

# Why We Stayed.

If you want to know what someone's really like, talk to their oldest friends. Here's one of ours — the University of Oregon.



## Mark McCulloch

Director of Information Systems,  
University of Oregon

### University of Oregon

**Institution Type:** Public R1 University

**Enrollment:** 22,720

**Solution:** eBill & ePay

**Challenge:** When Infinet, the University of Oregon's original billing and payment partner, was purchased by Nelnet in 2005, the institution faced a decision: stick with Nelnet Campus Commerce or explore other options. They chose the former — and it paid off.

**Result:** Nelnet Campus Commerce and the University of Oregon have enjoyed a partnership for more than 15 years. Dependable solutions and Nelnet associates who care, remind the University of Oregon each day they made the right choice.

For Mark McCulloch, partnership means everything.

As the Director of Information Systems for Business Affairs at the University of Oregon, Mark oversees web developers, system administrators, and business analysts dedicated to keeping financial systems humming at the institution.

In 2005, Nelnet purchased Infinet, the University of Oregon's original billing/payment partner. Oregon faced a decision: continue with Nelnet Campus Commerce or explore other options. After careful consideration, they elected to stay on the path with Nelnet.

The University of Oregon has now been a Nelnet Campus Commerce partner for more than 15 years. What made them stay so long? If you ask Mark, the answer's simple: the people.

"There's a genuine sense that Nelnet Campus Commerce associates care about their clients more so than other companies," says Mark. "Nelnet has service in mind at all times."

## Partners shaping solutions

As a member of Nelnet Campus Commerce's client advisory board, Mark directly impacts our strategic vision and products. It's a role that goes above and beyond what we'd expect from most clients — but is an essential part of the partnership.

"Vendors are more focused on selling their products. Partners listen. It's in their attitude working with clients," says Mark. "Nelnet Campus Commerce has been very good at engaging its clients. With them, we're able to steer the product and have a seat at the table. They want to understand our business and be relevant — not just today, but 5, 10 years down the road."

Nelnet Campus Commerce has continued to grow throughout the years. But that growth hasn't impacted the reliable, personable, and friendly approach the company has taken. Nelnet Campus Commerce's success in the market gives Oregon confidence that Nelnet will be able to deliver quality for years to come.

"Even as Nelnet has grown, the University of Oregon always has a voice in shaping their products," says Mark. "We're used as a sounding board, and asked about our needs as an institution. We will continue our relationship with Nelnet Campus Commerce, as they grow, and we will succeed together."

## Easy-to-use products along with best-in-class service

"The product itself has continually improved," says Mark. "With each release there are new features, enhancements, and bug fixes. Too many to name, but it continues to serve us well." It's important for Mark — and the university as a whole — that



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the platform be easy to use. When their team members feel comfortable with a product, they do better work and are more satisfied in the workplace. And when students and families feel comfortable with the product, everyone's happy.

"We spend our time doing business, instead of trying to figure out the software. And our customer service folks don't have to answer questions about why the software isn't working. Staff know it, students and parents know it, and it takes very little training. When we hire new people, it doesn't take long to get them up to speed. It's just a good product."

The affordability of Nelnet Campus Commerce also made eBill and ePay a smart solution for the University of Oregon.

"We must have value in the software we use," says Mark. "Nelnet Campus Commerce represents a tremendous value — and the people are great to work with."

## **Dedication to solving problems (and serving partners)**

As a technology veteran, Mark is aware of the inevitability of issues. No matter what an organization or IT professional does to prepare, they're going to happen.

For Mark, the true test of a partner is how they resolve issues. It's in the response time. The attitude of those solving the problem. The effectiveness of the solution they reach. These situations cement a partnership.

One of the few major issues Mark can recall occurred when a product upgrade forced users to clear their cache. This meant that the university's customer service representatives had to walk parents and students through a technical process. Nelnet Campus Commerce promised the institution this wouldn't happen again.

"We were promised in future releases that the clearing of browser cache wouldn't be a requirement going forward — and that's proven to be the case," says Mark. "Something like that can create an unpleasant experience for our students and customer service folks. But the issue was resolved and we haven't seen it happen again."

Fortunately, issues have been few and far between for the University of Oregon — but when they do happen, Mark and his team know that they have a partner working hard to resolve them.

## **Being treated like family**

"I really don't hear a whole lot from students or those using the software," says Mark. "That's a good thing — it means there are very few issues. When I do need to escalate an issue, I always know who to call. Whether it's my account manager Rhonda Plooster or Matt Spethman (director of client experience, Nelnet Campus Commerce) — they all know who I am and are ready to help."

In Mark's position, he sees and hears nearly every technical issue on campus — and according to him, service availability has gone a long way in their continued partnership with Nelnet Campus Commerce.

"Any issues we have are solved and any enhancement we ask for finds its way into the product," says Mark. "Honestly, the reason we've stayed with Nelnet Campus Commerce is the value, service availability, and relationship we have."

Relationships between clients and vendors tend to be transactional — businesses give their clients a product and that's that. Little to no personality is required. But Mark has found the complete opposite when working with Nelnet Campus Commerce. And it's made the partnership even more enjoyable.

"I'm not sure why I have such close relationships with Nelnet Campus Commerce associates compared to other vendors," says Mark. "I think it's been a central focus for DeeAnn Wenger (president, Nelnet Campus Commerce) and her executive team that permeates the company. The fact that I can recall so many names says something — they've become my friends."

Mark's relationship with Nelnet Campus Commerce staff has been nothing but authentic. He keeps in touch with every representative he has worked with, from Jill Rong who managed the implementation, to Sandy Gjermstad, Caryne Mesquita, Rhonda Plooster, and Roge Karma, account managers and customer service representatives.

He attends Nelnet Campus Commerce product meetings, board meetings, has online meetings about product enhancements and in-person lunches that are more about catching up. Throughout it all, one thing's sure: Mark's experience with Nelnet associates has been second to none.

"I like the people I've worked with at other vendors, but Nelnet is different," says Mark. "Receiving a holiday cookbook with recipes from staff members, getting to know team members. It's the little things that Nelnet Campus Commerce does that makes them more than just a vendor we pay for a service — they're like family."

### **Confident, on-time implementation**

Nelnet Campus Commerce takes implementation seriously. Support doesn't end once the solution is sold — and the University of Oregon is no exception.

"Implementation is scary. It's a critical part of the business and a lot can go wrong. Nelnet has proven itself as an effective project manager — their people have that skill set," says Mark. "I think with Nelnet Campus Commerce, prospective clients can expect to have their service running on time with few (if any) issues."

Mark's still in contact with Jill Rong, who helped manage the implementation of eBill and ePay for University of Oregon. She's still the product manager for the solution — and helps out whenever Mark needs her.

"If we ever need to install something new or change something, I can still go back to Jill," says Mark. "She knows the product inside and out and can get me answers in minutes."

### **Understanding the mission of higher education**

There have been times when Mark could have recommended switching from Nelnet Campus Commerce. And according to Mark, if the value wasn't present, that's what he would have done. But the combination of easy-to-use, comprehensive solutions with the friendly expertise of Nelnet Campus Commerce staff makes continuing the partnership an obvious choice.

"They understand the business and the pressure our customer service staff are under to make sure people are able to make payments and view their bills," says Mark. "The University of Oregon and Nelnet Campus Commerce share the higher education mission and we get to work with great people. Why would you do anything different?"

For those considering Nelnet Campus Commerce as a partner of their own, Mark offers plenty of reassurance.

"Don't worry, you are in good hands. Nelnet Campus Commerce is a partner you can trust."

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**- Mark McCulloch**, Director of Information Systems