

All in the Family: Utilizing Shared Resources Across Campuses

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ABSTRACT

Utilizing available resources in a University environment is a challenging venture. Technology support professionals are constantly faced with too little time and money and too much demand for those resources. This paper will describe how the campuses of Louisiana State University (LSU) and Louisiana State University's Pennington Biomedical Research Center (PBRC) came together to share resources in order to efficiently meet demand from the customers they served as well as support and train their own technology analysts. The shared resources accomplished by this collaboration were:

1. Licensing:
 - With master licensing contracts negotiated by Louisiana State University, the Pennington Campus was able to save time and money.
 - Support managers are able to compare vendors and benchmark costs.
2. Students:
 - Support managers share procedures for hiring, promoting, and terminating new students as well as evaluation and motivational tactics.
 - Student resumes are shared based on job description and position availability.
3. Training:
 - Managers from the satellite campus attend training at LSU's main campus to observe and gather materials to use for training at PBRC's campus.
 - PBRC's campus is without a training facility; therefore, the student workers are trained through the START program on LSU's campus.

4. Applications:

- Researching new technology such as NetMeeting, VMWare, Wireless devices.
- Troubleshooting existing technology shared between the two campuses.

Support managers from the two institutions meet once a month for a round table discussion to communicate issues that may be of burden or concern. From these monthly meetings, the managers gain ideas and solutions. In the process, these shared resources save time and money.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

K.6.1 [Project and People Management]: Staffing, Training, Management Techniques.

General Terms: Management, Measurement, Documentation, Performance, Design, Economics, Reliability, Standardization.

Keywords: Software Licensing, Support, Operations, Help Desk, Training, Applications.

1. INTRODUCTION

Louisiana State University and Pennington Biomedical Research Center began collaborating two years ago on various aspects of Help Desk operations and procedures. Licensing issues, student worker policy and procedures, training curriculums, and applications designed to enhance productivity were several issues discussed between the two organizations.

2. LICENSING

Louisiana State University participates in several site wide software contracts. In order to save time and money, for example, LSU negotiated a master Microsoft licensing agreement Pennington campus was able to obtain volume licensing through this master agreement. Not only were their costs reduced because of the volume discount, but administrative costs were reduced as well.

Software pricing, vendor relationships, and benchmarking were issues discussed between the two organizations. Information sharing has greatly reduced both organizations software related expenses. Both sites share vendor information and pricing for titles not

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covered by master agreements or site licenses. For example, Pennington software purchases were being made through one specific vendor. This vendor information was shared with the main campus for price comparison from their current vendors.

3. STUDENTS

The Computing Services Departments at both sites hire student workers on a regular basis. The recruitment and hiring process can consume many hours of each manager's daily schedule. When a manager is preparing to fill a new student worker position, they contact the other campus for possible qualified candidates. Since the job responsibilities of both campus departments are similar, the managers share the high-quality resumes.

An example of how we share resumes: A student worker at LSU was looking for a more challenging job given that their responsibility at LSU was only phone support. The student worker wanted "hands-on" experience because they would be graduating in about a year. LSU contacted PBRC about the possibility of a job opening in the TSG area. In view of the fact that the student worker had such a high recommendation, a position was created for this person.

During the managers monthly meetings current problems are discussed. Many times the managers provide guidance to each other in regard to handling problem student workers. The PBRC manager was having problems motivating a lazy student worker. At one of our monthly meetings, the PBRC manager discussed the lazy student worker. Suggestions were given on ways to motivate the lazy student worker and how to terminate him if the problem was not resolved. We also discuss various ways to motivate our student workers on a daily basis.

4. TRAINING

A successful support center is attributed to the knowledge and quality that the support center staff possesses. To keep the quality up to par, training is a major influence. Both Pennington Biomedical and LSU campuses have their own training agenda for their support center employees. As technology advances and internal procedures change, training becomes an ongoing endeavor. Managers and trainers from the two campuses have discussed the pros and cons of various training techniques as well as sharing training programs. For instance, the main LSU campus offers a training program for student workers who are affiliated with LSU. This program is a week long training course that covers various technical support aspects such as customer service, networking, hardware, software, etc. Pennington has taken advantage of this program by sending all of their new student hires to attend this training.

Pennington has shared the video training concept to the LSU helpdesk in which PowerPoint slides are correlated with captured video to represent a training video. By having the students view the video on their own time, the obstacle of scheduling training time, and a training facility are eliminated. By sharing these resources, both campuses have benefited from increased and efficient training at little or no cost.

5. APPLICATIONS

LSU and PBRC have been researching software and hardware solutions to increase the quality and efficiency of the various

operations of the help desk. We realized that taking advantage of the overlapping efforts of the two campuses would help optimize the resources of both organizations. For example, PBRC was using Nextel radios to communicate with support technicians, whether they were in the field or in the office. After discussing the effectiveness of radio use with PBRC, LSU researched different options for 2-way radios and began utilizing this technology. This enabled support technicians at the Help Desk to stay in contact with field technicians from anywhere on the campus.

Several different Operating Systems are prevalent on the LSU Campus. In order to support customers effectively, the LSU OCS Help Desk began utilizing VMWare's workstation software. This application allows the OCS Help Desk representatives to view the same operating system that the customer is using. This helped increase customer satisfaction and decrease problem resolution time. The use of this application was shared with PBRC analyst and researched by one of the PBRC Help Desk student representatives. Support staff at PBRC continues to weigh the benefits and risks of this application and hope to implement this technology to help improve similar situations at PBRC.

LSU began utilizing Microsoft NetMeeting as a way to provide remote assistance to customers on the LSU campus. Initial testing took place between OCS Help Desk management staff and PBRC Help Desk analysts. PBRC began to research the benefits of using the same application within their organization. PBRC technical staff now uses the NetMeeting server to support their end users. NetMeeting is used between LSU and PBRC to test and troubleshoot an application before introducing it to the end - users. This testing allowed both campuses to become more aware of the limitations of software packages and to learn the "workarounds" that are occasionally needed. Yet again, optimizing the research and development of the two organizations definitely benefits both Help Desks.

LSU is working on the implementation of PDA technology to communicate with support technicians in the field. PBRC is monitoring this PDA project while researching the use of wireless Tablet PCs in a similar manner. With each campus working on the implementation of different wireless solutions, we will be able to take advantage of each other's research. Our environments are different in some ways and we will not always be able to use the same solutions but we will be able to benefit from each other's research.

6. CONCLUSION

Information and Resource sharing in any environment can lead to better quality and efficiency in work flows. Louisiana State University and Pennington Biomedical Research Center have combined the two in order to develop superior service and support to the customers on their respective campus's. Both Louisiana State University and Pennington Biomedical Research Center's Help Desk support groups continue to collaborate and share and have benefited tremendously with increased customer satisfaction and reduced student worker turnover rates. We expect future results to follow an upward trend as we continue to strive for excellent customer service and satisfaction.