The transition to digital content: Successfully implementing your service

Case Study II
St. Vrain Valley School District
Introduction & Challenge

Spread across 411 square miles north of Denver and serving 30,000 Pre-K-12 students in 53 schools, the St. Vrain Valley School District is Colorado’s eighth-largest school district. A $3.6 million “Investing in Innovation” grant and a $16.6 million “Race to the Top” grant in 2012, both from the U.S. Department of Education, are testaments to the district’s reputation as a leader in technology integration and innovative education.

In 2014, St. Vrain chose OverDrive over other providers as its partner to supply full-length digital texts and technology services to the devices students will be equipped with through a 1:1 initiative instituted under the district’s ambitious “Learning Technology Plan.” Contributing factors in selecting OverDrive — the sole digital-only company in contention — included the breadth and depth of its content catalog; the ability to retain titles through the length of an adoption cycle; universal device compatibility; and ease of use.

St. Vrain invested $727,000 with OverDrive for digital content to serve three areas: novel sets as part of an English language arts adoption for grades 6-12; middle and high school libraries to support literacy engagement; and professional development.

With the digital content selected, St. Vrain and OverDrive began the process of implementing the service. The project would involve addressing several components: creating a customized website to house the digital content; authentication; assigning content to students; and staff training and promotion to the school community.

Implementing An Effective Solution

St. Vrain started working with OverDrive to implement its service in the summer of 2014. District leaders recognized how important having a service that works smoothly at launch for all users was to realizing the full potential of its 1:1 initiative. Administrators agree that if students and educators have a bad first experience with the service, they’re less likely to become return users.

“There have been several districts that have had 1:1 initiatives go down in flames because of lack of support,” St. Vrain Executive Director of Curriculum Kahle Charles said.

District administrators and instructional technology, media and library staff collaborated closely with OverDrive digital specialists to address the following key areas:

Selecting the digital content, creating a customized website

With guidance from an OverDrive educational content expert, the district selected the right combination of digital content to serve its grades 6-12 English language arts adoption, middle and high school libraries and professional development needs. To house these titles, OverDrive built St. Vrain a single website accessible to students and educators districtwide 24/7/365. The digital content was organized in custom subject and collection menus, and the site features the district’s distinct red branding. OverDrive specialists performed extensive quality assurance testing of the site before launch.

Authentication

Lightweight Directory Access Protocol (LDAP) was chosen as the authentication method for students and educators to access the district’s OverDrive-powered website. LDAP enables users to log in to the site with their existing network username and password.

Assigning content to students

In order to optimize the district’s digital novel set program for grades 6-12 English language arts classes, the OverDrive platform was successfully integrated with St. Vrain’s existing content management system. This allows titles to be “assigned” to student accounts without students having to check them out themselves. Outside these classes, students are free to check out titles on their own.
Training and promotion

To familiarize them with their OverDrive service before it went live, St. Vrain administrators and teachers were supplied comprehensive on-demand training resources. OverDrive also provided the district with customized promotional collateral and marketing tips to help spread awareness of the service to the school community.

A “soft launch” of the district’s OverDrive service was conducted in the fall of 2014 at three middle schools and three high schools. The service successfully went live districtwide on Jan. 26, 2015.

Charles said St. Vrain has appreciated OverDrive’s honest representation of the capabilities of its service and willingness to work to develop solutions to challenges presented during the implementation process. District Instructional Technology Coordinator Bud Hunt characterized OverDrive’s approach as “under promise and over deliver.”

“That’s not always the case (with other vendors),” Charles said. “A lot of times, you’re promised the sky, moon and stars, and that’s not what’s delivered.”

Charles said OverDrive has also displayed a commitment to timely customer service. This is critical, he said, because if a barrier to accessing digital content is not addressed immediately, it can serve to support the stance of anyone in the school community resistant to the transition to digital.

“OverDrive’s been phenomenal as far as customer service,” he said.

Results & Looking Forward

St. Vrain’s OverDrive service has been live for only a short time, but has already seen thousands of students and educators access thousands of titles. New users are trying the service for the first time every day.

“The (digital) library is open for business, people are finding it and I’m watching the checkouts creep up,” Hunt said.

Hunt said he’s received a significant amount of informal feedback about the district’s OverDrive service, with students offering excitement (“This is awesome!”) and many teachers using the digital library to revisit their love of reading (“Teachers are remembering they’re readers, too”).

“We want kids to be reading more, and we’re providing more opportunities and cutting out some of the barriers to that,” Charles said.

Looking forward, Charles said school principals have expressed interest in adding locally created content to the district’s OverDrive platform. OverDrive school partners can upload assessments, lesson plans and student exemplars to their sites to increase availability of these resources.

“Many are seeing the full potential of the OverDrive service,” Charles said.

Charles said St. Vrain is committed to providing digital content across its curriculum beyond the original grades 6-12 English language arts novel sets adoption, and sees OverDrive playing a significant role in this. Areas of immediate interest include middle school science and high school science and social studies, which are going through curriculum adoptions over the next year. In addition to eBooks and audiobooks, Charles said the district will explore adding OverDrive streaming video titles and periodicals to its service.

“With OverDrive, we’re able to provide high-quality materials to engage students in critical areas to further their skill sets to become more productive, collaborative people,” he said.

To learn about how St. Vrain selected OverDrive as its digital content partner, read Case Study I.