
The Demand for 'On Demand'

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Major shift or marketing buzzword? Questions to ask



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Here, Weir draws from his experience with NEU's award-winning Northeastern On Demand initiative—a web-based virtual computing environment—to explain why higher ed's trend toward "on demand" services is stronger than you might think.

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What's 'on demand' got to do with higher education?

- Incoming freshmen, born in 1988, have never known life without PCs or the net.
- To be relevant, higher ed must reflect the real world...an "on demand" world.

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So what do these 'on demand' people demand?

- Full access to their information, tools, and work regardless of time or place.
- Access via whatever workstation (or digital device) is available.
- Immediate service that reflects their unique needs.

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Is this just another 'enterprise portal' discussion? Nope: Take your portal and...

- ...add file storage with “self-service” collaboration.
- ...add access to desktop applications and tools.
- ...mix in cell phones, iPods, Xboxes, and heaven-knows-what’s around the corner.

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How can we cater to tens of thousands of individuals?

- Automated robust authentication/authorization (identity, role, status, preferences) through enterprise information systems is the “not-so-secret” secret sauce.

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You want software delivery via the internet to *anyone*? Are you daft?

- Virtualization technologies deliver desktop applications to any workstation, regardless of ownership (e.g., Softricity).
- Robust authentication allows access only to those authorized.

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Do users demand collaboration ‘on demand,’ too?

- Each member of the community can have an ample quota of web storage: a virtual “C drive in the sky” to store and share work without involving IT (e.g., Xythos Software).

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Doesn’t this change teaching and learning?

- Of course! All course-related software is available to faculty and students anytime, anywhere, potentially eliminating the need for computer labs.
- Students become knowledge manipulators and generators: Faculty can expand assignments to focus on experiential versus rote learning.

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Are administrators also demanding ‘on demand’?

- Absolutely! Fundraising and admissions staffs, for example, want access to their software tools and web-based storage whether in the office, at home, on the road, or overseas.

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What about security?

- It's a challenge. But adoption of standardized tools and robust authentication (at the enterprise level) goes a long way toward helping users keep their own data safe.

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Whoa! Are we talking about a major environmental shift? A climate change for higher education?

- That was probably the dinosaur's reaction to climate change...
- "On demand" demand is here and now. The question is how we'll adapt!

Proposals for articles and tips for news stories, as well as questions and comments about this publication, should be submitted to David Nagel, executive editor, at dnagel@1105media.com.