North Dakota University Systems – Making a Connection

In Brief:

- North Dakota University Systems went live with Nelnet Campus Commerce after being with another payment vendor for over a decade.
- Prior to Nelnet, North Dakota University System experienced delayed payment processing, causing confusion among student payers and accidental multi-payments.
- The implementation of Nelnet gave this institution the ability to customize branding for payments, billing, and online stores for all 11 campuses.

Time for a Change

After over a decade with their payment solution vendor, and a partnership that felt one-sided, North Dakota University Systems (NDUS) knew they needed a change.

"With our prior product, there were some pain points," shared Tom McNaughton, Director of Student Information System.

Students were unhappy with the extended wait times when accessing their payment portal. Staff were frustrated with a lack of communication configurations and branding options as all campus locations shared a single instance of the ERP. Not to mention the lack of customer service from their vendor. "With our prior vendor, it would be weeks before we would hear responses," explained Dee Muir, Assistant Director of Campus Solutions, NDUS.

In addition to this, NDUS wanted each campus and their various departments to have the ability to create and manage their own online stores, which was not possible on the current system.

Starting the Search

In order to change to a different platform, NDUS had to send out an RFP (Request for Proposal). Though Nelnet was familiar with NDUS from various national conferences, like the Alliance conference, conversations didn't start to unfold with Nelnet until after NDUS entered into the RFP process. Once the proposal talks started with key stakeholders at NDUS, one theme became evident – they wanted a user experience for their students that was better, faster, and more robust.

It Takes a Village

Nelnet knew this implementation was multifaceted and would require a phased approached with a considerable amount of planning and numerous, willing participants from the institution. The plan was to get all 11 campuses live within 12 months. "I think people were nervous right away hearing the timeline," shared Ashley Hanson, Student Financials Business Analyst, NDUS.

Over 100 different people were involved in various areas of this implementation. These areas included:
- Integration Specialists and IT Resources
- Core Project Team
- Key Stakeholders and Subject Matter Experts
- Executive Steering Committee & Project Sponsors

At certain points of the implementation, different associates were brought in from Nelnet as they had a deeper understanding of the products and could listen to the needs of the specific institutions.

"We always hear from vendors 'No problem; we can do that!' but then when we get into the project and a discovery happens, then all of a sudden the vendors' eyes become wide. That didn't happen with Nelnet," expressed McNaughton.

Successful Go Live

In mid-2022, NDUS officially went live with Nelnet products. In less than a years' time, Nelnet was able to completely implement all of the payment technology and eCommerce solutions NDUS had chosen.

"Nelnet was really on board trying to make sure NDUS was successful, which we had a 100 percent success rate with all of our implementations and all of our integrations," shared McNaughton.

"We had 11 campuses, three different main products to implement, and 12 months to do it. It could have felt very stressful," explained Hanson, "but Nelnet didn't make it stressful as we had great project management on both sides that really kept us on track."

Immediate Results

With the entire implementation being complete one month ahead of schedule, the results were immediate. Now, NDUS students were connecting to the payment portal within three seconds, compared to the previous 90 plus seconds of wait time. "We were timing it as we were floored at how quick it was," shared Hanson.

Not only were students impressed with the results, so was Shawnia Gurtz, Student Finance Coordinator for Bismarck State. "Once everything was implemented, it was really seamless and felt like we had always been with Nelnet," she noted.

Implementing Nelnet Storefront

Along with Student Payment and Billing solutions, NDUS added Nelnet Storefront to replace their existing online store solution. With Storefront, the online store experience designed for higher education institutions, NDUS was able to give their 11 locations what they had been asking for – the ability to set up and manage their own campus-specific online stores with customizable branding, inventory tracking, and reporting capabilities.

"Some benefits of having Storefront is it not only allows all of these unique storefronts to exist and gives the departments the ability to create a storefront when needed, but all of the reporting is centralized. I can run reports and manage it all in one location even though other departments are managing the storefronts," explained Gurtz.

"Everybody likes how they can configure their own branding when it comes to their storefronts because it just makes that user experience better," added Hanson.

Using Storefront in Creative Ways

Many institutions in NDUS have been using Storefront in a variety of unique and creative ways. From selling tickets to collecting non-credit course fees to taking birthday cake orders, Storefront is being used for more than just a bookstore or a place to purchase school swag. Here are how two institutions in NDUS are using Storefront to make an impact on their campus:

North Dakota State University

Not only does North Dakota State University (NDSU) use Storefront to collect testing fees, and as a general store, they sell event tickets too. In April 2022, their student government hosted a prom for freshman and sophomore students. They wanted to give these students an opportunity to experience a prom that they didn't get to experience in high school because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Storefront was used to sell tickets to this event and track sales.

Bismarck State College

At Bismarck State College (BSC), they too use their Storefront for collecting testing fees. "Students who use Storefront for their testing love that they can create an account and then log right in without having to fill out additional forms. With our last product, this was not possible for them. It really is a timesaver!" expressed Gurtz. Along with this, BSC uses Storefront in a variety of fun ways like Birthday Cake Orders, Kudos & Coffee, and selling booths at their career fair. "Nelnet Storefront has given us unlimited options for connecting with people," she remarked.

A Lasting Partnership

Today, NDUS is fully live and operational. Nelnet continues to provide innovation and support through developing new technologies for NDUS. This ongoing partnership is one built on trust and progress.

"Whatever your expectations are working with Nelnet, get ready for them to be exceeded," expressed McNaughton.

Read our Case Study: North Dakota University Systems Gets Creative with Nelnet Storefront

Learn more about Nelnet Storefront

Read other success stories and testimonials from our institutional partners

Questions about implementations? Reach out to Our Team