



Elastic Path Software Case Study

E-learning Leader Deploys Mobile-Enabled Commerce

Focused on the Digital Experience

Company at a glance:

Name: Desire2Learn Inc.

Industry: Education

Year Founded: 1999

Headquarters: Kitchener,
Ontario, Canada

URL: www.desire2learn.com

Employees: 1000

Market Cap: Privately owned

Customers: 700 institutions,
with approx. 8 million students

Enterprise Client

Desire2Learn is an innovative learning management company based in Ontario, Canada. Desire2Learn provides a next generation learning management platform and solutions to engage and inspire lifelong learners. It helps clients, which includes universities and corporations, break down barriers to access the highest quality learning experiences, and is recognized for its leadership in accessibility.

Desire2Learn's cloud-based (SaaS) learning solution provides an open and extensible platform to over 750 clients and over 10 million learners in higher education, K-12, healthcare, government and the corporate sector, including the Fortune 1000. Desire2Learn has offices in the United States, Canada, Europe, Australia, Brazil, and Singapore.

Business Problem

Desire2Learn's learning management platform — Learning Suite — is an integrated platform of solutions for fully-online, blended, or in-class learning, featuring sophisticated course design capabilities, reporting and assessment, collaboration, and integrated mobile capabilities. Quite simply, it is the most robust ecosystem of elearning products on the market.

With Desire2Learn, students and teachers had all of the tools necessary to enable cutting-edge online education delivery, minus one crucial element: Textbooks. If a student needed a textbook, they had to purchase it from their school's bookstore. This not only forced students to spend textbook dollars elsewhere, but it created an uneven digital experience as students went hunting on websites and rummaging through bookstores to find what they needed. Desire2Learn quickly saw an opportunity to provide students with e-textbooks without them having to leave the platform, making for a seamless digital experience. For teachers, e-textbooks meant that they could compile required reading lists for each class, and then publish the list for students to purchase online via the same elearning environment that they were using for the course.

By commerce-enabling their platform, Desire2Learn could provide a valuable ecommerce service to students, monetize content through revenue share deals with textbook publishers such as Prentice-Hall, Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill, and improve the overall digital experience.

Solution:

Students are an ideal demographic to sell digital products. As a group, they're digital-savvy and highly adept users of mobile devices. With this in mind, Desire2Learn approached its project differently than it would a traditional web storefront. It needed a flexible, open commerce solution that was built to monetize digital touchpoints within the concept of an overall digital experience.

Feature wise, our longer term vision was less about traditional ecommerce by going to a website and more focused on in-app purchasing outside of a traditional ecommerce site. Elastic Path's strengths in those areas were definite benefits over competitors."

- Terry Markle, Ecommerce Product Manager, Desire2Learn

As this was Desire2Learn's first consumer-facing commerce project — and one that they planned to create an entirely new business unit around — internal expectations for success were very high. "It definitely was a really big deal," Markle said. "There was lots of executive attention and a lot of attention from our shareholders. It was really a new business, not just a new product."

Elastic Path's Professional Services team was a key resource that appealed to Desire2Learn, because it meant that in-house developers were immediately available to help launch the project on a tight timeline — just 5 months from project kick-off to launch, not including the 3 months it took to evaluate ecommerce platform vendors at the outset.

Planning for Success

With Elastic Path Commerce selected, Elastic Path's Professional Services team worked with Desire2Learn to determine requirements and to create a success plan.

At the heart of Desire2Learn's project is Binder, a powerful and intuitive mobile tablet app (Android and iPad) that enables students to interact with course documents, e-textbooks and more, whenever and wherever it's convenient. The Binder platform's mission is to help educators make the transition from print to digital by simplifying the discovery and acquisition of publisher content through e-textbook integration into the online learning experience.

"It gives students a central place to learn that's on their own turf and on their own iPads," said Markle, whose 30-person internal team developed much of the iOS app.

For the web storefront, called Binder Shop, Desire2Learn wanted a modern frontend using HTML5 technologies. The Binder web store, powered by Elastic Path Commerce Engine, allows students to buy or rent e-textbook on the web, and then send them to the Binder tablet app where students can read or create study notes. Elastic Path Commerce Engine feeds product information, including complex product metadata and multiple SKU information, to the storefront.

From the outset, it was clear that his project would involve technical challenges not encountered before. For example, Desire2Learn wanted to offer digital product returns using a self-service model. In the education sector, product returns are a critical feature, and for good reason. At the beginning of a school semester, it's common for students to start a class and then quickly drop it in favour of another, more suitable class. Being able to return an e-textbook was a must-have.

“Students today have grown up in a digital age and expect a certain level of feature and functionality when buying online, especially with digital products,” said Markle. “Being able to handle the return process unaided online was key for us. There was also cost savings to providing that functionality through reduced call center volume.”

Elastic Path's Professional Services team wrote a custom connector that processes these digital returns, crediting the payment method used at time of purchase, which includes PayPal — a much-needed payment method for students who often don't have credit cards.

Elastic Path worked with its partner Amazon Web Services to provide Desire2Learn with a hosting environment that offered reliable, scalable, and inexpensive cloud computing service. Elastic Path Commerce is designed to be deployed to a number of popular cloud computing environments, and was optimized for use on AWS.

Because of its flexible architecture, Elastic Path Commerce also integrated with Desire2Learn's existing IT systems, including Edidentity, Desire2Learn's proprietary account management system for entitlements. For processing taxes, which is often a complex process, Elastic Path included out-of-the box integration with Avalara, which manages Binder's U.S. tax calculations while a separate system handles Canadian taxes.

About Elastic Path™

Elastic Path helps the world's biggest brands generate billions in revenue using its ecommerce technologies. The company's software also seamlessly brings omnichannel ecommerce, subscriptions, and enhanced connectivity right into Adobe Experience Manager, the leading content management platform – enabling companies to deliver a complete customer experience that maximizes engagement and conversion. Elastic Path has more than 200 customers, including Time Inc., Virgin Media, LVMH, Western Union, TeliaSonera, Kiabi, and Motability. For more information, visit www.elasticpath.com

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