California State University

California State University Ensures Web Accessibility with HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff®

CSU The California State University

Quick Facts

Organization

- CSU is a leader in high-quality, accessible, student-focused higher education
- One of the largest, most diverse and affordable university systems in the country
- 23 campuses with more than 450,000 students, faculty and staffs

Industry

- Higher Education

Challenges

- CSU strives to provide all of our students with an equal education and providing accessible online services and materials is an important part of meeting this goal

Solution

- HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff®

Benefits

- Standardized Web accessibility requirements across 23 campuses and thousands of websites
- Wide-based user adoption to ensure accessibility at point of publishing
- Measureable increases in cross-campus collaboration

Background

In an information-driven university setting, the ability to access Web content is essential for all students, faculty and staff. As one of the largest and most diverse public university systems in the country, California State University (CSU) is committed to providing access for their entire university community.

CSU's Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) was formed to guarantee compliance with federal Section 508 accessibility standards across the millions of Web pages maintained by the system and its vendors. To meet an accessibility mandate of this scope, the ATI sought out an automated compliance testing tool.

CSU chose HiSoftware, now part of Cryptzone, in order to best serve the university community. The robust functionality of HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff® is well suited to a 23-campus system with a wide range of content and Web page designs, and Cryptzone's commitment to customer service means CSU's ATI has a dedicated partner to help meet their accessibility mandate.

Introduction

CSU's online presence includes millions of Web pages that are vital information sources for more than 450,000 students, faculty and staff across 23 campuses. With so many people creating and consuming content, promoting awareness of the accessibility requirements, plus training, testing and monitoring, presented huge challenges.

CSU established the Accessible Technology Initiative (ATI) in 2006 to begin a system-wide implementation of federal accessibility standards and guidelines. ATI staff provides support and help to all 23 campuses to make Web content more accessible to people with disabilities, including those with blindness or low vision, hearing loss, learning

disabilities, cognitive limitations, limited movement, speech disabilities and photosensitivity.

"With increasingly limited resources, the ATI needed a creative solution that wouldn't require duplication 23 times," said Cheryl Pruitt, Director of the Accessible Technology Initiative at CSU. "We knew automated monitoring combined with manual testing was the key, but we also recognized we needed a partner that would work to develop customized requirements that fit our specific needs."

The Challenge

"CSU strives to provide all of our students with an equal education. Providing accessible online services and materials is an important part of meeting this goal. We had used an earlier version of Cryptzone's product for accessibility compliance and had been very successful. But we wanted to see what else was on the market," said Pruitt. To conduct this review, CSU established a campus-based committee to identify new contract requirements and evaluate all technology competitors. In the end, it was determined that Cryptzone could better serve the university community through a combination of better value and richer product features.

"We evaluated four enterprise-level Web accessibility tools. HiSoftware Compliance Sherriff was ultimately selected for its robust functionality, reasonable price and excellent customer service," said Pruitt.

Deployment, Training and Adoption

When kicking-off its deployment, CSU established a goal: strive to make all campus websites accessible at the time of publishing, and vendor websites accessible at the time of purchase. To ensure they remain accessible, both university-owned and vendor sites are proactively monitored.

Despite this simple goal, CSU faced substantial hurdles, leading ATI to develop three key objectives:

1. Establish standardized baseline testing requirements across all 23 CSU campuses;

2. Create a plan for university-wide deployment with campus user groups to enable self-testing; and

3. Develop a comprehensive training program across the system to ensure successful adoption and application use moving forward.

Standardized Requirements

Leveraging Compliance Sheriff's tunable rules engine, CSU created a customized set of testing guidelines that included both automated and manual criteria, as well as repair resources. CSU mapped the Section 508 requirements and CSU's Manual Evaluation requirements to the WCAG 2.0 guidelines in preparation for the upcoming

 508 refresh. The customized requirements were then deployed to the campuses to ensure system-wide standardization of testing criteria in Compliance Sheriff.

System Wide Deployment

The success of the project hinged upon wide adoption among the 23 campuses. A number of steps were put in place to help facilitate this.

First, each individual campus could choose to host the software themselves or have Cryptzone host it for them. Second, a deployment strategy for campus installation and initial training was executed to ensure that each campus had a successful installation. Third, the standardized requirements were developed and shared with campuses. Fourth, a process is in development that will be shared with campuses to create a campus deployment plan for:

- Web designers and developers who need access to the testing tools and resources during development;

- Content contributors who test content before publishing to the Web; and

- Compliance personnel who test vendor sites and prepare reports for executives.

Working closely with the CSU team, Cryptzone developed an expanded set of user roles and permissions that will give campus staff fine-tuned control to meet the separate needs of Web designers and developers, content contributors and compliance personnel.

"CSU needed a partner to achieve our goal of access to Web content for all faculty, students and staff. As that partner, HiSoftware delivers robust functionality and excellent service at a reasonable cost."

Cheryl Pruitt
Director Accessible Technology Initiative, CSU

Effective Training and Collaboration

Full implementation and acceptance of the new tools included training and a high level of collaboration throughout the CSU system. In addition to three regional face-to-face training sessions to be held across California, Cryptzone hosted three Web-based training sessions to accommodate the geographic disparity of CSU's campuses. CSU and Cryptzone also recorded and archived the training sessions for future review and playback. In addition to these six training sessions, CSU purchased additional sessions to assist with deployment and configuration of the new user roles and permissions.

"Cryptzone worked very closely with CSU to provide training, develop a customized support portal, map the system to our specific accessibility requirements, and collaborate with various CSU work groups to create and implement our systemwide deployment strategies," said Pruitt. "Their deep involvement mirrored CSU's commitment to its students and is helping the implementation move forward successfully."

Results with HiSoftware Compliance Sheriff

Compliance Sheriff now automates monitoring of previously published pages (numbered in the millions) against the customized requirements that CSU and Cryptzone created, and flags issues for remediation. Once the improved permissions are in place, all users will be able to automatically test new content prior to publication to ensure accessibility for the widest possible audience.

The CSU accessibility rules go beyond automated testing to include separate manual testing requirements as well. As a result, CSU users now have the knowledge and technology tools in place to understand when Web accessibility errors occur and how best to correct them.

Lessons Learned

CSU learned a great deal from their experience deploying Compliance Sheriff. With 21 out of 23 campuses opting into the CSU-Cryptzone program, this was a huge project and one that required patience. CSU empowered a student group to help them test, study and fully explore the functionality of the product. This valuable support helped move the project along and also provided students with valuable problem analysis and project management experience to add to their resumes.

Administrative issues can arise in any major technology installation, especially one with this many audiences. "Organizations as large as ours will be able to take advantage of the variety of administrative features within Compliance Sheriff to accommodate various roles and access restrictions," Pruitt said. "Some of these features take time to develop and the student team played a critical role in understanding the needs of CSU and proposing changes that will make it possible for all of the CSU user groups to easily use Compliance Sheriff."

"This project is a large undertaking and we learned to celebrate our accomplishments along the way. The end result will be that almost a half-million students and employees at CSU will have full access to the university system's websites and services. We are empowering equal education for students across our campuses in California – our top priority," said Pruitt.

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