

# Marketing Computer Support Services through Relationship and Training Strategies

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## ABSTRACT

In 2002, Harvard University's Division of Continuing Education (DCE) expanded its computer lab facility. This expansion allowed DCE to change its previous policy of restricting computer services to a small percentage of students to its current policy of extending these services to all DCE students.

This flexibility enabled DCE's Institute for English Language (IEL) to change its previous position of assuming that all students did not have access to computer technology to its new position of assuming all students have access to computer technology. This new position has expanded the way IEL courses can be taught and managed.

Church Street Staff initiated the building of relationships with IEL instructors to empower them with the skills and knowledge to infuse more technology into their courses.

Church Street Staff organized and hosted a colloquium for IEL instructors in which they showcased services focused on a Harvard-developed instructional development Instructor's Toolkit.

Main contacts for future support constituted the colloquium organization team. Team members conducted various parts of the colloquium to begin the process of building relationships with the instructors.

The lab staff arranged bi-monthly follow-up training in the Instructor's Toolkit to a targeted cohort of IEL instructors. These instructors would then serve as peer mentors to their colleagues. The bi-monthly training culminated in a launch week in which the lab

staff focused their attention on one-on-one help for the IEL instructors to launch their course websites.

The success of the campaign was determined by the percentage of full-time instructors using email, website, bulletin board, and announcement tool as management and pedagogical tools complementing the classroom instruction.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

K—Computing Milieu; kK.3—Computers in Education; K.3.1—Computer Uses in Education; K.3.m—miscellaneous; K.3; H.5—Information Interfaces and Presentation; H.5.2—User Interfaces

## General Terms

Management, Measurement, Documentation, Performance, Design, Reliability, Experimentation, Human Factors, Standardization

## Keywords

Marketing, Training, Faculty Development, Course Management, Instructional Technology, Customer Relationship Management, Workshops

## 1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

Harvard University comprises 11 schools including the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), enrolls 19,617 degree students, and employs 11,808 staff and 1,956 faculty members (excluding the Faculty of Medicine).

The Division of Continuing Education (DCE) is an affiliate of the FAS. It started in 1876 with the mission to provide a Harvard education to the local community. DCE grants Bachelor and Master degrees, as well as post-baccalaureate certificates. DCE enrolls 18,700 students, employs 111 staff and 202 instructors.

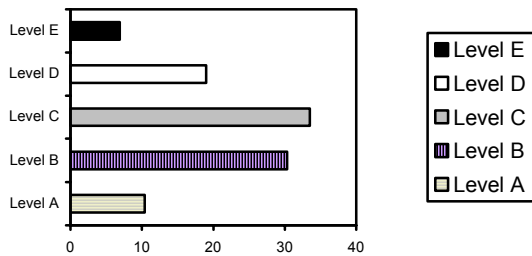
The Institute for English Language (IEL) is directed by Dr. Lillith Haynes, and is a department within DCE. It is best understood as an "English as a Second Language" department. IEL runs programs

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ranging from beginner English for non-native speakers who are underprivileged and work multiple jobs, to business communication for executives who are non-native English speakers. IEL enrolls approximately 2,000 students representing nearly 80 countries and employs 8 full-time Instructors and about 30 part-time instructors, depending on term.

The DCE and IEL run programs in 3 terms: Fall, Spring and Summer. The fall and spring courses run 13 weeks each, and the summer courses generally run for 8 weeks. IEL's programs are divided into 5 levels A through E with A being beginner and E being most advanced. The following figure shows the distribution of enrollments across levels for the 2001-2002 year.



**Figure 1. Distribution of enrollments across levels for the Year 2000-2001**

Computer services and support for students in the DCE are a bit complicated. Four groups combine to supply services and support: Harvard's University Information Systems (UIS), The Faculty of Arts and Sciences' Harvard Arts and Sciences' Computer Services (HASCs), DCE's Management Information Systems (MIS), and DCE's Academic Computing (AC). The authors of this paper are members of DCE's Academic Computing.

