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# CASE STUDY: TPC TRAINING SYSTEMS

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Andrew Kauser – VP of Marketing and Product Development

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## About TPC Training Systems

TPC Training Systems is the recognized leader in industrial skills and safety training. Since 1969, TPC Training Systems has built itself a proven track record of helping thousands of customers, and millions of skilled workers, build industrial skills and safety knowledge through its training programs. TPC's training solutions are used by enterprises small, medium and large including 3M, Boeing, and BP.

## Issues & Problems

Until 2001, TPC delivered its technical skills training using several formats. These formats included instructor led courses, paper based self-study workbooks, as well as the TPC Learning Manager™. The TPC Learning Manager™ is a proprietary LMS platform facilitating the delivery of TPC's courseware on in-house computers. Courseware was delivered on CD-ROMs or mass storage devices. TPC Learning Manager™ supported both networked client-server and standalone configurations.

TPC encountered many issues with these methods of delivery:

- The biggest issue for TPC - as with most other training publishers - was to make their training as available as possible.
- With the solutions that were available at the time, TPC had to keep a development team on board to assist its clients with installations, management and the support of the application.
- The learning departments of large clients often had a difficult time getting the attention of their IT departments, to help with the setup and maintenance of TPC's Learning Manager software.
- TPC's clients spent a lot of time installing and managing the software on their various computers.
- New operating system releases posed the ongoing task of maintaining the Learning Manager software, to ensure reliable delivery of courseware.
- TPC's revenue streams were irregular, as most current delivery methods were one-time purchases.
- TPC had little visibility and control over what happened with its course material, once it was shipped out to clients.
- The client-server model was declining in popularity, and was on the verge of being replaced by online courseware and other modes of delivery. TPC wanted to make online courses available to its clients, but did not have a way to deliver them.
- TPC needed a system that enabled it to distribute its content easily, but it had to be one that was designed for a publishing company, rather than a solution for an end-user company that only trains internally.
- A solution was required that accommodated the unique structures of very small and very large organizations.

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## The Major Issues

The points above are all relevant issues that TPC faced. Several issues were of greater importance than others. These are explained in the paragraphs below.

As with all training publishers, TPC needed to make its training materials as available and easily accessible as possible. TPC's clients also needed the ability to track the use and effectiveness of their training. Online delivery became more prevalent in the training industry. The next step for TPC was to acquire or build a learning management system (LMS) that allowed TPC to distribute its courseware more effectively.

TPC searched the market for a suitable LMS and found that many were available in the industry. Most existing systems were primarily designed to enable companies to deliver courseware internally. This would have required TPC to set up a separate instance of the application for each client, which would have become a management nightmare. TPC had examined the option of purchasing a large LMS, such as Oracle's, but that would have forced it into a rather common and expensive solution, which did not accommodate the unique needs of a training publisher like TPC.

Some of TPC's clients encountered problems, as their training department had a difficult time getting the attention of their own IT department. Managing the training software on multiple computers thus became an expensive endeavor, entailing high labor costs.

Instead, TPC required a system that allowed it to easily manage its client base, and add clients as seamlessly as possible. Many large companies already had an LMS in place, and were unlikely to purchase a second system. Simply providing TPC's clients with courseware, to run on their own LMS, would mean that TPC would lose control and visibility over the use of its courseware once again. TPC therefore needed a system that could interface with the systems that were already in place at large companies.

## Overcoming Challenges with Firmwater's Solution

TPC turned to Firmwater as it was familiar with the expertise of Firmwater's partners in the development of learning management and knowledge assessment systems.

Firmwater proposed a unique solution, ideal for a training provider like TPC: a multi-tenant learning management system that was based on the then emerging SCORM 2004 standard. This system integrates the capability of managing multiple business clients, with the functionalities of an online learning management system.

The Firmwater LMS allows TPC to manage all current clients and effortlessly add new clients, all in one application. Each new client receives their own portal, with the capability to customize the look and feel of the user interface, as well as to integrate with existing systems such as a website or an ERP system.

