

## Nine Ways (plus One) to a Better Online Learning Strategy

Consultant Marty Weil's article "Nine Ways to a Better Internet Strategy"<sup>1</sup> provides a good framework for thinking about a college or university's online learning strategy, as well. Here are his guidelines with some suggestions on how they are applicable for planning at your institution. The suggestions are based upon experiences gained by other colleges and universities who have pioneered Web-enhancement of teaching and learning, particularly through the adoption of a Course Management System (CMS).

Weil (2000)	Application for Online Education
<p>1. Know Thyself</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How has the change in communication brought by the Web changed your business?</li> <li>b. "You have to know where you are now in order to move forward" (Michael J. Herzog, senior vice president for High-Tech Solutions, KPMG Consulting, LLC).</li> </ul>	<p>1. Know your teaching &amp; learning process/model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What frustrations do your faculty have with their instruction? How do you want to address them?</li> <li>b. Which approach to the use of Web-enhancement of teaching &amp; learning is compatible with your beliefs about that and why? Don't abandon your mission as you adapt to the new Internet environment.</li> <li>c. How does the use of Web-enhanced or online classes change the nature of teaching and learning?</li> </ul>
<p>2. Know Thy Customer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. "[W]hat kind of collaboration, communication, and transactions" can you do "differently by incorporating the Internet into the process."</li> </ul>	<p>2. Know your Students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What new kinds of collaboration, communication and transactions are made possible by using the Web?</li> </ul>
<p>3. Establish an Internet Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. "Consider where the desired change will affect process, organizational structure or both."</li> <li>b. Requires commitment from the top.</li> <li>c. Company executives must strive to embrace the same Internet strategy to lead the company in a clear, definitive direction.</li> </ul>	<p>3. Establish an Internet Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What new possibilities are possible on a wired campus (online registration, electronic purchase orders, textbook orders, integration of academic and administrative computer)? What effect does the change in infrastructure have upon organizational structure?</li> <li>b. The change must have the support of the Board, the President and the Administrative Council to succeed.</li> <li>c. The Chief Officers have to agree upon a strategy to provide clear direction for the institution.</li> </ul>
<p>4. Develop a Flexible Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Easier to 'change processes, adapt applications and modify structure.'</li> <li>b. Using a standards-based architecture allows the company to adapt readily.</li> <li>c. Flexible infrastructure needs to provide connectivity and interactivity to your customers, suppliers and employees.</li> </ul>	<p>4. Develop a Flexible Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. As the rate of change in society increases, colleges and universities need an infrastructure in place that allows change to occur more rapidly.</li> <li>b. Use a standards-based architecture to allow the infrastructure to adapt readily. The "home grown" approach of the past, usually implemented because it was cheaper in the short run, actually is more expensive in the long run.</li> <li>c. The flexible infrastructure needs to provide connectivity and interactivity for your students, faculty, staff and</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Weil, Marty (2000, Sept.-Oct.), "Nine Ways to a Better Internet Strategy," *On the Pulse*. Available [http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/750/iq/general/features/on\\_the\\_pulse/pulse0\\_0003/pulse0\\_0003\\_1.shtml](http://www.cisco.com/warp/public/750/iq/general/features/on_the_pulse/pulse0_0003/pulse0_0003_1.shtml)