UIS supplies unique identification numbers and central authentication of computer users. HASCs provides email, computer space, websites, computer laboratories, course management tools, and user services to students and instructors that fall under the FAS umbrella. DCE's Academic Computing and HASCs provide overlapping services for DCE students and instructors (see Table 1).

DCE's Academic Computing maintains five computer laboratory sites. Four of the sites are smaller, satellite sites with up to 40 machines. The main site is at the Church Street facility, which houses sub-labs. Adaptive Technology, Multimedia, dual-boot Mac OSX and OS9, Windows XP, Redhat Linux, Distance Education, Experimental and laptop teaching labs constitute the labs at the Church Street site. Most of the Academic Computing staff work at the Church Street site. Academic Computing employs ten full-time staff and 35 part-time staff.

Most students are confused by, or unaware of, the computer services provided, and most of the instructors are not clear enough about the nature of the services to help them.

### 1.1 Motivation

The Church Street site underwent extensive renovation and expansion. The extra space and services permitted policy changes at the Church Street site and within IEL. Church Street staff wanted to

make sure all resources were optimized, primarily by getting more students into the labs to do course-related work.

	UIS	FAS	MIS	AC	SysAd
<b>PIN</b>	x		x		x
<b>Email</b>		x	x	x	
<b>Drop box</b>		x		x	x
<b>Access Card</b>	x			x	

In 2000-2001 the Church Street site underwent a \$6 million plus renovation, tripling its size and expanding the number of services. Prior to renovation, the Church Street site had limited capacity and consequently had to restrict access to a subset of DCE students. Students were granted access based on two criteria. Any student in a degree or certificate program or in a computer-related course was granted access. An instructor who wanted his course classified as computer-related made such a request on his course application form. The Head of Technology for DCE, Dean Henry Leitner, reviews the requests and grants or denies them. Prior to the lifting of restrictions, about 15% of all students received computer services.

The renovation and expansion of the Church Street site allowed Academic Computing to lift the restriction on students and permit all DCE students access to the facility. Church Street staff was wary of the potentially overwhelming increase in demand for computer services. Without any marketing, there was a 40% demand increase for computer services. Church Street staff decided not to announce the restriction lift to all students immediately, but to market it in scheduled blocks to specific sections of the DCE community.

The Church Street Staff decided that the first of these target sections would be IEL, for the following reasons. IEL is the most clearly defined group of students and instructors. It is the only group that has full-time instructors, and we speculated students taking IEL courses were unlikely to be taking other courses, preferring instead to focus on building their English skills.

The IEL director had established a policy that no instructor could assume his students had access to technology. Relaxing of restricted access to the Church Street site enabled IEL to amend this policy as all students now have access to technology at the Church Street site. Instructors could now incorporate technology into their IEL courses.

These two policy changes, Church Street lifting access restrictions to its site and IEL allowing instructors to incorporate technology in their teaching, encouraged Church Street to focus on this group to expand use of Academic Computing's resources.

### 1.2 The FAS environment

As of summer session 2003, every IEL class has a dynamically generated default home page containing basic information such as course title, description, instructor's name, schedule and location.

Every DCE student and instructor is eligible to activate an FAS account, which includes e-mail, 100 MB of storage space, and web hosting.

Instructors may request an authentication PIN. This PIN authorizes them to carry out a number of operations in the Instructor's Toolkit.

### 1.3 The Instructor's Toolkit

Harvard's Instructional Computer Group (ICG) has developed a set of tools, The Instructor's Toolkit, to allow the easy creation and maintenance of course Web Pages. By default, only the head instructor can access the Instructor's Toolkit for his class. To ensure the secure use of this application, an ID and PIN number are requested to login. The instructors can access the Instructor's Toolkit by launching a browser from any location.

