

# The top 7 things to remember when buying a portal solution

Choose the right solution to create a  
great online campus experience

ellucian

An eBook for  
institutional  
decision-  
makers

## Introduction

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Ellucian portals deliver the gold standard in higher education



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# Introduction

**We all live in the digital world.** We interact online every day with resources, personal apps, and our favorite retailers. These interactions shape our framework for a quality online experience.

Your campus users are bringing their consumer experiences and expectations to your institution's portal. They expect to quickly access the applications and resources they need to complete required tasks. They lose interest or become annoyed with irrelevant or difficult to find content. And they might miss an opportunity to connect with your institution if it is not presented to them in a personalized way.

Successful online retailers have set the standard for a positive online experience. How does your campus portal stack up?



From smartphones and tablets to laptops and television,  
**90% of all media interactions today are screen-based** according to *Think with Google*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The New Multi-Screen World Study; Think With Google," August 2012.  
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/research-studies/the-new-multi-screen-world-study.html>

# 1. Simplify the experience with single sign-on

**Multiple click-throughs and annoying passwords** and logins are obstacles to getting work done and barriers to communication. A static web populated with dizzying links to your many departments, learning management system, library, bookstore, and multiple campus online systems is a link farm, not a portal. Even worse, it's a bad experience for your end-users.

You can eliminate the headache of multiple logins with one secure portal. Today's portal technology provides single sign-on access to the tools and content users need to accomplish their administrative tasks and connect with your institution. When students can accomplish tasks in a quick and efficient manner, it frames a positive overall educational experience.



**Single sign-on also makes your IT staff happy.** They can focus more on projects that create value for the institution, and less time answering calls to reset forgotten passwords. A portal with integration to other campus applications also ends their frustration with managing content and attempting to create a consistent brand experience across multiple pages.

## 2. Deliver self-service applications that improve the online experience

**Self-service applications satisfy everyone.** Students are happy when they can complete their administrative tasks any time they want 24/7. Staff are satisfied when students manage their own needs online, freeing them up from data entry and answering routine questions. Instead, staff can spend more time having meaningful interactions with students who really need their help.

You can create a great digital experience for your faculty, staff, and administrators, too. Self-service applications and single sign-on let faculty work through their administrative tasks easily, whether posting grades in the learning management system or checking their remaining vacation days. Administrators can access dashboards and other business intelligence tools without having to search for them.



**Self-service functions are also the lifeboat for administrative staff when enrollment surges but employee headcount remains the same.**

### 3. Reflect your campus experience online

**College and university campuses hum with activity.** Bring that same collaborative buzz to your portal. Students can communicate with their professors and classmates through chat rooms and email. Campus clubs can create a space to share information and to gather virtually. Tools like blogging, wikis, discussion boards, and bookmarks also encourage deeper communications and connections. These tools become even more important for online learners who are hungry for a connection to your institution.

Your portal should reflect your college's unique experience and values. Does yours mirror your institution's personality? Is it distinctive? And is the experience reflected throughout your portal? An effective solution puts your departments and schools in control of their content, but sets the parameters that enhance the institution's brand. Maintaining a consistent look and feel while navigating throughout all your department and school websites also enhances the user experience.



**Providing the latest collaborative and self-service applications demonstrates that your institution is current with technology, adding to your positive image.**

## 4. Recreate the consumer experience through personalization



**Your portal is a busy place.** Departments and clubs are sharing resources and news. Administrative tasks need to be completed. It is easy for users to become overwhelmed or irritated when they need to search for content.

You can restore order through personalization technology that recognizes users' roles and automatically centralizes and presents the right resources to them. Channelized content about subjects like financial aid, registration, housing, and student resources is pulled directly from your ERP and other systems and presented to the user in one page. A distance learner is presented with online tutoring services and relevant courses. Students in the college of engineering can view announcements about upcoming speakers in their field of study as well as alerts about the deadline for tuition payment. Only portal solutions with deep integration to your ERP enable this level of personalization.

The consumer market has set role-based content as the new benchmark. Online shoppers receive ads and offers that reflect their interests. Personalization is pervasive in the consumer environment because it clearly improves the overall user experience. It also propels users to take the action you want, like registering for classes on time.

Lastly, personalization enhances your institution's image and strengthens connections. It demonstrates to users that you understand them, and that you know what they need—even before they do.

**Personalization is sometimes confused with customization. Customization simply allows a user to tailor the look of their web experience by selecting a particular page layout and colors, and adding channels of their choosing. It's a fun feature but it lacks the power of personalization, which manages the types of content the user receives. Make sure your portal provider can deliver both.**

## 5. Deliver the right content at the right time in the right format

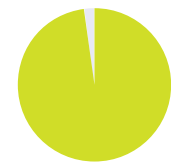


**Students and other users access digital content** by choosing the device that best suits their mood, location, and what they want to accomplish<sup>2</sup>. Smartphones are ideal when users are on the go, tablets are suited for entertainment and browsing, and laptops and PCs are most often used for completing tasks, according to *Think with Google*.

