



ICW Institute

Integrated Education Management Solutions

Effective and Affordable Education Management For Small to Mid-Sized Learning Providers

What is Education Administration?

Education administration is those activities associated with registering learners, processing payments, supporting curriculum, and providing ongoing care to your present and future clients.

Your customer is at the heart of your business. Whether the learning your organization offers is related to safety, workplace performance or soft skill development, client care and satisfaction is paramount.

Time is a precious resource, and investing time and limited human resources in performing repeatable processes that are easily handled by automation can negatively impact your ability to focus on core business. As a small business providing education, you are torn between hiring a half-time person to manage enquiries, registrations, booking facilities, preparing course syllabi and curriculum supports, or burying yourself in hundreds of repeatable process details. Yet the acquisition, mastering and configuration of an expensive automation suite of software is equally overwhelming.

Education Administration Automation

If you have ever attempted to navigate the purchase of an IT solution you may have felt that you were being “managed” by a technical expert or “coerced by a slick salesman”, neither of whom attempted to understand your true business need. From the expensive to the complex, solutions for managing education administration makes decision-making challenging indeed. From the Learning Management System (LMS) to the Content Management System (CMS), event management software, open source or *software as a service*, the world of affordable automation of education administration can be quite confusing and overwhelming. This is particularly true of the small business owner anxious to stay focused on core business and mission while, at the same time recognizing the need to dramatically reduce administrative effort and improve client relationships.

Unless you are an aspiring new College or University, chances are that your organization seeks to provide just in time skills for adults in the workplace. You need to collect payments, sell space in the classroom, deliver content to support your curriculum, and have enough time to maintain contact with your clients (and perhaps take a few days of annual vacation).



Achieving Success, Losing Contact

The irony is that as a company grows (from one or two employees) success comes with a price: how do we manage our success? The concept of maintaining a single customer point of contact that is responsive, timely and accurate is ideal, but often feels unattainable; especially when our small business begins to grow. In the previous paragraph we mentioned the two approaches to education administration: sales and IT. There's nothing quite like an information technology project to balloon out of control in terms of time, cost and scope.

Conversations related to databases, integration, implementation, all seem to lose sight of the fact that the technology should perform the *heavy lifting associated with increased client loads*, and allow you, the educator to have more time for your core business, your clients.

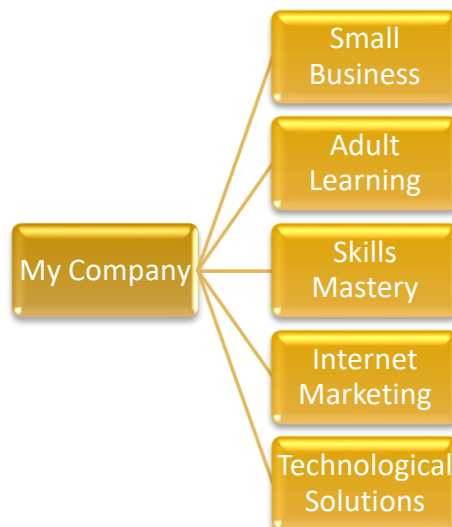
When considering an education administration solution, the real challenge is to decide between non-essential and essential technologies.



Hire or Automate?

Most small education providers already have a web-presence. A website, Facebook page, LinkedIn account and the age-old email account are the generally accepted industry standards. Yet beyond that there is a desire and need to build a powerful administrative back end, but what is essential? And what possible next steps are affordable?

The first step is to seek a solution that combines five elements of an adult learning delivery model. The following diagram illustrates the elements most important in determining essential services and next steps.



Imagine if you choose a provider that is unaware of one or more of the five elements of a solution for your education administration needs. For example, remove adult learning from the equation; you may engage a solution that sees education as merely a product to vend, much like any other commodity, failing to recognize that *learning* is as important as *vending*. Or consider the essential need for adults not just to learn *about a topic*, but to actually master new skills. Alternatively, settling for a solution that lacks the technological power will leave you continuing to carry out needless administrative activities.

We illustrate the ideal situation; one designed for the small business in mind that brings marketing and client acquisition and care to the table.

As the world changes rapidly, the small business owner who provides education to adults must have the support of a technology that will enable agile responses to market opportunities. A new business opportunity emerges; you want to provide learning to a new client. The solution you choose must support your decision to proceed and give you tactical advantage.

Solution Characteristics

Overview

What does an education administration solution look like? What does a solution *do for me and my company*?

Simply stated, it should perform, with ease, the following:

Curriculum Delivery Options

Allows me to deliver blended and online learning options, with seamless integration to my existing course catalogue on my website.

Online Learning Supports

Provides access to publically accessible and password protected *unlimited* content storage and delivery in support of my course offerings.

We Never Close Self Service

Seamlessly integrates my course offerings with a shopping cart, supported by a reputable payment processor, giving my clients 24/7 access to self-serve course purchases.

