Success Stories from Higher Education:

Building the Next Generation of Digital Experiences

How higher education institutions are improving their digital properties to solve problems, engage diverse audiences, and deliver exceptional experiences

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Introduction

No two educational institutions have the exact same needs. But all colleges and universities are challenged to provide highly diverse audiences — current students, prospective students, their families, faculty, administrators, and alumni — with top-notch digital experiences across many types of devices and channels. It's no easy task.

Institutions must attract the right prospective students in order to meet annual enrollment targets. This means they need to offer engaging, personalized digital experiences that highlight their school's unique academic offerings, campus cultures, and specialized programs.

But their marketing and communications needs go far beyond this. Universities must also enable many different internal teams to connect with multiple audiences. To make this happen, many people — with highly varied backgrounds and skill sets — must be able to manage and publish content independently. At the same time, the institution needs to manage its website, core messaging, and branded communications in a unified manner.

Building on a platform that adapts to meet your organization's strategic initiatives is key. Used by 71% of the top 100 universities, Drupal is the most popular content management system (CMS) in higher education today. There are many good reasons for this, including:

- **Drupal's flexibility,** which empowers higher education institutions to build websites that are custom-tailored to meet their unique requirements.

- **Drupal's ease of use,** which makes it possible for non-technical users to create and publish content independently.

- **Drupal's scalability,** which enables the platform to handle high traffic loads during peak periods, such as admissions season, and makes it possible to build large numbers of complex sites in a single, centralized place.

Introduction

But the right CMS is just the beginning. Certainly, higher education institutions want to gather experiential data from their website visitors, but they also want them to volunteer personal information so more substantive conversations can take place. And all that information must be unified so it can be analyzed and used to drive more compelling personalization.

By creating genuine, one-to-one experiences and sharing individually tailored content on relevant channels, colleges and universities can engage diverse audiences and provide them with experiences that will capture their attention and interest. Plus, these organizations need to create high-performing, engaging sites that can be centrally managed by small, resource-constrained teams.

These challenges highlight why a digital experience platform (DXP) with composability has become such a game changer. The ability to deliver personalized experiences for the audiences you want to attract while using the digital services you prefer gives you power and flexibility that haven't been so easy to find.

This e-book highlights the stories of nine different schools, universities, and other institutions that are transforming their approach to digital experience management for the 21st century. They're leveraging modern tools and solutions – along with fresh thinking – to meet higher education's long-standing challenges.

Building Brand Awareness

Boosting website performance makes it possible to better engage students and increase awareness of your faculty's world-class research.

Administrators for Stanford University wanted to increase student interest in its earth, energy, and environmental sciences programs and disseminate faculty thought leadership by improving the experiences of its website's visitors.

The digital team's concrete objective was to engage 80% of the institution's undergraduates on the school's site by the end of the year. To do so, they'd need to migrate away from slow-performing on-premise servers.

Stanford University Web Services (SWS) and website design firm Exygy partnered to implement a new site on the Acquia Cloud Platform. It features a student-focused design that provides a wealth of easily accessible information on a single page, with vastly superior video and photography elements.

By combining these elements with integrated social media, the new site is much better able to tell the story of what the school's students and faculty are discovering in their studies and research. Additionally, SWS has been migrating its more than 3,000 Stanford Sites onto Drupal 9 with Acquia Site Factory for central code management.

Traffic to the environmental science pages is up, and so are interest and engagement. Plus, the use of Site Factory helped ensure that all sites in the university's ecosystem adhere to design and accessibility standards.

The results

170%

increase in traffic to undergraduate experience page

420%

increase in traffic to graduate experience page

2x

increase in time-on-page for undergraduate experience

The lesson

For teams that must use their resources strategically, a platform that makes it easy to install, deploy, and manage a growing ecosystem of high performing sites is a must have. Solutions like Site Factory enable teams like this to maintain brand governance and tight security while making each site stand out from the crowd.