The Instructor's Toolkit offers a variety of tools for the teacher to implement. Based on the interests of the IEL instructors as evidenced on the first survey, we focused on three tools: syllabus posting, announcements, and bulletin board.

- **The Syllabus** posting tool consists of a folder where the instructor can upload the course syllabus in different formats.
- **The Announcements** tool allows the instructor to post notices to the students on the main page of the Web Site. These announcements can be prepared in advance and dated for automatic display at the convenience of the instructor.
- **The Bulletin Board** allows teachers to post different topics and/or readings that can be used to inform students or fuel class discussions. The students can post responses to pre-existing topics or create new topics. In addition, attachments can be uploaded and links posted. The instructors choose the privileges that the students can have in different areas of the board (post, read only, upload files, create folders). By default, the head instructor is the only one with administrator's privileges and hence can delete any postings at any time.

To add these tools to the Web Page, the instructor simply has to check these choices in a list of available tools. The environment of the Instructor's Toolkit is user-friendly. The user only needs to click on different tabs and links to build the entire Web Site.

Another feature of the Instructor's Toolkit is the possibility of password protecting the entire Web Site (or parts of it).

Because of its robustness, ease of use, and security features, the Instructor's Toolkit was chosen as the tool for IEL instructors to create, develop and maintain their courses' websites. Therefore, our training strategy centered on the use of the Toolkit.

## 2. MARKETING PLAN

The process of developing a marketing plan came in 6 stages:

1. Identify our goals for promoting the resources and services available in the lab.
2. Identify the target customer base.
3. Gain support for our efforts.
4. Establish a marketing strategy.
5. Determine how to measure our success.
6. Schedule strategic launch times.

### 2.1 Goals & Objectives

Our goal was to increase the overall IEL faculty and student traffic to the computer lab. We hypothesized that through faculty's use of technology in the classroom, students would become more aware of

computer services and resources that are available. Faculty, in effect, would become IT ambassadors. Our approach was two-fold. The first was to market our services to IEL instructors and the second was to market our services to IEL students. This paper focuses on the marketing to IEL instructors.

Our objectives were to get the IEL instructors to use the Instructor's Toolkit and use the lab.

### 2.2 Identify the target customer base

Our target customer base was focused on full-time IEL faculty. IEL faculty had already had access to the lab and a few full-time motivated faculty members already expressed interest in using course management tools for their classes. We focused on full-time instructors rather than part-time instructors due to part-time instructors having full-time commitments outside of teaching. Additionally, full-time staff members had demonstrated leadership and therefore could serve as peer mentors to their part-time colleagues.

### 2.3 Gain support for our efforts

The Church Street site was completely renovated in 2001-2002. The award winning lab, with state-of-the-art machinery, new multimedia and adaptive technology labs "wowed" the computer science contingent among the faculty. The success of the renovations, however, did not impact the larger DCE community to the same extent.

Initially, we had to overcome a few obstacles in gaining support to get faculty members to take advantage of the lab and infuse technology into their courses. We needed support from the IEL Director, Instructors, and Lab Manager in order to establish credibility. Some of the obstacles we had to overcome were:

- Our lack of familiarity with best practices on use of technology in the classroom, especially as it related to teaching English as a Second Language.
- The IEL Director's concern of inappropriate use of technology and for quality control.
- Instructors' lack of confidence in technical skills.
- The Lab Manager's concern that our efforts would extend beyond our current support capabilities.

We managed the above obstacles by:

- Restricting our offering to technology rather than pedagogy.
- Meeting with the Director of IEL to establish departmental standards for integrating technology in their courses.
- Holding a colloquium for the Director of IEL and her instructors. We demonstrated how technology could be integrated into the course structure and offered training for them to acquire the necessary technical skills to implement the technology.
- Showing that we would restrict which tools we would offer, and focus on the full-time instructors to act as support for the future.

