



Capella University's Information Fulfillment Program

Capella University is an accredited institution of higher education, offering MBA programs, Master of Science and Doctor of Philosophy degree programs in education, human services, organization and management. Using the world wide web, Capella provides courses to adult learners around the world.

The Challenge

Capella University was poised for rapid growth when it completed accreditation with the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools in 1997. But events following accreditation posed several challenges.

Capella had found success in an aggressive strategy for responding to inquiries from prospective students. Understanding that leads cool rapidly, Capella's strategy involved assembling and mailing customized informational packages to prospects who inquired by mail, the Internet or telephone on the same day the inquiry was received. These packages included a personalized letter from the dean and information on the program in which the prospective student had expressed interest. The packages also included course catalogs, school newsletters, financial aid information, application forms and business reply envelopes.

Days after the information requested by prospective students was mailed, Capella's associate directors of admissions would follow up personally with a phone call to answer any further questions. Many of these calls yielded requests for further information and, as a result, a second round of mailing with additional personalized letters and contents not included in the first package.

With the number of daily inquiries projected to increase from 50 to as many as 200 following

accreditation, Don Smithmier, Capella University's Director of Communications, didn't want to devote the staff or storage space for materials needed to maintain their same-day response strategy.

"We already had a person devoted to inquiry fulfillment every afternoon," Smithmier said. He added that Capella would have needed to hire at least one additional staff member to help handle the new workload that was being created by the new stream of inquiries.

Capella University also needed to address the number of undeliverable packages that were being returned. With prospective students entering their own addresses, as many as 10 percent proved to be undeliverable, greatly reducing the impact of Capella's program.

The Solution

Working with Capella University's staff, DPD created a program to take over and continue Capella's same-day response strategy as the number of prospective students grew.

In addition to producing brochures, handbooks, letterhead, application forms, envelopes and other components of Capella's customized informational packages, DPD stores and manages their inventory, assembles, addresses and meters their packages before delivering them to the post office for distribution to Capella prospects.

DPD imports new prospect inquiry information from Capella University by email on a daily basis. Inquiry information includes the name and address of the prospective student as well as the area of academic interest. Using this information, DPD generates a personalized cover letter with variable information to fit the prospect's area of interest

and custom assembles an informational package for each prospect. Packages are delivered to the post office on the same business day for all initial inquiries received before noon. And Capella is alerted when materials in inventory at DPD need to be replenished.

To help Capella recognize and correct undeliverable addresses, DPD checks all prospect addresses against post-office certified software for deliverability. Since the program was turned over to DPD, Capella's number of returned packages has been reduced to less than one percent.

As the number of secondary information requests continued to grow, DPD was put in direct contact with associate directors who began forwarding fulfillment requests to DPD via email on a daily basis. DPD then began fulfilling the second round of mailing to prospects on the same day the information was requested.

But DPD's services don't stop when Capella's packages are delivered to the post office. Through quarterly management-to-management meetings and monthly reports on delivery data and inventory, DPD keeps Capella informed on the progress of the program. These are opportunities for Smithmier and others at Capella to discuss concerns and changing business needs, and also to maintain a high level of control over the program.

Benefits to Capella University

Turning over this program to DPD, Capella University has freed staff and space, while dramatically improving the deliverability of its informational packages and ultimately improving the response from prospects. Capella maintains control of the program, but now has space to grow in its existing location. Capella staff members also have additional time to devote to their core responsibilities, developing the institution's programs and aggressively marketing them to potential students.

"Our people can now focus on other high-value activities," Smithmier said. His staff has literally emerged from the mailroom to concentrate on bolstering Capella's second wave of contacts - personal calls to prospective students.

With a single supplier producing and distributing Capella University's materials, Capella staff save additional time by minimizing the coordination of a project between multiple vendors or a supplier and staff.

Capella's informational packages are reaching their target audience more often as the number of undeliverables has been dramatically reduced.

As the volume of inquiries has grown, Capella has been able to maintain its rapid response to the information needs of its prospects and attract more students from its pool of prospects. When Capella's volume of inquiries experiences further growth, the school won't need to add staff or space to accommodate it.

"I think the bottom line with having DPD do it is that the program is completely expandable now," Smithmier said. "We don't need to worry about a sudden increase in inquiries crippling our staff."

Cost-Benefit Analysis

- Capella University saves significant payroll costs with DPD's program to handle its prospect response packages.
- Capella facility space previously devoted to storing promotional materials and assembling packets is free for other uses that facilitate the organization's growth.
- Capella will enroll more students by responding quickly to the information needs of prospects.
- Capella saves money and improves the quality of its database for future use by reducing the number of undeliverable addresses.