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Increasing International Enrollment

On-site personalization makes it possible to display content that's tailored for each of your site's visitors, which is critical for engaging applicants and prospective students.

Internationally recognized for its expertise across a range of disciplines including science, medicine, engineering, and art, the University of Dundee in Scotland wanted to increase international recruitment. To achieve this goal, the university needed to ensure that all prospective students visiting its

site could easily understand entry requirements.

Partnering with TPXImpact, the university's digital team used an Acquia CMS starter kit to migrate the site's content onto Drupal more quickly. Next, after implementing Acquia Personalization, digital teams were able to create a site that can display personalized entry requirements to prospective students right from the course page.

Applicants can now choose from 99 requirements and 85 countries,

seeing what's needed for acceptance to any program at a glance. Personalization campaigns

based on applicant journey stage data and geotargeting efforts have delivered impressive results.

The results

220%

increase in campaign-driven bookings

86%

increase in conversions driven by this campaign

6 months

to complete the entire project

The lesson

With the right tools, you can build a site that delivers the right information to the right visitors at the right time.

Driving Engagement Across a Diverse Student Population

Modernizing your site through a powerful platform makes it possible to deliver the highly personalized, mobile-first experiences that today's audiences expect.

Serving more than 12,000 students, South Dakota State University is the largest higher educational institution in its state. Siloed processes and an outdated CMS made it difficult for the university to provide accurate, updated information to its diverse population of undergraduate, graduate, continuing education, off-campus, and online students.

The Acquia Cloud Platform enabled SDSU to leverage the power of Drupal to manage all of their audiences' digital experiences in one place. Adding Acquia Personalization gave them a powerful personalization engine that makes it possible to deliver the tailored digital experiences that today's students expect — even when visiting the site on mobile devices.

The results

19%

increase in mobile traffic, to 39% of total site visits

11%

decrease in bounce rate

7.5 million

pageviews over 9,700 pages and 14,900 unique URLs

The lesson

A powerful CMS, like Drupal, enables lean digital teams to centrally manage content and experiences. But when you add a personalization engine smart enough to display specific content from that CMS, you are positioned to deliver truly compelling experiences across a wide range of devices and channels.

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Implementing Multiple Sites On One Fully Managed Platform

A managed cloud hosting platform gives digital teams the power to create high-performing sites and manage them centrally, even if different schools and departments have very different needs when it comes to digital services.

Established in 1821, George Washington University has been educating the next generation of leaders in government, international affairs, journalism, and other areas for more than 200 years. Meeting the online needs of the various schools, departments, and colleges that make up the university demands high levels of site reliability and operational efficiency.

To achieve this, the university partnered with Acquia to migrate its Drupal codebase from on-premise servers to Acquia Site Factory. Site Factory allows GWU to implement updates across their entire site portfolio to ensure everything is up to date and secure without any time-consuming manual maintenance.

This approach also simplifies security and compliance across the entire network of GWU sites.

In addition to making management easier, Site Factory also helped GWU decrease the time it takes to create new sites. Now, if the web services team needs to provision a new site for a school or department within the university, they can do so in mere minutes. Each site can be customized with content that suits the independent school or department while adhering to the university's brand governance requirements.

Now that the university's team no longer has to worry about these things, they can focus on their own codebase and deliver a premium service that aligns with the university's top-tier reputation.

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

WASHINGTON, DC

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The results

90%

decrease in time to provision new sites

300+

sites migrated to Acquia Site Factory in seven weeks

100%

recorded site uptime since the migration

The lesson

Migrating multiple existing Drupal sites to a centralized site management platform can exponentially increase efficiencies, eliminate infrastructure headaches, and streamline governance.

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Organizing Creative Content at Scale

A digital asset management (DAM) system makes it easy to manage large and ever-growing digital content libraries.

With more than 30,000 undergraduate students, as well as a fast-growing cohort of graduate and professional students, the University of Georgia is one of the top research universities in the U.S. It's no surprise that the prestigious institution's marketing and communications needs are complex and diverse.