### 2.4 Establish a marketing strategy

Given the number and confidence level of our audience, we decided that mass mailing and posters would not be the most effective marketing tool. Instead, we decided to establish personal relationships that would create a better learning environment that

would allow the instructors to acquire the technical skills to use the Instructor's Toolkit. We also believed that a personal relationship would create the motivation necessary to complete the training and implement the knowledge acquired.

For us to achieve our goal of instructors using more technology in their courses, they had to expand their skill set which would take time and resources. We supplied the training resources over time. We offered four training workshops in course management software and basic computer skills. At these presentations, we distributed printed brochures, instructional handbooks, and software CDs.

For the instructors to buy in to what we were offering we had to build trust with them by demonstrating our technical expertise at the colloquium and developing personal relationships through informal meetings and discussions.

## 2.5 Determine how to measure our success

We measured success by the percentage of full-time instructors intending to use specific features of the Instructor's Toolkit in the following semester.

In order to determine the instructors' intent, we collected data from anonymous surveys.

## 2.6 Schedule strategic launch times

We launched the seminar series in mid-Spring. While many programs are set to launch right before the beginning of a new semester, the middle of the semester gave us many advantages:

- We had a captive audience who was well into the flow of teaching.
- The instructors could practice building course websites for the summer term so that they had many months lead time to make changes.
- We could offer workshops at a pace that was comfortable for all participants.
- We had time to develop and revise guidelines for instructional web pages as issues arose.

## 3. ACTION & METHODS

### 3.1 Policy Development

Church Street Staff met with the IEL Director and a select group of instructors to develop standards, guidelines, and policies for IEL websites. These policies were adopted into the IEL Instructional Handbook and presented at the final workshop.

### 3.2 Workshops

The Church Street Staff organized a series of workshops in order to introduce IEL instructors to the technology available to them through the lab as well as train them in specific skills oriented towards the creation of course websites. Each workshop lasted for two hours.

**Initial Contact:** A cohort of IEL instructors who were planning an IEL colloquium were invited to discuss ideas and suggestions for giving the colloquium a technology theme. After this meeting the instructors enthusiastically embraced the idea and asked us to organize the colloquium.

### Workshop 1: Colloquium

- Church Street Staff related to this project was introduced to begin the process of building relationships with the instructors.
- A discussion was encouraged where the instructors talked about their needs and expectations.
- Church Street Staff showcased the main elements of the ICG Instructor's Toolkit
- We administered the first survey online.

### Workshop 2: FAS Environment

The instructors were divided in two groups: advanced and beginners. The instructors appointed themselves to each group according to their level of computer knowledge. The same topics were covered across both groups:

- Overview of the different PIN/ID numbers and their different uses in the University.
- Getting a PIN number to use the Instructor's Toolkit.
- Getting a username/password for FAS e-mail accounts.
- Using the FAS e-mail system.
- Discussion about the uses of e-mail in the classroom.

### Workshop 3: Creating a Web Site

- Finding a course URL in the Harvard system
- Accessing the Instructor's Toolkit and general overview of the system's interface.
- Creating PDF files and file management.
- Uploading the syllabus to the site.

### Workshop 4: Additional Tools and Skills

- Using the Announcements tool.
- Creating and managing Bulletin Boards.
- Creating video and audio files
- Presentation and discussion of IEL policies for the creation of course websites.

## 3.3 One-on-one help

The IEL instructors were given the e-mail address of the workshops' instructors to ask questions or request one-on-one help. Nine part-time and three full-time instructors requested and received individualized help.

## 3.4 Surveys

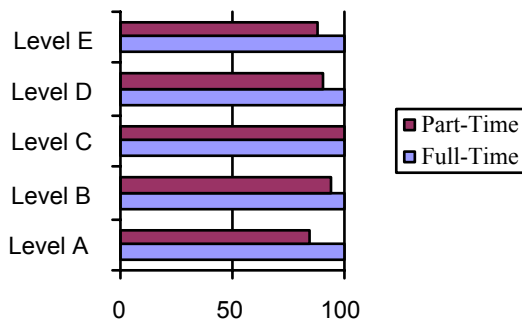
A total of two surveys were conducted to gather information from IEL instructors.

