is syndicated, how many times it has been viewed per location.

Curtiss also integrated Rock Valley's personnel directory database with Estrada. As changes are made to directory records, automatic

updates are made to staff members' names and contact information that appear in the content of the Web site.

"Estrada makes it so easy to update content anyway, but being able to develop custom functionality for Estrada lets me simplify things even more," said Curtiss.

Clearing the "Webmaster Bottleneck"

Estrada allowed Rock Valley to move from its old way of Web publishing to a new, more efficient Web development model. Before Estrada, the school's primary webmaster struggled under the sheer volume of requests from around campus to create and change Web sites. Work often backed up at this "bottleneck."

Estrada introduced a new approach to Web publishing called distributed authoring, in which individuals add and update content to assigned areas of the Rock Valley Web site directly, without depending on a webmaster or needing to learn HTML. A major advantage of enabling non-technical people to easily author Web pages is that it minimizes the need to hire additional technology staff and frees up Rock Valley's existing technologists from routine maintenance tasks so that they can push the site's technology forward.

As an added bonus, Rock Valley did not need to hire any new technical staff even while expanding the Web site. Sherry Pritz, a photographer by training, stepped up to the role as the College's New Media Specialist and Webmaster. Pritz said, "Estrada is easier to use than Dreamweaver. Plus, I can call Estrada Support anytime for help."

"Estrada allows us to work smarter and to get more done with less," said Director of Marketing Chuck Brown, Ph.D. "With higher education budget crunches, that kind of efficiency is invaluable."

Right on Time: Estrada Helps Keep Content Accurate and Timely

Redesigning its Web site gave Rock Valley the opportunity to revise and update Web content



that had fallen out of date, but the College's Web staff knew that they needed to take proactive steps to ensure that the new site's content would continue to be fresh, interesting and, above all, accurate. An added advantage to Estrada's distributed authoring model is that it has created a sense of ownership and pride among the Web authors.

"We really needed help keeping everything up to date. We love the Estrada feature that lets us set up email reminders telling us to review and update data," said Pritz, describing Active Content Management, which also enables Estrada Authors to schedule content items to begin or stop displaying at predetermined dates and times.

The Estrada Workflows feature also helped Rock Valley to ensure the accuracy and quality of the content being created by multiple authors. Rock Valley's Web team set up the Workflows, or review chains of individuals who read and approve new content before it can be published to the Web. The Workflows are fully customizable and can have any number of review levels.

Getting Everybody on the "Same Page"

Finally, Estrada provided Rock Valley with the means to strengthen its brand identity, which was part of an integrated marketing strategy that Rock Valley developed in conjunction with Stamats, Estrada's higher education marketing partner.

The College's previous Web site was comprised of many independently maintained sites that varied widely in accuracy and design styles. Now Estrada provides Rock Valley's Web team with a better system, including editorial oversight over all of its Estrada sites and sub-sites.



Templates make it easy for Rock Valley Web authors to create pages with a consistent look and feel, reinforcing the school's new marketing campaign and brand identity.

In keeping with the College's new marketing campaign, templates create a consistent look and feel throughout the new site. The templates function like containers or patterns. Authors simply insert content into the templates, without needing to worry about design. Templates also provide consistent, logical navigation features on every page. Different templates or variations of the same template can be applied to different areas of the site, to provide design changes and functionality as needed.

"One of the critical elements in any Web site is the ability to update the site, yet maintain the design parameters originally intended," Brown noted. "Estrada appears to address this need perfectly."

■ For More Information

About Estrada Web Technology

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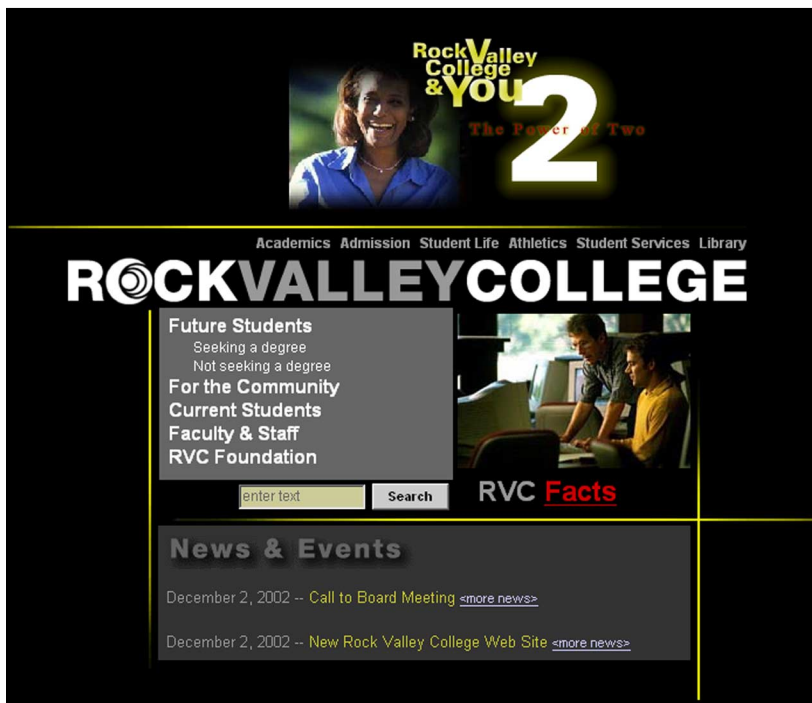
Estrada Web Technology, a division of Gandalf Development, Inc., is a technology firm with expertise in Internet development, enterprise management consulting and contract services. The firm's large national client base includes leading corporations, federal and state government, higher education and non-profit organizations.

About Rock Valley College

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Rock Valley College is a public, two-year community college located on a scenic 217-acre campus in Rockford, Illinois. Rockford, a progressive community of 150,000, is less than 90 minutes from both Chicago and Milwaukee.

Founded in 1964, Rock Valley has more than 9,000 students enrolled in undergraduate programs each semester. The college has more than 125 full-time faculty members, the majority of whom hold master's or doctorate degrees. In addition, Rock Valley has approximately 500 part-time lecturers.



Estrada's development platform makes it convenient to create custom functionality, such as the dynamic news feeds at the bottom of RockValley's home page.