UGA's Marketing and Communications division includes multiple full-time photographers who work to create an expanding library of digital content to support the university's messaging strategy. To manage this content, the university relies on Acquia DAM.

Acquia DAM makes it easy to get the right content to the right people by providing built-in tools that save time and effort within creation workflows. With flexible metadata fields, automated tagging, and self-service access

via a central portal, Acquia DAM empowers UGA's photographers to spend more time on creative work and less time on data entry.

The results

1 **million**

assets managed within the DAM

6

different metadata types in use

24,000

content downloads from the DAM within six months

The lesson

Acquia DAM gives creative and digital teams access to the tools and workflows they need to do their very best work, empowering them to produce more high-quality content and build the university's reputation and brand.

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Integrating Commerce Capabilities

Universities that need powerful back-end capabilities can combine a managed cloud hosting platform with an array of other solutions to deliver dynamic audience experiences.

Adtalem Global Education is a mission-driven commercial organization that empowers students to achieve their goals, find success, and make inspiring contributions to the global community. Adtalem needed to provide all of its sites' users with great digital experiences while also leveraging a robust commerce solution on the back end.

They needed a solution architecture that would empower their digital team to:

- **Add site content quickly and easily**

- **Integrate with Salesforce B2B Commerce**

- **Gather data to use for analytics to optimize users' on-site experiences**

Adtalem partnered with digital consultancy Avionos to implement the first-ever combination of Acquia and Salesforce B2B Commerce. Their site, now powered by Acquia Site Factory, is simple for non-technical employees to use and enables the entire team to quickly implement new site designs in an agile manner.

ADTALEM
GLOBAL EDUCATION

The results

35%

increase in overall site speed, with homepage and most-used pages now loading in less than one second

The site is performing double digits higher for same-day sales, year over year

100%

uptime since the new site's launch

The lesson

Adding functionality like commerce to your web properties does not have to be a headache when you use the right platform. A composable DXP lets you integrate third-party digital services more easily so you can start delivering value quickly.

Better On-Site Experiences Empower Users to Explore the World

Clean, modern, and easily searchable websites help students find the information they need. A strategic combination of powerful tools along with a strong foundation of Drupal makes this possible.

Princeton International is an interdisciplinary, cross-program initiative dedicated to providing guidance and resources for members of the Princeton University community interested in exploring international opportunities.

Princeton International partnered with Evolving Web to redesign its website. Built on Drupal 9, the new site is clean and easy-to-use — and leverages custom modules to synchronize content from multiple sources and ensure that site visitors' experiences are personalized on a granular level. With Acquia Search, the site offers fast, flexible web searches to give its users access to additional information.

The results

29

new landing pages and 19 additional components built on Drupal 9

Clean, easy-to-use site that's high performing

Students empowered to plan their own international experiences

The lesson

Building on Drupal makes it possible to create websites that are clean, modern, and easy to use. It also makes it possible to tailor experiences to individual users' needs — no matter how diverse.

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Honoring Graduates' Achievements — Online

The Rhode Island School of Design is one of the oldest and most prestigious art and design schools in the U.S. Traditionally, the work of graduating seniors is displayed in the RISD Museum, in a special exhibition celebrating their years of study and hard work.

When the COVID-19 pandemic struck, RISD had to close its museum and college campus. Students were sent home and no visitors could enter the museum. But the university wanted

to recognize its graduates' accomplishments by providing a virtual experience that was comparable to what they would have had in the physical museum.

With the highly scalable publication platform that Drupal's Layout Builder offered them, RISD Museum staff were able to create an online exhibit to honor RISD's graduates. They added new features and permissions that would enable students to custom-create scripts so that they could tailor their presentations beyond

the platform's initial design flexibility.

