



Alliance Data Wins with New SharePoint Intranet Site

Platform enhances user experience; facilitates effective communication across the enterprise

Alliance Data (NYSE: ADS) and its family of businesses is a leading provider of loyalty and marketing solutions derived from transaction-rich data. Through the creation and deployment of customized solutions that measurably change consumer behavior, Alliance Data helps its clients to create and enhance customer loyalty to build stronger, mutually beneficial relationships with their customers.

The company manages millions of customer relationships for some of North America's largest and most recognizable brands, helping them grow their businesses and drive profitability.

Background

Headquartered in Dallas, Alliance Data employs approximately 7,000 associates in 50 locations worldwide. It supports three primary lines of business (LOB): Retail Services, Epsilon and LoyaltyOne. Each of these operates and is branded independently, which creates some challenges in communicating and managing relevant content throughout the organization. Alliance Data had an existing intranet in place, but it was nearly 10 years old with problems like inadequate search, complicated navigation, haphazard add-ons and outdated software; not to mention a dependency upon IT for support. Two of Alliance Data's businesses, Epsilon and LoyaltyOne, were acquired entities, and each had its own branded intranet with similar issues. Furthermore, with separate networks and IT departments to support associates across the company, additional intranet sites were haphazardly created across the enterprise, resulting in information being widely scattered and unavailable to a large number of people.

Hampered by their inability to reach associates across the organization through one "common platform," Alliance Data's Corporate Communications department decided a new approach was in order. Karen Smith, Senior Director of Internal

Communications summarized, "When we initially considered this project our corporate communications and marketing departments had just gone through a restructuring that basically cut our staff in half. We needed a tool that could help us do more with less, but a "one size fits all approach wasn't going to work." With that in mind, Alliance Data partnered with Catapult Systems to design and develop "Inview," an intranet site that could meet the individual needs of each LOB, as well as Corporate Communications.

Implementation

Alliance Data and Catapult began by conducting offsite sessions where they spent time with people from different business units and functions, sharing the vision for a cohesive intranet solution that would incorporate different views and content management for each LOB. According to Smith, the sessions were an essential component of the project's ultimate success; they proved invaluable with regard to capturing what would serve and meet people's needs, while gaining buy-in at all levels from the get go. "This was part of where Catapult was really strong," said Smith. "Their consultants really understood our organization and how we operate; they had a good style and worked well with our different groups. We have had some vendors/partners who don't get it and just say 'you should do it this way,' which is a disaster. In this company it's a process of collaboration to get things done. Catapult's consultants did a good job of reading our organization and working with all of our different LOBs, enabling each of them to have some ownership."

With design requirements in hand, Catapult relied upon Microsoft Office SharePoint Server (MOSS) and Active Directory Federation Service (ADFS) to architect the site. SharePoint's flexible and comprehensive functionality created an ideal foundation for the collaboration and content management that Alliance Data was

seeking, while AFDS provided the backbone of authentication for individualized content and views even for LOBs that were not on the same network.

In structuring the site, the communications group focused on several key elements including branding, content management and search. Branding was emphasized because Alliance Data felt it was important for site users to have unique views that retained individual LOB identities. “From a user adoption standpoint we wanted to give people a site that they felt was branded to their own business,” Smith shared. “We developed a look and feel to the site that everyone felt good about and from there incorporated each LOB’s logo and color palette.” This theme was carried through to the content management aspect of Inview: “The most important thing for us was being able to serve up relevant content,” said Smith. “We knew that to our associates what would matter most was what was going on in their business, but we also wanted them to be able to be connected to what was going on across the company.”

To accomplish this, information boxes—sections of a page where the communications group could post items of interest like company news and links to specific items were created. “This has been a great tool to communicate to our folks without having to send another email,” Smith said. “And we can customize it by business, so content can be distributed to everyone or just to a particular business. It’s a really nice feature to have that level of flexibility to target specific people.”

Just as important, however, was the ability for their associates to find peers across the organization. SharePoint’s inherent functionality made this easy, and the communications group capitalized on it by placing an “associate look-up” box prominently

on the home page. By simply typing in a name, Alliance Data’s associates can now easily connect with other employees across the United States and Canada. And, each associate has their own profile which they can update with information they’d like to share.

Results

Inview has been a resounding success, garnering widespread approval and adoption. Within the first month the site had more than 6,000 unique visits and is currently averaging around 3,200 unique visitors a day. User feedback has been especially positive with regard to search, profile pages and the ability to easily find people across the organization. “For the first time, associates across all LOBs can access and view information from a single platform,” said Smith. “This has vastly enhanced the user experience and made our jobs so much easier.”



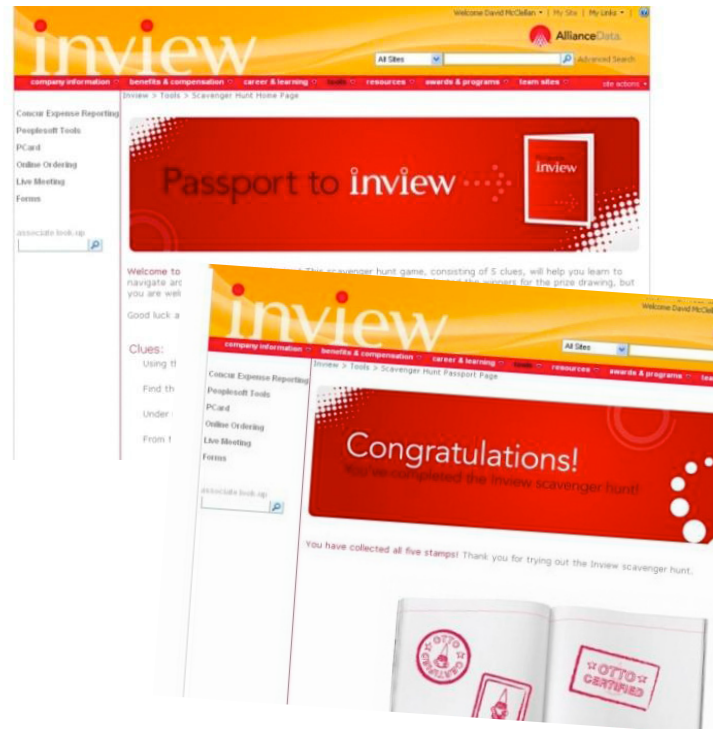
Catapult’s consultants did a good job of reading our organization and working with all of our different LOBs, enabling each of them to have some ownership.”

Karen Smith | Senior Director of Internal Communications

“This has vastly enhanced the user experience and made our jobs so much easier.”

A significant win has been acceptance of the site by the individual LOBs—one received such good feedback from their associates they decided to convert their own, separate intranet site to Inview. “It’s always a good thing when we can leverage an investment across all of our businesses,” said Smith. “The site has also proven value by giving groups the ability to promote their programs. We’ve gotten great feedback from our corporate support groups—they really appreciate having the ability to talk about their projects and get visibility for what they have going on.”

Part of Inview’s initial success can be attributed to the communications group’s foresight of promoting the site early and well. Knowing that many people would associate the new site with the problems of the past, the group created a grassroots organizational readiness campaign that promoted the site in low-cost, fun and innovative ways such as a scavenger hunt, t-shirts, power user training and a launch event to get people interested and engaged. This effort paid off, as Inview is now averaging more than 3,000 unique users per month. Alliance Data anticipates this number will continue to grow as it adds additional team sites, and associates see the value of Inview through usage and peer promotion.



How can we help you?

Contact us at 1-800-528-6248 or info@CatapultSystems.com