D2L demonstrates its passion for pedagogy
Ovum view

Summary

Technology alone is not a game changer. Rather, an institution's pedagogical goals and overall strategy will lead to improved educational outcomes. Higher education institutions that encourage faculty to first develop their curriculum and a strategy for how to execute it, and then use technology as an aid to that strategy, are more likely to enhance the process of teaching and learning and improve student engagement. D2L advocates and supports this theory. Although D2L is a technology provider, it does not end there. The company has a strong focus on pedagogy and enhanced learning experiences. With this in mind, D2L’s online learning platform (OLP), Brightspace, has grown into a robust learning enhancement system (as opposed to a management system) that truly has the power to improve teaching and learning.

Innovation and quality are important, as is a long-term relationship

The findings of Ovum's 2015/16 ICT Enterprise Insights survey show that quality and innovation are the most important factors for more than 50% of institutions when selecting a learning management system (LMS). Quality and innovation are almost equally valued, with approximately 30% of institutions choosing quality and almost 30% of institutions choosing innovation before other criteria such as cost and delivery model. Selecting solutions based on perceptions of product quality and innovation is an indication of the long-term commitment and investment that institutions are looking to make. Furthermore, institutions will require partners that are investing in the quality and innovations to support institutional processes. In Ovum's view, vendors serving the higher education industry must have the vision and the capability to deliver the type of solutions that institutions need today, and to future-proof their investments so that they will meet the requirements of tomorrow.

Equally as important to innovative and high-quality solutions is a vendor's investment in the long-term relationship. Vendors must become partners that have an interest in working collaboratively with institutions over the long term, rather than being focused on short-term gains in sales. At the end of the day, it's the relationships built through strategic alliances based on the long term that will help both institutions and vendors to be successful.

Education, education, education – the heart of D2L

To reiterate, D2L is a technology provider. However, at its heart is its passion for education and advancing pedagogy for its customers. Announcements made by D2L at its recent education conference, Fusion 2016 – which had more than 1,000 attendees from around the world, 30 partners, and 150 breakout sessions – provide evidence of the company's continuing commitment to education and providing the tools to advance teaching and learning. With approximately 25% of attendees joining Fusion for the first time, D2L was keen to make an impression. The company started the conference on the right foot by strategically including several customer success stories in its opening keynote. This resonated well with attendees because it shifted from a product to an education focus. Ovum believes that too many vendors miss out on significant value from partnerships in terms of vocal reference accounts, and without these, vendors will find it difficult to advance in the industry.
D2L demonstrates its passion for pedagogy

Though of course, as with any vendor end-user conference, some new products and improvements were revealed. Firstly, D2L unveiled the new features and functionality – mostly associated with video, social, mobile, game-based learning, and learning analytics – of the Summer16 release of Brightspace. Secondly, in Summer16, customers will be able to pilot the new user experience, the Brightspace Daylight Experience, for the Brightspace Learning Environment. The new experience has been optimized to work on any mobile device. Finally, completing the video-based capabilities of the Brightspace platform, D2L announced a new partnership with YouSeeU to deliver a Virtual Classroom from within the Brightspace Learning Environment.

In Ovum's view, in order for D2L to continue to provide next-generation tools to advance teaching and learning, institutions should be as vocal as possible about their requirements. D2L provides channels for this, such as the Product Ideas Exchange on the Brightspace Community, and should continue to open up these avenues. After all, being candid about challenges gives vendors an insight into what institutions face and allows them to brainstorm ways to help surmount those challenges.

Engage with vendors that truly understand pedagogy

Institutions are not increasing and future-proofing their investments in technology for the sake of what their peers are doing. After all, technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Rather, they are leveraging technology to support critical institutional objectives. Without a deep understanding of not only these objectives, but also wider higher education dynamics, a vendor remains a vendor, and not a partner to help fulfil goals. Continuously improving pedagogy is without doubt one of many institutional objectives. Therefore, institutions must engage with vendor partners that truly understand pedagogy and provide solutions and services to enhance the teaching and learning experience.

Given D2L's strong reputation for understanding the needs of institutions, and the recent additions to its product set, the company is well positioned to support effective pedagogy and enhance the learning experience. This puts pressure on its competitors to be more than just technology companies, and instead be true partners of higher education.

Appendix

Further reading


"Hitting the Sweet Spot for Cloud Deployment in Higher Education," IT0008-000888 (May 2016)

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We hope that this analysis will help you make informed and imaginative business decisions. If you have further requirements, Ovum’s consulting team may be able to help you. For more information about Ovum’s consulting capabilities, please contact us directly at consulting@ovum.com.

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