Business Scenario

ATM RSD Service

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RSD—Case Study

The Robert Gordon University

As universities develop new learning facilities, computing technology is providing a vital foundation. For The Robert Gordon University, a **powerful new e-learning service** had given practical difficulties and incurred system maintenance high costs. But thanks to **ATM Technology Management**, The Robert Gordon University has improved system monitoring, regained management control and reduced operating expenditure.

The Robert Gordon University in Aberdeen offers a wide range of full-time, part-time and sandwich courses at undergraduate, post-experience and postgraduate levels. There are some **9,000 students taking 145 different courses.** The University is a leader in the field of e-learning through its Virtual Campus and award-winning Faculty Intranets.

supporting online learning

e-learning is helping to change the face of education throughout the UK. The University's Department of eLearning provides a Virtual Campus service used by over 1,000 fee-paying students in 116 countries with over 8,000

virtualcampus campus.rgu.com department of eLearning

users registered. It offers postgraduate and short courses in subjects such as engineering, law, business and computing.

According to eLearning Project Manager Jacqui Nicol, the RGU Virtual Campus was originally hosted by an ISP using the University's hardware. Third-party hardware maintenance was complemented by the Department's support staff for software issues.

"*There were problems with physical access to our equipment. We had to give the ISP notice if we wanted to work on the Virtual Campus system,*" said Jacqui.

Although costs were high, most concern centred around the inability to perform proper system monitoring. There was little **advanced warning** of trends that might have otherwise prompted timely housekeeping. Jacqui says the Virtual Campus service was not monitored closely because it was too time-consuming.

In mid 2002, it was decided to find an alternative. An increased level of in-house expertise offered the opportunity to return the servers to the University and save on hosting costs. But a more effective approach was essential too as Jacqui explains.

Special points of interest:

- *Improve service using our smart technology.*
- *Automate routine problems and their resolution.*
- *Have access to a wide range of skills on demand*
- *Flexible hours and working locations*
- *Options to handle a small part of your requirement or a full Managed Service covering all your needs*
- *A professionally managed service that lets you focus on the business*

ATM Technology Management

The Power—The Partner

"*We wanted to increase our own control of the Virtual Campus. This meant having a notification system for potential problems, preferably automated to reduce the pressure on our staff.*"

Although the proposals were sound, an increased workload for the eLearning team was undesirable as was the acquisition of new monitoring software or providing in-house out-of-hours cover. **Costs had to be reduced yet management control regained - a seemingly impossible task.**

The University's IT Department carried out a detailed evaluation of potential solutions. Having assessed several suppliers, it was decided to award the contract to ATM Technology Management. ATM not only offered a cost-effective solution for remote server monitoring, support and hardware maintenance but it also demonstrated extensive expertise.

By August 2002, the RGU Virtual Campus hardware had been returned to University premises. ATM technicians then installed Remote Service Desk monitoring software along with two gateway servers for access to software agents on the target systems. ATM also took over the hardware maintenance role; providing a four-hour response and four-hour fix along with unlimited telephone-based operating system support.

Remote Service Desk now operates constantly yet invisibly, tracking the system health of the Windows NT/2000 servers for web pages, database, chat, internet payment and a development environment. If any problems are spotted, ATM notifies the e-learning team who carry out any remedial work.

"*We see ad-hoc reports from ATM of events like low disk space warnings. We don't want to see too much information as we're a small team*," said Jacqui.

Nothing is missed by the Remote Service Desk as software agents automatically capture, classify and report events around the clock. These are listed by severity - warning, minor and critical - for individual servers. Disk space warnings and stopped services will flag a critical event while excessive paging and timeouts are considered less important.

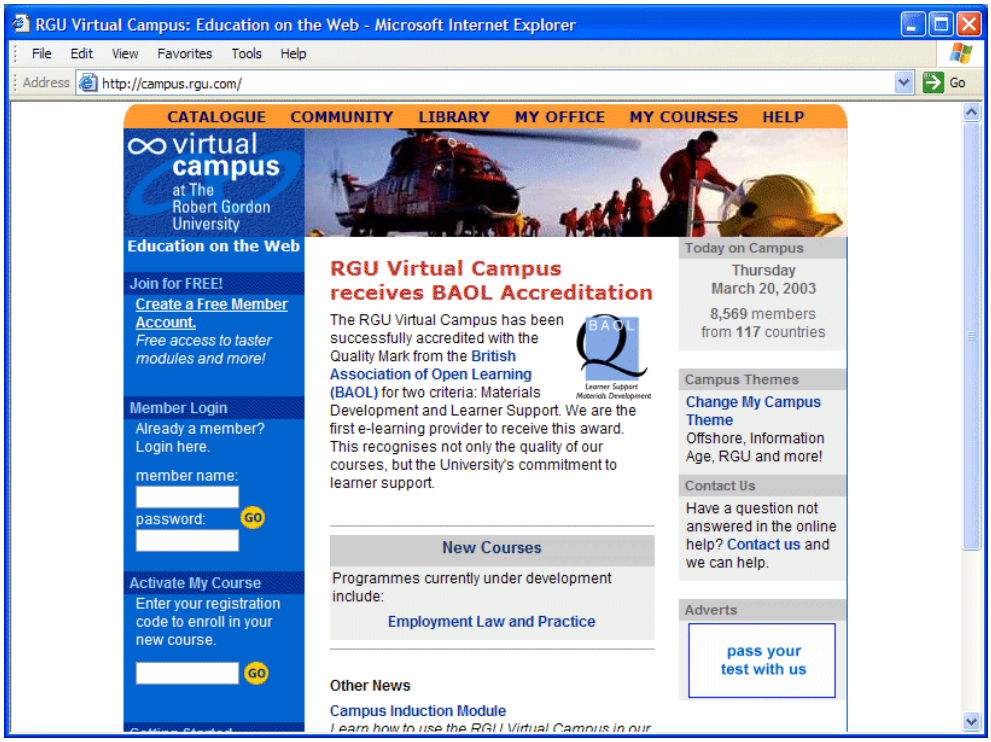
"*If something is noticed, ATM contacts us by e-mail during the day and by telephone out-of-hours*."

The RGU Virtual Campus is also underpinned by telephone access to ATM's "very good" Help Desk for operating system support. The final reassurance is provided by ATM's hardware maintenance service. For example, ATM has swiftly taken care of a failed fan and faulty CD drive. Additional project work by ATM has included security and back-up audits.

"*ATM gives the e-learning team **peace of mind**. We've had time to work properly rather than fire fight and so have been able to improve our infrastructure. I can certainly recommend ATM who are always professional and handle our queries promptly*."

Thanks to ATM's efficiencies and economies of scale, there's been a **welcome reduction in operating expenditure.** Nicol says that ATM has contributed to a 20 per cent cut while providing far better management for the mission critical servers.

As the **popularity of e-learning increases**, new courses will be added to the RGU Virtual Campus to help generate additional revenue for the University. Its primary mission is to widen access to all courses, something that this technology delivers superbly well. And as more people benefit, The Robert Gordon University has the constant reassurance of well-supported systems.



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