CSU   CCC   UC

AIMHUB:
THE NEXT GENERATION OF
ACCESSIBLE MEDIA EXCHANGE
FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

The AIMHub project is a collaborative effort of the California State University and California Community Colleges to develop a modern, unified, web-based system that assists campus staff members who serve students with print disabilities, allowing them to manage, exchange and track electronically accessible instructional materials.

To ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to higher education, each U.S. postsecondary institution is legally required to convert print and multimedia instructional materials into accessible formats, called "accessible instructional materials" or "alternate media." Lab manuals, textbooks, course readers, captioned documentaries, and instructor-created materials all must be accessible to students. The consequences of failing to deliver usable accessible instructional materials to students on time are severe, including unequal access to education, reduced independence, failed courses, loss of financial aid and possible lawsuits against the institutions.

The AIMHub project will unify and improve the two existing media exchange systems into one modern web application. Both the CSU (Center for Accessible Media, or CAM) and CCC (Accessible Media Exchange Database, or AMXDB) have web-based database applications facilitating the exchange of converted accessible instructional media (AIM) files between campuses. They both operate on an exchange model, where individual campuses independently provide information about what materials they possess and other campuses request those materials. Both websites have served the postsecondary campuses of California for a decade, holding tens of thousands of titles and collectively facilitating the exchange of thousands of instructional material files per year.

The majority of campuses find it difficult to deliver accessible instructional materials services that keep up with student demand and provide accurate materials in a timely manner. Since timely delivery yields risk mitigation and compliance benefits, campuses utilizing AIMHub will be able to fulfill students' accommodations in a timelier manner and limit the grounds for legal action.

MILESTONES

- Complete web application development.

- Validate existing data.

- Migrate existing data.

- Application testing.

- Add existing CAM and AMXDB users.

- Deliver training for the new system.

- Run concurrent systems for a time to allow for graceful transition.

- Retire existing CAM and AMXDB.

- Develop desktop application to integrate with campus accessible media holdings and facilitate seamless exchanges between campuses.

- Develop a self-sustaining model for application maintenance and enhancement by offering subscriptions to campuses outside of California to join AIMHub.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

This project directly meets the goal of California higher education systems working together to share common services and cut costs. There will be cost savings from reduced duplication of effort; increased delivery speed due to quicker acquisitions between campuses; and smoother tracking of conversion work.

The unified AIMHub system will provide an educational experience for students with disabilities by eliminating redundant efforts, integrating the best aspects of existing systems, and delivering long-desired functionality to the three California public higher education systems' accessible media service providers.

Currently:
- California Community Colleges host the AMXDB system and the CSUs host the CAM system; UCs can join either system.
- CAM exchanges approximately 1,300 titles per year, saving hours of employee time and promoting student success by ensuring timely delivery of instructional materials.
- A single campus using AMXDB can usually find 20 percent of their requested titles, freeing time and resources for the other 80 percent.

In the Future:
- AIMHub will hold all the titles for all three systems in one easy-to-use application.
- AIMHub interface will be built on principles of Universal Design.
- Users will be able to enter titles more quickly and accurately, as AIMHub utilizes the World Cat service, automatically populating the book information based on the ISBN number.
- Exchanges will happen much more quickly, efficiently and securely.
- Having one shared application will save time, money and resources for all three systems, as well as improving student access to instructional materials.

OPPORTUNITIES AND SOLUTIONS

Users of the current applications expressed a number of concerns, including:

1. Managing archives of alternate formats

2. Workload of exchanging formats

3. Discovery of necessary materials

4. Management of student requests for alternate formats.

AIMHub will address each of these issues through purpose-built tools with a desktop application that will provide the capability of managing student requests, accessing local files for exchange, and managing directory structures. This application will ensure that sensitive information remains within a campus and automatically interact with internet systems.

PROJECT TEAM

CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Gaeir Dietrich
director, High Tech Training Center Unit

CSU OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

Gerry Hanley
assistant vice chancellor, Academic Technology Services

Cheryl Pruitt
director, Accessible Technology Initiative

Jack Sullivan
software engineer, Accessible Technology Initiative

IMPACT AND BENEFIT

Each of the 113 community colleges, 23 CSUs, and 10 UCs employ dedicated staff and resources to comply with the requirement for accessible instructional materials. When students receive their alternate formats on time, they are able to study independently, complete their assignments, participate in group activities, and take responsibility for their education. The AIMHub project will provide alternative media professionals with a faster and more efficient means to locate and request accessible instructional materials from other institutions, thereby improving delivery, enhancing students' success and offering free resources for other student services.

QUALITY, COST, OR DELIVERY

A subscription model will be developed to make AIMHub available to postsecondary institutions outside California. We project that the AIMHub desktop tool will fulfill alternate media specialists' needs by allowing them to organize and prioritize student alternate media requests, track alternate media workflow, schedule alternate media delivery and streamline all aspects of the conversion process.

As the number of colleges and systems in the AIMHub grows, we predict that CSU and community college funding support will be replaced by revenue from subscription sales to outside campuses and systems. The intention is to phase out monetary support by the CSU and community college systems altogether. As the initial developers, both systems will continue to utilize AIMHub free of charge as anticipated revenue from outside sources increases. Once that occurs, we anticipate AIMHub's ongoing maintenance and development will be fully supported.

LESSONS LEARNED

The community colleges and CSUs have been running parallel systems, which has led to a duplication of effort and a lack of efficiency. In addition, administrators of both systems recognized that one nationwide database of instructional materials will reduce redundancy of effort and improve student services.