



Sun West School Division Delivers Learning In The Cloud

Sun West, Saskatchewan



Overview

Sun West is a large school division located in Saskatchewan, Canada. With a large distance learning program as part of its mandate, the school division wanted to ensure that its geographically spread out community could access the most up-to-date curriculum content reliably and securely.

Business Challenge

The school had tried various alternatives to delivering its distance learning program but none were working effectively. They were considering purchasing a video server and developing their own content and asked Softchoice for help in sourcing this solution.

Solution

Softchoice Cloud is a suite of services that makes it easier to source, implement and manage the right cloud solution. The Softchoice team realized that the video server solution might prove costly and complex for the school district to manage and maintain and recommended a SaaS application called Brainshark as a viable alternative.

Results

The Softchoice Cloud team's recommendation has enabled the school district to focus on a solution that fits their needs, instead of further investing in a complex infrastructure that would require additional expertise to support and manage.

Softchoice's focus on helping solve client problems cost effectively helped drive an innovative solution that has made a big difference in Sun West's ability to serve its communities.

Located in West-Central Saskatchewan, Canada, the Sun West School Division covers approximately 31,252 square kilometers (12,066 square miles). The School Division administers 40 schools; comprising Kindergarten to Grade 12, elementary schools, high schools and Hutterite Colony Schools for almost 5000 students.

Business Challenge

The Sun West School District had worked with Softchoice for several years, partnering in various opportunities as the board built its technology infrastructure.

Last winter, Sun West's Superintendent of Education, Darren Gasper, in discussions with Softchoice representative Rick Anodal, mentioned that the school division was interested in acquiring a Video Server as a replacement for School Tube, a free moderated video sharing platform that the division was using.

Sun West used School Tube as part of its active Distance Learning Program, to ensure that all students were able to access high quality educational content, no matter where they live or attend school.

Using School Tube was proving challenging however, as it had no support and there was no control over content. Sometimes teachers would find that videos were abruptly removed from the service for copyright violations with no advanced notice. If students were using these videos in course work, they would then be unable to complete their module. This made for an unhappy user experience and blemished the reputation of the distance education program.

The alternative solution Sun West was considering was building its own content hosting service, purchasing a video server and storage and then developing and customizing content.

Solution

Anodal spent some time analyzing Sun West's request for a video server, calculating power and storage costs, fail safe and redundancy requirements, maintenance, warranties, lifecycle upgrades, additional staff requirements and training, and realized that the video server option might prove very complex and costly for the school board.

To ensure that he was offering the best solution to his client, Anodal decided to leverage Softchoice's server and storage technical architects and the Softchoice Cloud team to come up with a better, more cost effective solution.

After extensive consultations, the Softchoice cloud team presented Sun West with an exciting newly offered online hosted presentation technology called Brainshark.

Brainshark provides web-based applications that enables users to create, share and track online video presentations, that can be viewed at any time, on computers, smartphones and tablets. The simplicity of the solution enables users to pre-record videos and additional content such as documents, a PowerPoint deck or other content and then use telephone or computer microphone to record voice narration. Additional features such as polls, quizzes and attachments can also be added. The final result is accessed via a Web link or embedded in a Web page. One of the huge benefits of the Brainshark solution for Sun West is that it

measures and quantifies everything on the site, so teachers can easily see what students are doing and how long they are spending on modules.

A couple of online meetings with the Softchoice Cloud Team and Brainshark allowed Sun West to review the solution based on its extensive evaluation criteria, and resulted in Darren Gasper being so impressed with the solution he said, 'We've seen enough, we're ready to move forward immediately.'

"Our experience has been really positive with the Softchoice Cloud team and the Brainshark solution. Our goal is to provide the best experience we can to our students and their feedback is confirming we have met and are surpassing that goal."

*Darren Gasper,
Sun West Superintendent
of Education*

Results

Softchoice Cloud is a suite of services that makes it easier to source, implement and manage the right cloud solutions.

“Softchoice’s recommendation to use Brainshark has made a huge difference in the way we deliver education to our community” says Darren Gasper. “In a short time we’ve found many different ways of using its features to deliver content to students. Teachers are actually changing the way they deliver content as they add, edit or update on the fly, chunking content into more manageable bites of information and pausing periodically to receive student feedback.”

The school board is now a leader in leveraging cloud technologies to manage, grow and support its community’s varied educational needs. “The project has been so successful that we’ve been partnering with other school divisions around the province providing them with our content, so they can take advantage of what we have been developing” says Gasper.

As evidence of the success of the project, in August alone, over 51 presentations were created, there were over 1,000 views and almost 18 hours of video presentations developed – a huge number when you consider that the new school year hadn’t even started!

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Softchoice’s focus on helping solve client problems cost effectively helped drive an innovative solution that has made a big difference in Sun West’s ability to serve its communities.

“Providing educational services to remote and home-based students requires the ability to deliver dynamic content they can access easily and conveniently, including from mobile devices,” says Gasper. “Our experience has been really positive with the Softchoice Cloud team and the Brainshark solution. Our goal is to provide the best experience we can to our students and their feedback is confirming we have met and are surpassing that goal.”

Key benefits of the Softchoice Cloud and Brainshark solution include:

- **Cost Savings** : No need for an investment in costly video technology or the extensive maintenance or support the infrastructure requires.
- **Improved Productivity** : Staff and students use the system reliably on their own schedules.
- **Risk Avoidance** : Brainshark is easy to use, always available and without the restrictions of the school division’s previous solution.
- **Reduced environmental impact** : Students and teachers don’t need to travel long distances in potentially hazardous weather conditions to take a course.
- **Flexibility** : Authors can create content quickly and easily from home or school and students can view the presentations on any device. Edits can also be done easily to ensure the content is current.
- **Powerful Analytics** : Dashboards and reports give teachers insight into how presentations are being used by students.