Regardless of the device they choose, users want a smooth experience. A mobile web page does not scale well to a larger screen. Hybrid mobile pages look outdated and clunky when accessed through a browser. Delivering apps only through mobile limits your users' choice of channels, and it produces a poor online experience on other devices. Top, higher ed institutions offer constituents a campus portal that lets them accomplish their work on the screen best suited for the task, and that aligns tightly with your mobile solution.



**24%** of interactions occur on PCs or laptops



**98%** of us move between devices within a single day<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> "The New Multi-Screen World Study; Think With Google," August 2012.  
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/research-studies/the-new-multi-screen-world-study.html>  
<sup>3</sup> "The New Multi-Screen World Study; Think With Google," August 2012.  
<http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/research-studies/the-new-multi-screen-world-study.html>



## Context drives device choices.

Today consumers own multiple devices and move seamlessly between them throughout the day.

The device we choose to use at a particular time is often driven by our context:



The amount of **time** we have or need



The **goal** we wish to accomplish



Our **location**



Our **attitude** or state of mind

## 6. Complete the experience with tight ERP integration

**Native integration transforms your portal** into a gateway to the critical applications in your ERP. You can deliver in-demand self-service functions for admissions, scheduling, bill payment, advising, and more. Integration also keeps data in synch so that users always have current information, like which dorm rooms are available and the status of a financial aid application.

Integration also is the foundation for delivering the optimum personalization experience. Data pulled from the ERP populates a user's view with targeted announcements and dynamic course schedules. And the content presented to users changes as their roles evolve. For instance, when students become alumni, they are presented with new resources for career management, networking, and giving.

Some portal vendors claim their solutions integrate with your ERP. However, most use unsupported legacy code interfaces or custom integrations that require additional service engagements whenever the solutions undergo an update. This can lead to unplanned outages, unbudgeted support costs, or critical security gaps. When your portal and ERP are integrated, you can easily deliver core services and targeted content without cumbersome website updates or redeployment.



**Aligning your campus-wide portal to your ERP makes sense on every level—from easy single sign-on, to delivery of critical role-based user applications, to a secure and smooth path forward as both systems evolve.**

## 7. Choose the right technology stack—with the right relationship

**Your technical staff—not your portal vendor—should drive the selection** of Liferay or Sharepoint as your underlying technology stack. Let your staff choose the stack that fits best with their experience and comfort levels. Then take the important next step of asking your potential portal vendors if they have a formal relationship with that provider. If not, walk away from the table. A tight partnership between your portal vendor and the provider of the underlying technology keeps your portal live and your constituents happy. It gives you one point of contact and eliminates the possibility of finger pointing and portal failure.



# Conclusion

## Digital rules; your provider should be a leader, too.

Your institution's digital experience affects your image, student satisfaction, and the workload of your administrative staff. An undertaking of this importance needs to be in competent hands.

Choosing the wrong provider or placing portal development in the hands of your faculty or technical staff could leave you with an outdated and unsupported portal when people leave or technology changes. If your portal cannot evolve along with new consumer applications, your visitors' experience will suffer, and you will be unable to deliver new functions.

When choosing a portal vendor, review the evolution of their solution. Are they rapidly iterating on their features and functionality? How many releases or updates have they issued in the last year? Do they have a clear roadmap for the future? Is the solution scalable to match increasing enrollment and users' expectations?



Choose an industry leader that can support your portal solution now and well into the future.

## Ellucian portals deliver the gold standard in higher education

**Ellucian's portal solutions leapfrog competitive offerings** on two important fronts. One, only Ellucian's solutions deliver native integration to your Ellucian ERP, delivering exponential benefits like self-service applications and personalization with less work from your IT staff.

Two, Ellucian customized both the Liferay Enterprise Edition and Sharepoint technology stacks to create two complete portal solutions that align with your needs. The deep customization delivers improved security a better user experience, and ease of migration and maintenance, creating an end product that is much richer than the sum of the underlying technologies. Ellucian's technical service team helps you with every aspect of implementation, migration, and ongoing support. Native integration with our ERP keeps in-demand self-service and personalized applications always available.

Tailored for higher education, Ellucian portal solutions let you exceed user expectations, build strong connections, and reduce administrative costs.

## About Ellucian

**Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world.**

Ellucian helps education institutions thrive in an open and dynamic world. We deliver a broad portfolio of technology solutions, developed in collaboration with a global education community, and provide strategic guidance to help education institutions of all kinds navigate change, achieve greater transparency, and drive efficiencies. More than 2,400 institutions in 40 countries around the world look to Ellucian for the ideas and insights that will move education forward, helping people everywhere discover their potential through learning.

To learn more, visit [www.ellucian.com](http://www.ellucian.com).

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