



LMS Case Study



PetStorePro.com



Pet Industry Distributors Associations

In effort to improve education delivery, PIDA embraces a Cloud-based learning management system to help members educate customers

Business Need

The Pet Industry Distributors Association (PIDA) was organized in 1968 to promote progress within the pet industry and to conduct programs and activities on behalf of the wholesaler-distributor. Its mission is to enhance the well-being of the wholesaler-distributor, to promote partnerships with suppliers and customers and to work cooperatively with other organizations in fostering the human/companion animal bond.

Realizing early that the sales associates at retail pet outlets require training to deliver exceptional customer service and to maximize profitability and employee retention, in 2008, PIDA introduced Pet Store Pro. The online education program is targeted at pet retailers, its members' customers, and is provided at no charge. Pet Store Pro includes courses on customer service and sales, merchandising techniques, pet nutrition and in-store animal care for the species most commonly sold in pet stores.

Initially, PIDA opted to deploy a learning management system (LMS) from another association that appeared to have similar requirements for its LMS.

The organization that they purchased the LMS from had developed it from scratch to meet its members' needs.

As Pet Store Pro's user base grew, it became apparent that the system would require a significant amount of customization to address features that PIDA determined to be important for the continued success of the program. Adding a new course was laborious, record keeping was a challenge and the reporting functions left a great deal to be desired. The system did not offer support for adding brief video clips to instruct students how to manage tasks associated with typical pet store operations. Nor did it support automated messaging to users, another feature that was considered desirable to PIDA.

In short, PIDA knew there must be a better option to educate and improve the learning environment for sales associates at pet stores.

Solution

PIDA seeks better model to educate members' customers

PIDA offers Pet Store Pro at no charge to any qualified pet store, a very large potential market. To minimize the

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financial risk associated with delivering the program to an unknown number of users, PIDA sought a robust LMS that offered the features they knew they needed with no per user fees. Working through an independent broker, they soon were evaluating Latitude Learning's LMS.

"We liked everything we saw with Latitude Learning's LMS," said PIDA's Director of Online Education, Stephanie Kaplan.

The LMS had many of the features they wanted; with the option to custom develop additional functionality.

Following up with current Latitude Learning customers proved that its product was effective and the company's support team was keen on providing excellent customer service – two considerations that were key to PIDA's decision making.

"We liked everything we saw with Latitude Learning's LMS," said PIDA's Director of Online Education, Stephanie Kaplan. "We were pleased with the interface, the controls were more streamlined, we were able to control and monitor which classes were taken and it was SCORM compliant. Something we neglected to require in our first LMS."

Results

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More robust features and functionality attractive attributes

The new program was re-launched in March 2011 with the same name but with more user-friendly features. In addition to having a more appealing and intuitive graphical user interface (GUI), PIDA moved the certificate printing from the association to individual stores, minimizing staff time for PIDA to manage the program.



Pet store employees found the Pet Store Pro interface, a customized version built on top of Latitude Learning's standard LMS platform, to be easily navigated, even for the less computer-savvy users. And store owners and managers were now able to easily track student progress; they could see where someone started, stopped and restarted, as well as monitor assessment performance.

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From the perspective of pet store owners and managers, the new system encouraged usage by the employees and resulted in a higher level of expertise and improved customer service.

For PIDA, they were able to leverage the Latitude Learning LMS template and customize the interface to reflect the organization's needs and match the level of the sales associates' computer expertise. As one example of additional benefits, PIDA's database included a sizeable number of duplicates, resulting in confusion over exactly how many stores were using the program. The new registration process compares registering stores' addresses and phone numbers against the database to prevent duplicate entries.

Improved user demographics allow PIDA to track users by type of store and products sold. Although designed primarily for use by independent stores, the program is also used by sales associates from a number of chains and franchise sales associates to supplement corporate training resources.

"Pet Store Pro is filled with in-depth information — from selling skills to animal care — that benefits every employee from new hires to seasoned pros," said Linda Morrison, J&M

Aquatics and Pet Center, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Benefits extend to workers, management and customers

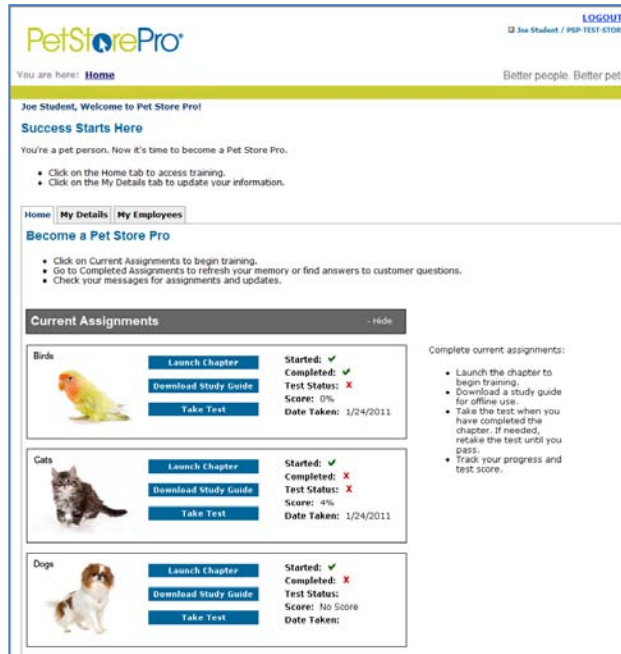
Many pet retailers rely on young workers who love animals but don't have a great deal of sales experience. Pet Store Pro helps prepare these

employees to answer questions related to pet health, nutrition and care.

The educational program helps stores:

- Retain workers longer
- Provide additional value to the customers through improved service
- Improve the professionalism of the staff

In an industry that has done relatively well in a difficult economy, Pet Store Pro has helped sales associates and management meet the expectations of customers seeking expert advice and attentive customer service — and ensured continued success in the retail marketplace.



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