	<p>administration. No part of the institution should be left out of the changes.</p>
<p>5. Develop Useful Metrics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Requires applying useful metrics “to measure the process as the project moves forward.”</li> <li>b. Measurable results are necessary for continual reevaluation.</li> <li>c. How you will measure it will vary according to the strategic model.</li> </ul>	<p>5. Develop Useful Metrics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How are you going to determine whether or not Web-enhancement of the learning process is working for your institution?</li> <li>b. The pedagogical changes made possible by the change in structure often mean that students are learning different things in different ways, meaning that a pre-test, post-test approach to analysis doesn’t fit.</li> <li>c. Have to determine what the goals to be met by the change are and how they can be measured in a meaningful way.</li> </ul>
<p>6. Plan to Move Quickly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. You will have to know where you are going and move quickly.</li> <li>b. The Internet measures years in 90-day increments.</li> <li>c. “Choose the opportunities that lead to big wins quickly. Small, high-impact, low-risk projects are the best candidates.”</li> <li>d. “To garner support for a larger effort, start with a smaller division.”</li> </ul>	<p>6. Plan to Move Quickly</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. You will have to know where you are going and move quickly.</li> <li>b. “The train has left the station” when it comes to adopting a CMS; the time to decide and implement is now.</li> <li>c. Don’t try to get your faculty to do massive overhauls of whole courses when they begin using a CMS. Have them start small, implementing one change for one module of a course. As they have success with that, they will extend the change to the rest of their course and will begin trying out other features of the CMS.</li> </ul>
<p>7. Unite Business and Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Although traditionally separate, they must work together.</li> <li>b. Both sides must agree on “objectives, time lines, metrics, and their roles to achieve the related goals.”</li> <li>c. The planning group “must reach a common set of vocabularies, and [the group] must be collaborative.”</li> <li>d. “A good rule when considering budgets is to select projects that can be completed in three to six months, achieve a payback within a year that is greater than the cost of the project, and contribute to improving customer satisfaction.”</li> </ul>	<p>7. Unite Pedagogy and Technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. The first generation of faculty development focused on teaching faculty how to use computers. There was little connection with pedagogy. The second generation of faculty development has to start with pedagogy and help faculty learn how to make appropriate choices from the options available.</li> <li>b. Colleges and Universities need to identify Teaching and Learning Mentors (TLMs) on their campuses who can help faculty learn how to effectively use IT for teaching and learning.</li> <li>c. The TLM must have a close relationship with the IT staff, helping make the connection between the faculty and their needs and the IT staff and their support</li> <li>d. An “us vs. them” mentality will doom any attempt to effectively implement a CMS.</li> </ul>

<p>8. Reach out to Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Partnership provides access to expertise.</li> <li>b. “No one company has everything, so you look for those companies whose partnerships maximize responsiveness and resources” (Donald Rosenthal, vice president of strategy practice, Proxicom).</li> </ul>	<p>8. Reach out to Partners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Independent colleges and universities have to work together to gain from each other’s experience. The Ameritech/SBC approach in Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and Wisconsin was founded on the idea that we have faculty and staff on our own campuses who have expertise in the use of IT. The “folks just like us” approach helps break down barriers to acceptance.</li> <li>b. No one institution has everything and some of our schools have limited staff for building and supporting the infrastructure. Collaboration between institutions with similar missions and which struggle under the same kinds of constraints (e.g., budget, staffing, teaching loads) will allow us to maximize responsiveness and resources.</li> <li>c. In the face of the challenges from online education, “we must all hang together or we will all hang separately.”</li> </ul>
<p>9. Accept Failures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. “[F]ailure itself is part of the process.”</li> <li>b. If something isn’t working, “you must be prepared to recognize it and change—especially considering the pace of the Internet age” (Herzog).</li> <li>c. “Companies that are best positioned to seize [new business opportunities] will have devised and implemented a strategy based on a thorough understanding of their business needs—and how emerging Web-based technologies will be shaping those needs.”</li> </ul>	<p>9. Accept Failures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Everyone is experimenting with the possibilities and not all of these experiments will be successful. Faculty need to be reassured that as much is learned from failure as is from success.</li> <li>b. Realize that strategies don’t work in all settings for all courses. Even using the same strategy from one module of a course to another (or from one term to another) doesn’t always work.</li> <li>c. Don’t be too quick to assign failure. See point 6.c. above.</li> <li>d. Realize that what goes on in the classroom is going to “look different”—don’t view faculty who are trying new approaches in their classes as not teaching properly.</li> </ul>
	<p>10. Recognize and Reward Successes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Have a structure by which you can learn the successes your faculty are having with innovative approaches.</li> <li>b. Find a forum for your faculty to share their experiences with their colleagues. Their enthusiasm will go a long way in bringing others along.</li> <li>c. Build rewards for effective teaching into the tenure and promotion process.</li> </ul>