

Forsyth County Schools "SAFARI Montage as a Learning Object Repository"

Background

Forsyth County Schools is a recognized leader in the implementation of K-12 instructional technology, particularly in the area of digital learning. We have launched a number of initiatives over the past decade, including Bring Your Own Technology in 2009, and we have utilized an LMS since 2001, with an average of 11,000 visits per week. What we at FCS have learned over the years is that a Learning Object Repository (LOR) is the heart of digital learning, serving the same function for digital learning assets that a library serves for traditional textbooks and written material.

The Challenge

In the spring of 2009, Forsyth's cloud-based LMS platform was acquired by another company and an end of life date was announced. This presented the challenge of migration and ongoing management of the more than 12,000 digital resources which FCS teachers and students relied on for daily curriculum. It became clear that what was required in order to serve the digital needs of the Forsyth community was a dedicated Learning Object Repository that was in-house and under our control. We sought to identify a LOR platform whose product development architecture was based on industry standards and whose assets could easily be transitioned if required in the future. A critical factor was to ensure that the new platform strongly supported our BYOT initiative—all objects in the LOR needed to be accessible on a variety of mobile devices, as well as traditional classroom workstations.

The Solution

While Forsyth had been using SAFARI Montage for many years for its streaming video content and lesson reinforcement, the learning object repository was a function that had not been utilized. SAFARI Montage was an attractive LOR solution due to its ability to transfer objects using the Common Cartridge standards – ensuring that asset migration (to or from) the system would forever be hassle-free. With SAFARI's help, Forsyth County Schools migrated 12,000+ digital assets from the previous LMS to the SAFARI Montage LOR in less than a month. Additionally, we imported 7,000 objects which had been identified and meta-tagged but never entered into the previous LMS. With this move, all objects—regardless of type—are now accessible on any platform, while maintaining the meta-data, standards alignments, Digital Rights Management, and all critical information that make the assets relevant teaching tools to our community.

The Learning Impact and Return on Investment

With the move to the SAFARI Montage Learning Object Repository, we have been able to extend learning beyond the school day, and beyond the school year, here at Forsyth. The LOR provides the necessary digital content and the infrastructure for transitioning from paper to digital learning. That impact is measurable in a number of ways: The LOR in SAFARI now houses over 51,000 learning objects identified and created by Forsyth County teachers and students. We have dramatically reduced our spending on textbooks, from about \$3mil per year in 2007 to about \$4-500K currently—a drop of roughly 85%.

Another very important feature of the LOR is the ability to track usage, so we can see that our investment is being accepted and embraced by our staff and students. In our eyes, the return on investment is really a 'return on learning', measured in terms of new learning that is possible. For example, we can confirm that total plays in SAFARI Montage increased by 168% last school year to this year. In-school use went up 130%. But what we really think is meaningful is home use, that is, use of the system from outside the school and on mobile devices. There, usage has exploded— up over 2,000% over last year.

Summary

Increased access equates to increased engagement and increased learning. The SAFARI Montage Learning Object Repository now in place at FCS provides much faster access to digital resources, which results in less time waiting and more time being engaged in the learning process. On the whole, the move to a dedicated LOR has had a dramatic impact on teaching and learning in Forsyth County Schools, providing fast, secure, and reliable access to our growing collection of digital resources.