- **Survey 1:** This survey was conducted at the end of Workshop 1. Before leaving the Computer Lab, the instructors completed and submitted an online survey. The objective of this survey was to gather information about the instructors' computer skills, needs and areas of interests. The data collected was used to design and choose the topics of the subsequent workshops. Also, after realizing the differences in computer skills, it was decided to divide the instructors in two groups according to skill level.

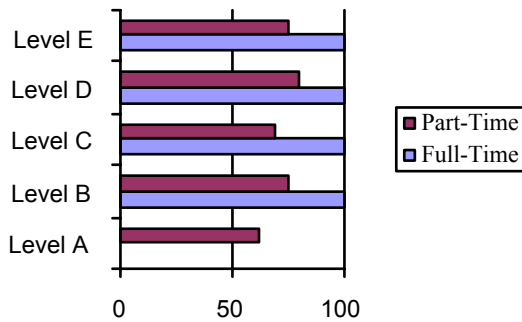
- **Survey 2:** This survey was paper-based and was distributed to each IEL instructor. To assure the validity of the data, this survey was completely anonymous. The purpose of this survey was to provide the Church Street Staff with an assessment of instructors' experiences with the workshops as well as suggestions for future instructional events.

#### 4. OUTCOMES

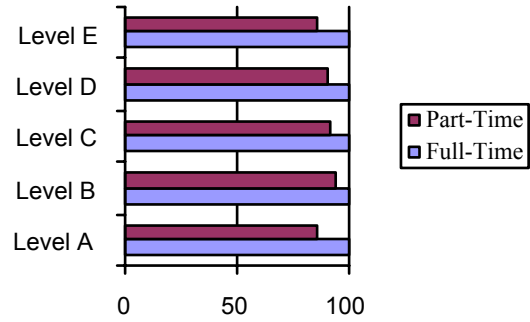
We met our goal of obtaining 100% intended use of e-mail, bulletin board, and announcement tools by full-time instructors using the ICG Instructor's Toolkit (See Figures 3-6). We predicted that once the instructors were exposed to the ICG Instructor's Toolkit, their enthusiasm and willingness to participate would not be difficult to gain. Still, we were pleasantly surprised at achieving a 100% success rate with full-time instructors on each metric. Our results also indicate a very high level of intended use of these tools by part-time instructors.



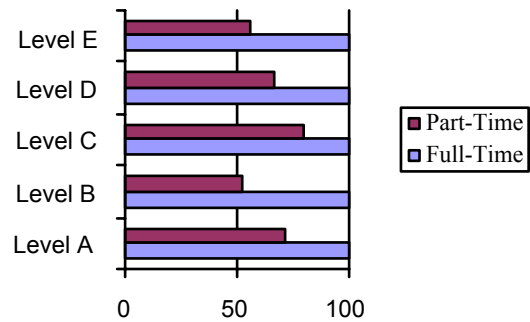
**Figure 2. Percent of instructors who plan to build a course website**



**Figure 3. Percent of instructors who plan to create course Bulletin Boards**

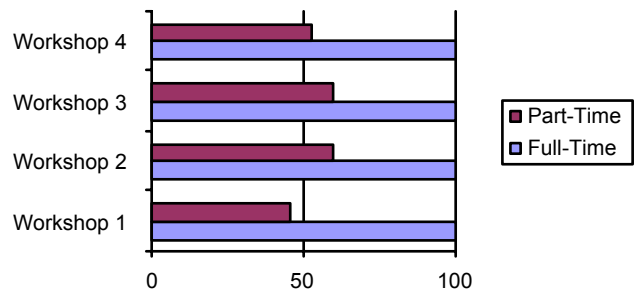


**Figure 4. Percent of instructors who plan to use email as a primary means of communicating with their students**



**Figure 5. Percent of instructors who plan to use the Announcement Tool**

After workshop 2, the Director of IEL made all subsequent workshops mandatory for all instructors. The IEL Director wanted her instructors to acquire a minimum level of technical skill in order to integrate technology into their courses. But our data shows a high level of participation even when attendance was optional. Based on our final survey, the following chart illustrates both part-time and full-time participation levels for each workshop.



