

TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS CASE STUDY



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The University of Phoenix sought a forward-thinking solution for financial aid automation.

They found it with Vocado. (Now Oracle Student Financial Planning)

UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

Founded in 1976 by Cambridge-educated economist, professor, and entrepreneur, John Sperling, PhD., the University of Phoenix, a private for-profit university, was a response to the changing needs of higher education and the workplace. It was part of Sperling's commitment to provide adults with the higher education they would need to fill those changing needs. Decades later, the institution continues to do just that. While the

times have changed, the objective has remained the same: to help people enhance their lives through education. The University of Phoenix keeps working to fulfill Dr. Sperling's vision, improve the lives of the students, and strengthen communities.

The University of Phoenix's forward-thinking vision propelled the institution to offer online classes in 1989, well before most other universities and colleges. Today, the University of



Phoenix is the largest private, for-profit institution in the U.S., with a large majority of the institution's 142,500 students attending classes online. In 2017, the University of Phoenix was acquired by Apollo Global Management, LLC a U.S. private equity firm.

AT FIRST GLANCE

The University of Phoenix, one of the top recipients of Federal student aid, was in the midst of a reinvention strategy. A key component of that strategy was to look for a financial aid solution to replace the institution's heavily customized 20-year old Oracle PeopleSoft implementation. The University sought a modern financial aid solution that would provide for increased automation and "self-service enablement" for students and administrators. This was a move toward software as a services (SaaS) and a reduction in reliance on customizations. The question of value versus benefit loomed large.

The University of Phoenix met with specialists from Vocado, which has since been acquired by Oracle Corporation, to review the company's modern, real-time student financial aid and data intelligence platform, which addressed higher education funding, enrollment, and performance through AI-enabled student finance management and actionable analytics. Vocado's claim to automate up to 90 percent of the financial aid process was particularly attractive to the University of Phoenix.

DESTINATION: AUTOMATION

Automation stood atop a list of the university's priorities. While there were processes that were automated in their existing system, via custom code and development through internal IT resources, there were limits across the board. This included steps to certify students and reevaluate them with any real consistency. Due to the manual nature of the existing system, there was



little confidence that the information provided would be relevant and timely. The Vocado Financial Aid solution has met and exceeded the university's expectations, providing automation across various processes. At the core of the solution is a process-management workflow engine that facilitates the automation of up to ninety percent of the financial aid processes, including those for the complex and Borrower-Based Academic Year (BBAY) schools. Information displayed online is now accurate and up-to-date. It was a giant first step in moving toward self-service functionality, enhancing the visibility of Title IV status information to students.

THE ROADMAP

The University of Phoenix considered several vendor solutions before choosing Vocado. "Some in the market have misconstrued that we chose Vocado because it was supporting non-term. That was definitely an important factor, but the automation and the overall architecture of the system, as well as the team at Vocado, exceeded our expectations," says Kyle Curran, Vice President for Business Technology Integration, University of Phoenix.

The university felt a shared view of automation with Vocado. While some vendors made claims of non-term support, the university felt they could not be substantiated at the level of complexity required. The university's

core offerings are undergraduate and master's degrees across a variety of concentrations, and the flexibility to package and track an extremely wide variety of aid offerings played strongly into the Vocado decision, as did integration.

"Automation and integration go hand-in-hand with Vocado. The two primary integrations are our student information system and our student accounting system," Curran states. "Our student information system is a custom, homegrown system that has served the institution for more than 20 years. Our accounting system is Oracle Finance, which has been customized to be a student accounting system, including Title IV processes." According to Curran, "The university leveraged its middleware layer to integrate the institution's student and finance systems with Vocado."

IMPLEMENTATION. COOPERATION. INTEGRATION.

Kyle Curran estimates that there were about a dozen full-time university staff involved with the Vocado implementation. Three groups were needed for the implementation: the university's functional team, the university's technology team, and the Vocado implementation consultants. The University of Phoenix personnel and Vocado partnered together to implement the solution. The university was responsible for the technology,



people, and process aspects of the implementation. The university also utilized its own internal technical skillsets to develop integrations and to test the solution as it was being released.

The university considered this as a unique opportunity to work directly with a vendor responsible for designing a product and building it to meet market specifications. "We asked Vocado to keep us accountable to ensure that anything that we built would be for the market, and not specifically for the University of Phoenix," stated Curran. The university did not want another custom solution; it had to be something marketable to other institutions.

TAKING MEASURES: KPI. ROI. NPS.

The key performance indicators (KPI), return on investment (ROI) and net promoter scores (NPS) on Vocado are all positive, according to Kyle Curran. "First, Vocado wins out over our legacy system in operational efficiency," says Curran. "This includes measuring any adjustments made to accounts due to any type of processing errors, in addition to measuring student-to-staff ratio."

"Second, the overall student experience with self-service and faster processing timeframes is far superior to what we were ever able to provide students in the past. We measure this through NPS."

"And the third metric for success—though not thought to be a differentiator initially—was compliance. Our metrics used to calculate our risk score delivered even greater peace of mind and provided guidance to further mitigate risk in reaching our automation destination."

The University of Phoenix reports that Vocado was about 70 percent deployed in September 2017, with roughly 30 percent of student remaining on the older financial aid system. As of April 2018, the solution has been deployed to 100 percent of the University of Phoenix's student base, which is comprised of more than 100,000 students.

ABOUT VOCADO

Vocado was acquired by Oracle Corporation on April 30, 2018 and has been re-branded as Oracle Student Financial Planning. Vocado, a premier student-centric, cloud-based financial aid solution for higher education, brings to the Oracle Student Cloud a modern and mature financial aid solution that is designed for all academic models across all stages of the student lifecycle. It is anticipated that the Vocado acquisition will allow Oracle to expedite the Oracle Student Cloud timeline by at least one year.

Vocado is a multi-tenant SaaS financial aid solution that can integrate with both cloud and on premises Student



Information Systems. According to Oracle, the Vocado solution will be fully integrated with the Oracle Student Cloud, as well as, offered as a standalone financial aid solution. The company has also reported that connectors between Vocado and PeopleSoft Campus Solutions will be forthcoming. Vocado provides a full range of real-time events and web services that are exposed via RESTful APIs. Vocado is a scalable solution that was designed as a highly-automated and scalable platform that can support high volume institutions with hundreds of thousands of users and tens of thousands of transactions per hour.

Photo Credits

University of Phoenix, <https://twitter.com/UOPX>.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The purpose of this case study is to provide higher education institutions with information about the objectives, solutions, and outcomes related to the utilization of technology in colleges and universities across the U.S.

The Tambellini Group thanks The University of Phoenix for approving this case study and the quotes herein.

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