

Case Study

British and Irish Modern Music Institute

Mission Possible: How BIMM Went Digital in Just Six Weeks

The British and Irish Modern Music Institute (BIMM) had two needs they were looking to fulfil: improving student achievement and retention. While the intent to move toward a digital blended learning solution had been a long-term project, the desire to enhance the student experience for the upcoming term made summer 2018 the perfect time to move forward with an e-learning programme.

Why digital? For starters, the size and weight of the students' materials were an issue. Depending on their course load, students could be carrying multiple 200-page textbooks around with them each day. Some students weren't bringing these cumbersome books to every lesson, some copies were lost or stolen, and others were lent out and forgotten about.

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Dean for Academic Development Jason Knight had a sense that there was a better way of doing things. He says, "It's taken us quite a long time to engage with the digital realm. We're a practical college—we do things, we play instruments. Even the act of getting involved with an online library has been a long process." But his tutors let him know things needed to change, telling him how frustrating it was that their students didn't want to lug their hefty books around.

Making the Switch

Knight began his search for a digital solution with a provider who was only just developing their digital programme, but quickly realised he would need to go in a different direction to meet BIMM's timeline and budget. He turned to VitalSource and found that VitalSource Studio™ was the perfect choice for their needs. "It suddenly became apparent that unlike the other provider, where I would have to supply everything to them and they would charge us quite a hefty development fee, we could actually get involved and do it ourselves with Studio," he says. "Yours was just a better product."

Using Studio, the team at BIMM was able to create their own impactful learning materials and publish directly to VitalSource Bookshelf® with ease. This simple authoring tool allows users to include interactive elements—such as video clips, audio, and even slideshows—helping to engage students with the content.

Pat Garvey, Head of Drums and BIMM Group eBook Manager, is pleased with the shift. "With VitalSource, we essentially had our printed materials, but they are now in a cleverly digitised format. It gives us the ability to add blended content and have the resource available online and, crucially, offline. Plus, students (and tutors) can also annotate, bookmark, and easily reference the relevant content and associated further study," he says. But does it change the way he teaches? Yes and no. While he still uses many of the same materials, just digitalised, he can now embed content directly into his material.

"In that context, it actually does change the way we teach, because we have access to those resources," says Garvey. "I don't have to line up a load of videos on an external hard drive, or dive in and out of any video sharing platforms. I can literally refer to the videos that we created for the topic, which we then embedded within the eBook, and use them right there and then. And, perhaps more importantly, so can the student, which drastically improves the student experience."

In addition, the flexible workflow environment made it easy for multiple content creators to work collaboratively on the same product. "At one point we had 30 different people who all had login credentials to that one environment, many of whom had never even published a Facebook page, let alone an ePub," says Knight. "We aren't talking technically savvy individuals—all of whom engaged with it, all of whom made it work, and all of whom have said, 'Well it was just easy, wasn't it?'"

A Tight Deadline

After selecting VitalSource as their provider for digital learning materials, BIMM had just six weeks to ensure content delivery in time for the new term. Time was short, so how did the team manage? Says Knight, "It really helped that the product we went with was one that was so adaptable and appropriate for what we wanted to do with it." He also praised the support he received from VitalSource, saying, "The speed with which VitalSource turned around contracts—it was so efficient and so quick, and there was not one snag in the whole process."

In fact, they were able to deliver a dozen brand-new eBooks within their limited timeframe. But how exactly did they create such a high volume of content in a short amount of time? According to Garvey, the simple, intuitive nature of Studio played a large role. He says, "It does do exactly what it suggests it's going to do or allow you to do. Those tools that are built into the back end of that software are very, very useful and very, very good for our purpose."

VitalSource's Pro Services team also proved helpful in saving the BIMM team precious time on their project. Knight and Garvey provided existing content in PDF format, and the Pro Services team created templates within Studio. They then uploaded several of BIMM's course books, while the

BIMM team created a half-dozen more from scratch. Says Garvey, "Once they had uploaded the existing content, we were able to go in and add new content, videos, audio, and new chapters because it was all there. Had we had to do all of that, it would have been a far more stressful exercise, and no one would have gotten much sleep."

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Jason Knight, Dean for Academic Development, BIMM

Improving the Student Experience

So, how will the shift to interactive eTextbooks affect students at BIMM? The biggest changes are improved access and a lighter book bag, which have received a positive response thus far. "The ability to have access anywhere, anytime will have a big impact on the student experience," says Knight. "Students no longer need to carry around a chunky textbook, which—according to many tutors—they stopped doing very soon into the first term."

The new materials have proven beneficial for teachers, too. "The eBook format is a much more efficient and up-to-date resource than a standard textbook format or subject-specific handout," says Garvey. "It's all there, right in front of the tutor, to enhance the teaching and learning experience in an unlimited amount of ways."

And what advice would the BIMM team offer to peers exploring eTextbooks? "The key is to explore the software and have a very clear plan," says Garvey. "Just embrace it and enjoy it, because once you start putting it together and understanding how to join the dots, it's actually very simple. The trick is then managing a timeline with that level of production involved—our course notes are of a sector-leading, world-class standard, and VitalSource gave us the ability to match that standard with the quality of their product and the professionalism of their team."

Learn more about VitalSource Studio get.vitalsource.com/content-creation/intl

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