The virtual graduation exhibition was a triumph. RISD was able to give its students a public platform from which to be heard and a celebratory send-off worthy of their accomplishments. And the Acquia infrastructure seamlessly handled a 1,200% increase in traffic.
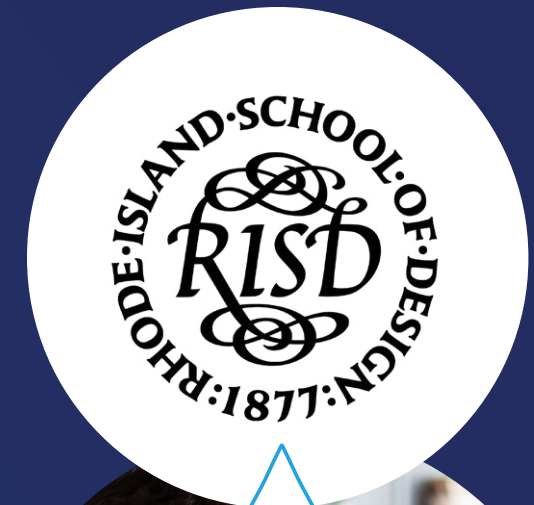
The results

Flawless site performance during the virtual exhibition

1,200%

increase in site traffic

A virtual experience comparable in many ways to what takes place in a physical museum

The lesson

The events of the past few years have taught website teams to expect the unexpected. Drupal's design flexibility and scalability make it possible to rise to the challenge, no matter how unprecedented it may be.

Improving Application Processing and Support

Not only does building on the right managed cloud hosting platform eliminate the need for in-house teams to manage your website's hosting infrastructure, but it also means you'll be guaranteed stable, scalable performance — even during traffic spikes.

UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, is an independent nonprofit organization that provides information and advice about secondary educational opportunities to UK students. It also serves as the shared admissions service for all higher educational institutions in the UK. Processing more than 3 million applications from some 765,000 prospective students applying to more than 400 colleges and universities each year, UCAS's website is no stranger to traffic spikes.

With Acquia Cloud Platform and Drupal, UCAS's digital team doesn't have to worry about the site's stability, even during the application season's peak period. The fact that Acquia Cloud Platform is fully managed reduces UCAS's in-house administrative workload and frees staff to work on building value-added services instead.

Since its implementation of Drupal on the Acquia Cloud Platform, there have been no unplanned outages. This improved web stability has enabled UCAS to optimize its significant commercial advertising revenues, too.

The results

100%

uptime rate since the migration to Drupal and Acquia Cloud Platform

95%

student satisfaction rate with UCAS services

Eliminated the need to update and manage on-premises infrastructure

The lesson

A fully managed, cloud-hosted platform can better enable your website to meet growth, traffic, and performance demands while empowering your in-house teams to shift their focus from maintenance to innovation.

Summary & Takeaways

Forward-thinking technology leaders in higher education aren't asking whether or not they need to accelerate their digital transformations. They're not questioning the value of powerful site governance and customer data tools, or asking if they need a CMS that can deliver top-notch performance, meet accessibility requirements, and live up to rigorous security standards.

Instead, they're thinking about how — given their available funding and in-house resources — they can best personalize digital experiences, engage with prospective and current students as well as alumni and donors, and meet researchers' communication needs.

With unrivaled expertise in Drupal — the open source CMS of choice for higher education — Acquia is well-positioned to help colleges and universities address these big challenges.

Acquia's open and composable DXP gives leaders in education the control and flexibility they need to engage today's audiences across many different channels and platforms, and better positions them to tackle tomorrow's challenges.

See How a Digital Experience Platform Gives Modern Educational Institutions an Edge

Find out how Acquia DXP can help your organization improve the experience creation process.