**Figure 6. Percent of instructor s who attended workshops**

Some unexpected challenges that we encountered were lack of basic computer skills by some instructors. We also had to manage instructors' apprehension that students' English skills would prevent them from taking full advantage of certain website resources, such

as the Bulletin Board. In addition, the sometimes confusing FAS environment that required PIN authentication, e-mail account activation, etc challenged the instructors. This resulted in some instructors being unable to fully participate in workshops.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Our efforts were hugely successful. Our four metrics corresponding to intended use of e-mail, bulletin board, web site and announcement tool were met. The fact that a third of the IEL instructors called for one-on-one help during and after the workshop series showed the establishment of a relationship and trust as well as the high level of investment of these instructors on the project. The positive response obtained and high level of interest raised even from part-time instructors reflected a high level of buy-in.

The strategy of training and relationship building as a marketing tool has proved to be a successful approach. This approach was so successful that the IEL director adopted the use of technology into the departmental instructional guidelines.

## 6. LESSONS LEARNED

The instructors are hungry for skills and knowledge. Therefore, the Church Street Staff must adopt a proactive attitude to approach departments and faculty members to create a relationship and meet their needs.

Investigate the particular structure of each department more fully. This strategy will allow us to identify internal members of the various departments as potential resources for peer mentoring and dissemination of information.

In the particular case of the IEL department, we learned that the administrative staff is a better source of intradepartmental support than full-time instructors. Administrative staff already had the mechanism to communicate back and forth with instructors. In addition, the IEL director wanted to delegate the responsibility of Web Site quality control to a member of the administrative staff. Therefore, the administrative staff gained an important role in the implementation of the project.

This lesson can be generalized to other departments since most DCE instructors teach part-time and have a more direct communication with the administrative staff of their department than with their teaching peers.

Instructors must be separated more rigorously according to skill level. Self-selection resulted in less than optimal separation of skill sets. Giving the instructors a skill diagnostic test and dividing them according to the results would have been better than self-selection.

Always be prepared to respond to shifts in your customer's needs. Although we were aware that there was a demand for audiovisual skills, we were not aware of how great that demand was. During the course of the workshop series, IEL began investigating the possibility of converting their VHS library to streaming video.

Our support and resources must always be sufficient to satisfy the demand created through our training efforts. IEL instructors expressed that a computer in the classroom would allow them to fully integrate technology to their class. Presently, DCE does not have enough computers to cover all the classes.

## 7. FUTURE PLANS

To finish this first phase of marketing to IEL, we will train IEL's administrative staff and upgrade Church Street support staff's ICG Instructor's Toolkit skills. We will investigate implementing a laptop loaner program or equivalent initiative to overcome the shortage of instructional machines.

Implement the next phase in the IEL marketing plan to address IEL students. In doing so, we will examine whether the strategy of personal relationship building and training can be applied to a larger audience.

In the last survey, IEL instructors indicated that they wanted further training in office productivity software, among other technologies. We assume that instructors in other departments will be interested in similar training, so we plan to put on workshops to meet this demand.

Feedback from our workshops and surveys indicated that students' lack of technical skill would prevent instructors from integrating technology in courses. The Church Street lab staff will investigate putting on workshops in order to help the students acquire these skills.

The resounding success of the IEL effort has encouraged Church Street staff to employ similar strategies with other departments to maximize the use of the lab, quality of the courses, and boost the technical expertise of our students.

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