

Blackboard Leverages SoftChalk for Engaging Content

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Creating original and meaningful online content is a challenging obstacle for many educators. With class sizes continuing to grow, faculty have less time to effectively create and distribute engaging content for their students. The fact that many learning-content authoring programs in use today are difficult and time consuming to use only compounds the problem.

This fact was not lost on Nancy Edwards, currently a Tier One Support Analyst for Blackboard. In 2005, Edwards was at Florida Gulf Coast University assisting faculty to develop their online courses and saw the struggles educators were facing first hand. "Faculty needed a way to add content into their courses that would engage students," said Edwards. "Unfortunately, there was no easy way to do this and some solutions required extensive programming knowledge."

In 2006, while attending a meeting of the Florida Distance Learning Consortium, Edwards was

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introduced to SoftChalk and realized it could be the solution to the growing problem faculty were facing. SoftChalk is a content authoring software that helps educators create professional and engaging learning content quickly and easily. "Once I saw SoftChalk in action, I knew it was the solution faculty needed when creating content," said Edwards. "It takes the programmer out of the equation and makes the finished product look great with little effort needed by the person creating it."

When Edwards became the Director of eLearning at the State College of Florida, Manatee – Sarasota, she was excited to see they were already using SoftChalk. "One of my responsibilities at the college was to teach faculty how to use the solution," said Edwards. "It was very easy to teach people and I didn't need to do much support—SoftChalk just worked."

Now that Edwards is at Blackboard, she is using SoftChalk to educate new hires on protocols for their role on the Blackboard support team. Essentially, Edwards is teaching them how to do their job. "When I came to Blackboard, they were using Microsoft PowerPoint™ for the tutorials," said Edwards. "I decided to use SoftChalk instead in order to make the tutorials more dynamic and interactive." Edwards was able to pull existing content from PowerPoint slides and easily import that material into SoftChalk. "The process was very

easy—SoftChalk did a majority of the work for me automatically,” said Edwards. “The solution even created a table of contents for each tutorial automatically. SoftChalk saved me a tremendous amount of time.”

SoftChalk’s word processing-type interface is easy to use. Educators can quickly create new content from scratch, import their content from Word, or repurpose lessons and activities openly shared in the SoftChalk Cloud learning object repository. SoftChalk automatically formats the material and faculty can publish the content with the click of a button to most learning management systems, the SoftChalk Cloud LOR or package it for use on their web server.

Educators can easily build, customize and personalize content by mashing up their own materials with rich media (video, audio, images, widgets) and interactive activities. SoftChalk also makes it easy for educators to integrate quizzes by following menu-driven choices or by importing their own existing questions. “The quiz feature

is great because faculty can ask a quick question during the lesson to make sure everyone is understanding the material, and then do a longer test at the end for overall assessment,” said Edwards. “The results can also be forwarded right to a scoring system such as Blackboard’s Grade Book.”

SoftChalk interfaces seamlessly with the Blackboard Learn™ platform, and educators and students can view SoftChalk-created lessons at anytime from any device, including today’s most popular mobile devices.

“The lessons are much more interactive and engaging for the audience. My colleagues at Blackboard were blown away by the appearance and experience of the new tutorials—if only they knew how easy they were to create!”

In the future, Edwards plans to use SoftChalk in the classroom. “In addition to my responsibilities at Blackboard, I am an adjunct professor for the State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota,” said Edwards. “I want to use the solution with my students in the coming semester.”

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