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This solution is offered on a Software as a Service model (SaaS). The application is hosted and maintained by Firmwater. With online delivery, TPC is able to offer its training 24/7 to geographically distant locations, making it easily accessible. The SaaS model shifts TPC's revenue stream from single purchases to monthly subscription fees.

The Firmwater LMS is based on the SCORM 2004 industry standard. This allows TPC to track how its clients use its courseware as well as the LMS itself. TPC is now able to keep track of its own courseware, and is in full control over who has access to its training. The data gathered by the LMS provides TPC with proof that its training is actively used by employees. Tracking of completion scores shows that employees learn the items that are set as goals. This provides TPC with solid evidence to better sell the value of its training programs.

SCORM 2004 also makes it possible to restructure training content in ways that match the unique needs of each of TPC's clients. Using Firmwater LMS, administrators can take out and reorder sections of the training content to accommodate the requirements of each new user group. Adding in new documents, such as a unique training manual, is easily accomplished. This not only saves TPC time, but allows it to provide even more customized training services to each client.

As TPC creates its training content based on the SCORM 2004 standard, it is capable of playing its training courses on any LMS compliant with the standard. This makes it possible for TPC to target large companies that already own their own LMS solution, and are otherwise unlikely to purchase a second system.

TPC now has a way to service large clients with this LMS solution. Firmwater LMS provides a way for other systems to launch content within the application, and then send back the results to TPC's client's LMS. That allows TPC to retain visibility and control over what happened with its content, while being able to service all of its clients. Firmwater LMS is capable of mirroring organizational structures of very complex companies, therefore permitting TPC to service organizations of all sizes.

TPC receives great feedback as it introduces its clients to the Firmwater LMS. Some large clients previously worked with simplified versions of Oracle's LMS. They are amazed at the intuitive and easy to use interface of Firmwater LMS. These large clients switched over to Firmwater LMS as soon as they could.

## **Benefits of Choosing Firmwater LMS**

Even today, TPC employs the Firmwater LMS and makes its training content available via the web. Not only can TPC manage its whole client base from a single system, but adding new clients is seamless. TPC now has full visibility and control over the use of its training content.

Firmwater LMS directly affects TPC's bottom line:

- TPC's training is available 24/7 to anywhere globally, at the convenience of its clients.

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- The unique multi-tenant model allows TPC to conveniently administer all its business clients from one interface.
- TPC only needs half as much support staff as with other LMS solutions, because Firmwater LMS is extremely user friendly.
- Revenue flow has become continuous and more predictable as they moved online. Now 50% of their online revenue is annually renewable.
- Because Firmwater LMS is a SaaS system, TPC can now operate without an internal IT department.
- The information gathered by the Firmwater LMS provides TPC with strong evidence for the value of its training programs, making it easier to sell more courses.
- Firmwater LMS makes it very easy to bring on new clients and manage them seamlessly.
- As the application is managed by Firmwater's team of specialists, TPC's clients rarely need to involve their IT department anymore.
- TPC regained control and visibility over how its training is used in client organizations.
- TPC's client satisfaction increased and support calls decreased due to the extremely easy to use Firmwater LMS interface.
- Customizing courseware to match the needs of new user groups became effortless, and increased customer satisfaction.
- Firmwater LMS interfaces with TPC's clients' systems, allowing TPC to sell and deliver its training to large organizations that already own a LMS.

With the Firmwater LMS in place, TPC Training Systems acquired a reliable and scalable solution which will continue to provide TPC with unmatched functionality to grow its client base.

## Testimonial:

“By using Firmwater LMS, we have been able to grow our business substantially. In a span of three years, from September 05 to September 08, we have grown our business from 6 clients to 127 clients, and from 184 users to 23,747 users. We were able to do this with one full time administrator, and one part time administrator. And we do not have or need an IT department. Forecasting has become much easier also, as 50% of our online training has become annually renewable.”

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