Learn more
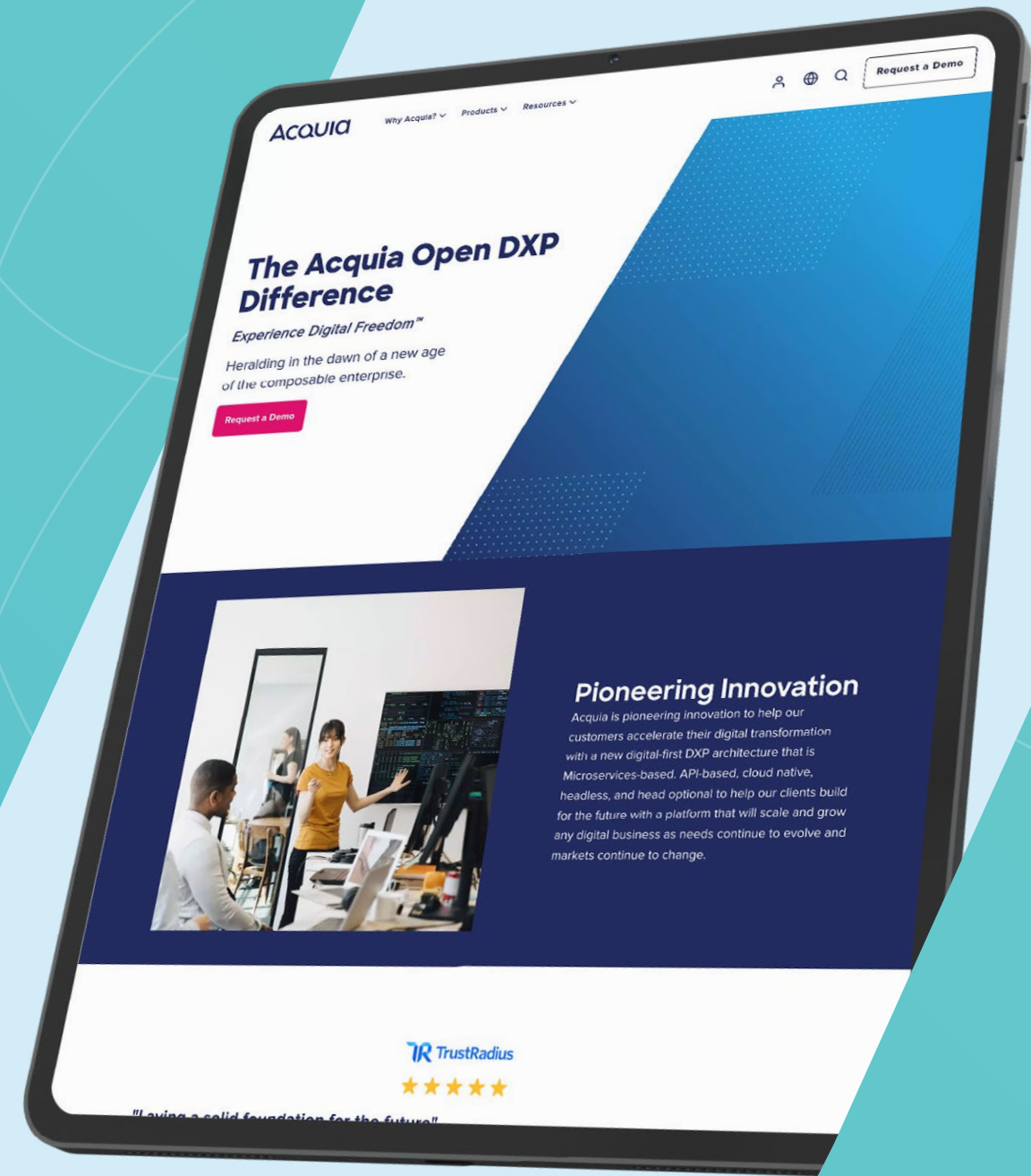
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About Acquia

Acquia empowers the world's most ambitious brands to create digital customer experiences that matter. With open source Drupal at its core, the Acquia Digital Experience Platform (DXP) enables marketers, developers, and IT operations teams at thousands of global organizations to rapidly compose and deploy digital products and services that engage customers, enhance conversions, and help businesses stand out.