Curriculum Delivery Options

There is much talk of in-class, online or blended learning these days. For many small organizations providing adult learning workshops, life can be rather one dimensional. Invite the attendees to the workshop location; provide the paper based learning supports used during the session and facilitate the learning. An education administration tool can expand the options for you as a provider by empowering you to deliver a wider range of options. From the traditional in-class session, to blended learning that combines your in-class experience with web-based activities that are creative, engaging and *anytime-is-the-right-time* options. A robust system will even support the addition of purely online learning options for those learning needs that don't require in-class time.

Web-based Learning Supports

Scenario:

Imagine for a moment that you are preparing to deliver a workshop in your city. You prepare three documents: A workshop outline and session overview, a workbook, and a topical article for them to take away as a supporting material to anchor the learning. As you are preparing for the session you discover a *TED Talk*, an interactive online resource, a *GOOGLE Earth* asset to support your learning; all of which would prepare your learners in advance of the workshop session. Ideally the overview would be "public;" several of the items you want to deliver while in-session; and others you want only the "paid participants," to access.

An education administration tool should be able to support your learning plan exactly as described in the scenario above.



Marketing Automation

Scenario:

Take a moment and answer the following questions. If you answer "yes" to more than three of them, you likely need an electronic solution to your education administration needs.

- A staff member or I respond to all calls related to course enquiries.
- Client financial transactions require an action on the part of my staff or me, and clients can only purchase courses during office hours.
- We use web forms to collect information, then we manually process the information submitted.
- Class lists, course syllabi, and certificates of completion are all manually produced.
- Registrants cannot download any learning supports connected to their upcoming session.

- I cannot provide my learners with valuable downloadable or streaming curriculum supports from a secure website.
- If I want to follow up with a former learner and tell them about an upcoming course or special offer, I manually send them an email.
- I don't have an automated system to remind learners of an upcoming session in which they are registered, collect satisfaction surveys or ask about dietary restrictions for in-course meals I provide.

After reading and answering the preceding questions, you may be inclined to think that a fully automated customer relationship management solution reduces the ability for a client or potential client to access you or your staff. It is all in the way in which automation is designed, and the level of one-on-one contact you wish to have. At first glance, marketing automation may create the mental image of endless spam-filled emails landing in your clients' email inboxes. With the increased anti-spam legislation, and with your good reputation on the line, this could not be further from the truth.

Taking care to align your marketing strategy with your corporate mission to provide learning will ensure that automation or your processes does not distance you from client contact. In fact, automation of repeatable processes will increase the time you have to work on essentials such as course development, client acquisition and delivery. Simply stated, automation enables the small learning provider to grow and maintain a high level of accessibility.

Conclusion

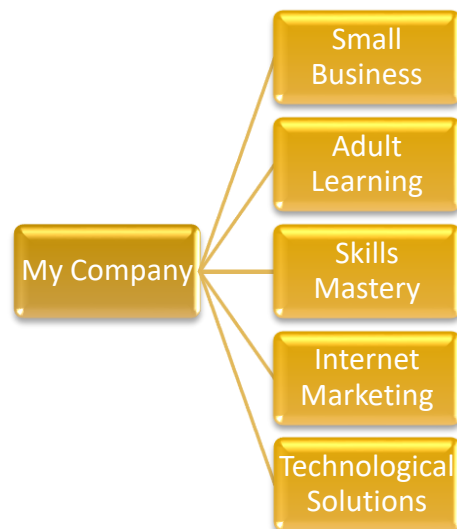
No matter how challenging, integrating your marketing, payment and client management into a single system should be a priority for small education companies today. It provides the support to grow your business, without sacrificing ongoing and meaning interaction with your clients. In the digital world in which we live, automating systems that allow for increased human contact is a business improvement. Personalizing your clients' experience with your company further provides the opportunity to meet their learning needs and thereby increase customer loyalty. The implementation of strategies to automate your small business, when done in such a way as to support existing processes and capitalize on proving new ones, will allow your business to expand and reach new clients.

DIY?

Automation of learning processes may seem like something made for the *do-it-yourself*, entrepreneur. On paper, automating your business likely makes sense and may appear straightforward. However, the complexity around mastering software, capturing business processes for the purpose of automation, and running a business at the same can be an overwhelming task. Set up of the automated processes, creating emails, sequencing, are all time consuming and complex steps. Once up and running, it might seem like "everything just

runs itself,” but in reality, ongoing support will always be needed to ensure the kinds of desired outcomes are being achieved.

Remember the following diagram? *My company* is your primary concern; the provider of automation is concerned with implementing best practices for the elements on the right in support of your business.



What's Next?

Developing a long term plan will be the best strategy for ensuring long term growth and success. Unlike the vendor at the conference mentioned a previous scenario, education administration automation requires long term planning and continuous improvement. Get started, work with your provider and grow into a preferred future.

To quote Howard Schultz, founder of *Starbucks...Onward!*

Call or write! We would love to chat about your learning management needs.