Canberra Institute of Technology

CIT is modernizing payments with Ellucian Payment Center by TouchNet

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) is a vocational education institution serving more than 25,000 students across four campuses in Canberra, Australia, and two additional learning centers in the Australian Capital Territory. After years of challenges associated with a legacy payment processing system, CFO Karl Caig initiated an effort to modernize. As an Ellucian Banner school, they turned to the Ellucian Payment Center by TouchNet to provide the payment experience students expect, as well as the efficiency the school needed.

Grappling with a legacy system

As a public entity, CIT began processing payments online through the local territory government's online portal. While efficient for paying for things like drivers' licenses, the system wasn't built to handle the more complex payment scenarios found in higher education.

"Because we sit somewhat external to government, it wasn't well integrated with us," said CIT Director of Corporate Services Karl Caig. "While students could indeed go to the website and pay there, the payment would come to us between two and four days later.""

That delay in payment processing was an issue for the institute and students alike. While students come to campus with the expectation of making online payments, the existing experience proved clunky at best. It became an even more burdensome experience when CIT tried to accept other types of payments beyond tuition. For example, if a student had a hold on their account because of overdue fees or just an overdue library book, it could be days or weeks before it was resolved.

To help in recruiting and retaining students, CIT knew they needed to modernize payments to provide a better customer service experience.

Bringing payments into the 21st Century

Knowing their system wasn't working, CIT outlined the ideal payment experience they wanted to deliver for everyone going forward.

"What we were looking for in a system is one where students could jump on our website, pay instantly, it would be instantly reflected in their account and holds could be lifted immediately," said Caig. "If people had problems with payments we could intercept at the time rather than waiting several days to find out and going back to them to sort it out."

The Ellucian Payment Center by TouchNet delivered that and more. Integrating with Ellucian Banner, their existing student management system, it empowered the institute to evolve to a more upfront payment model instead of relying on dated invoices. On the first day of classes, they know exactly which accounts are paid and which are not.

It's also delivering the payment experience students expected.

According to Caig, "Now, everyone is either loving it or just doesn't notice it's there – particularly the new students. No news is good news."

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Finding institutional efficiencies

While providing better customer service was CIT's primary goal when adopting Payment Center, they discovered drastic improvements in internal operations.

"My account staff are overjoyed at the level of transparency we get in real time from the TouchNet dashboard," said Caig. "We can log on, download the payment data, and do reconciliations straight away. We know exactly which students have paid and when."

Data from the new system allows CIT to be better informed and predict turnout by comparing the number of student enrollments to the number who have actually paid for a particular class. They'll also be keeping an eye on metrics like payment turnaround times to help identify friction points which will improve customer service and operational efficiency. They're already seeing a reduction in staff workload with less time spent solving payment problems.

"If there are any issues, we can immediately rectify that," said Caig. "We had one student that somehow made an incorrect payment. That would have normally taken us two or three weeks to resolve. We had it done in 30 minutes."

Ensuring cyber security

After a recent data breach at another Australian university, students are demanding more assurances of online security.

CIT worked closely with Ellucian and TouchNet to ensure the Payment Center complied with all of CIT's strict security protocols.

"We needed assurance there," according to Caig. "And not just the paper-based assurance, either. We needed software with a proven track record of security."

Ellucian Payment Center is built, hosted, and integrated by TouchNet, which means CIT has less to worry about when it comes to ensuring their cyber security.

"Anything that ensures that we're not storing data is good for us," said Caig. "If we don't have to worry about storing peoples' credit cards here at CIT, that is so much better from a security point of view."

Going contactless at the right time

CIT implemented and rolled out the new online payment system shortly before the initial outbreak of COVID-19 in Australia. The timing couldn't have proved better. Prior to Payment Center, students looking for immediate reflection of a payment on their account had to pay in person, which became impossible as campuses closed due to the pandemic. Payment Center solved this and eliminated one touchpoint in CIT's enrollment process. This success has been a key part of CIT's overhaul of its existing online enrolment system.

Even after the pandemic subsides, CIT says they'll be thankful to have a system in place that helps them better serve everyone and most importantly the immunocompromised, mobility impaired, or those who otherwise have difficulty visiting in person. Plus, they're in a better position to respond to emergencies while running more efficiently and delivering a best-in-class student experience.

Expanding capabilities easily in the near future

CIT sees the implementation of a payment system as just step one of their digital transformation journey. A big part of why they selected the Ellucian Payment Center by TouchNet is the ease with which they can expand capabilities with the U.Commerce platform.

"TouchNet has integration we can just slot in and that's much better for us – not from a financial point of view, but from a risk management point of view as well," said Caig.

The institute will also look to integrate payment plans in the future. Having the option to pay tuition over time will ultimately improve the student experience.

By fully modernizing their enrollment experience starting with payments, CIT is confidently relying on TouchNet to roll out a better student experience one big leap at a time.

The power of partnership

Ellucian and TouchNet have come together in a strategic partnership to offer colleges and universities enterprise grade platforms for campus-wide commerce and credentials. TouchNet powered solutions are functional, secure, and deeply integrated into the framework of the Ellucian product suite, delivering greater efficiency, visibility, and scalability.

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