

CASE STUDY:

AWARD-WINNING UNIONCLOUD ENHANCES NUS SERVICES



Arrk Group helps NUS enhance its digital services with the development of UnionCloud, its cloud-based membership management platform. Awarded The Times Higher Education Awards ICT Initiative of the Year, UnionCloud incorporates modular design to provide student unions with an appealing and feature rich solution.

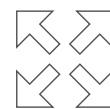
Key Benefits



Enhances commercial potential and profitability of NUS



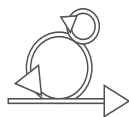
Flexible, cloud-based 'union website in a box' solution



Highly scalable platform capable of reaching 7m student users



Combines open source and bespoke development



Developed using a hybrid Agile scrum-based methodology



Successful and rapid deployment based on academic year

Customer

- Not-for-profit organisation
- Over 600 student union members

The National Union of Students (NUS) is a confederation of over 600 student unions, accounting for 95 per cent of all higher education and further education unions in the UK. A not-for-profit organisation it exists to promote, defend and extend the rights of students by providing a collective voice for the student movement as well as delivering a range of services to its diverse member unions.

Situation

- Ageing and dispersed IT systems
- Increased competition from external commercial providers

The NUS was losing the ability to serve its member unions due to ageing and dispersed IT systems. Furthermore, it was coming under increasing competition from external

commercial providers capable of offering alternative digital platforms and services.

These dual issues were having an adverse effect on usage and revenue, which in turn meant that less money was remaining within the student movement. NUS has not-for-profit status, with profits ploughed back into the student movement.

Following a detailed consultation period, NUS opted for a fully integrated digital membership platform. The cloud-based platform had to become the solution of choice for student unions, by providing a cost effective, easy-to-access and flexible platform for their day-to-day operations.

In the face of increasing competition from alternative providers, a well designed and architected solution that met all of NUS's key criteria needed to be delivered quickly and in a high quality manner, on a critical path determined by the academic year.



Enabling the
Digital Enterprise

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Challenge

- Crucial strategic development
- Immoveable deadline
- Significant financial investment

The UnionCloud project was not only a critical strategic initiative for NUS but also a significant financial investment. The organisational context was also highly complex, with a diverse range of stakeholders whose needs and desires had to be embraced as part of the development programme.

Requiring more than a team of smart software engineers, NUS required a development partner which would work closely and collaboratively, forging close relationships at all levels to become an integral part of the team. The right partner also needed expertise and experience of delivering a highly complex cloud-based solution with the ability to scale up to 7m potential users and huge volume peaks at the start of the academic year.

Solution

- Rapid knowledge acquisition phase
- Joint project delivery team
- Modular design

The solution incorporates a highly flexible, modular design which allows a diverse range of student unions a customised deployment, yet still retain all the advantages of having a large scale, centrally-managed cloud-based system. No two deployments need be the same, with student unions able to incorporate their own branding and colour schemes, as well as select from a variety of feature modules.

The digital platform utilises a combination of bespoke and off-the-shelf components, using best-of-breed technology stack and open source elements which ensures that UnionCloud is built upon rock solid foundations. These core elements are crucial in ensuring that UnionCloud is able to grow robustly and securely as more unions sign up to the service.

Arrk Group and NUS team members work closely to develop and support the UnionCloud platform and infrastructure. Agile development practices have been used to quickly showcase and build working software.

UnionCloud was developed using Agile/Scrum-based framework and built using technologies such as Ruby on Rails, Postgres, Redis and Resque.

Outcomes

- The Times' Higher Education Awards ICT Initiative of the Year 2013 winner.
- First use of Agile delivery methods by NUS
- Successful and rapid deployment

Recognised as the ICT Initiative of the Year at The Times' Higher Education Awards 2013, a key factor in the success of the project was the collaborative partnership model. Arrk Group worked closely with NUS to rapidly understand and shape programme requirements.

The successful deployment of UnionCloud has ensured that generated revenues are driven back into the student movement, with effective programme management ensuring a swift route to market which delivers on UnionCloud's potential.

By utilising hybrid Agile delivery methods, a first for NUS, a distributed team of over 30 people successfully delivered the platform under the strict deadlines imposed by the academic year. This innovative approach was critical in streamlining the process of understanding and elaborating requirements, testing out technologies and developing the solution from day one. This helped to maximise communication and transparency, while reducing bottlenecks and potential delays.

Arrk Group delivers award-winning digital systems through collaborative partnering and high performing software engineering.

Call today on +44 (0) 161 227 9900 for more information.

"Arrk Group's unique hybrid delivery model has been crucial to the success of the project, and their technical skill, attention to detail and quality plus their speed of delivery have been important factors in helping us deliver UnionCloud effectively."

Doug Tomlinson, NUS Group
Director of IT and New Media



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