Coldwell Banker's Social Learning Portal

Since 1906, Coldwell Banker® LLC has been a premier provider of full-service residential and commercial real estate. The oldest national real estate brand in the United States, Coldwell Banker has a network of nearly 86,000 sales associates and brokers working in approximately 3,300 offices in 50 countries and territories.

Challenge

Almost half of Coldwell Banker's offices are independently owned and operated franchises, making it more difficult for Corporate to mandate management training and performance interventions for its managers. Further, most managers who leverage Coldwell Banker's Learning Management System (LMS) for 'structured' training opportunities, do not do so on a repeated basis. They register for a course and then exit the platform. Furthermore, they cannot collaborate with others in the LMS. However, managers within the CB franchise network will often get together to share best practices and encourage mentoring opportunities from experts in local markets. This is referred to as "informal learning."

Driven by the philosophy that "the key to a successful real estate operation lies with its office managers," Coldwell Banker (CB) Executives were challenged to find a learning and development approach that would increase managers' performance and productivity, yet complement the effective informal learning that was already taking place.

Solution

When CB approach Aptara, it was clear that the key to success would be designing an approach that would be perceived as an everyday work tool, not a discrete training intervention. Leveraging the latest in learning science and web technology, Aptara created an interactive and collaborative virtual world for CB, known as a social learning portal.

Launched in March 2011 after nine months of design and development, the custom "Managing Broker Academy" (MBA) Portal is a comprehensive, modern learning solution that facilitates peer-to-peer, expert-to-peer, mentor-to-peer, and L&D-user collaborative learning to create an inviting and comfortable culture of knowledge sharing and collaboration. It also integrates the full range of Coldwell Banker University's traditional, structured learning resources—web resources and documents on CB websites, CB's Intranet and Learning Management System (LMS)—all connected by a convenient single sign-in login.

Aptara's media specialists created a 3-D virtual world graphical user interface that emulates a CB real estate office. The illustrated and engaging environment encourages visitors to explore and interactively learn. Users are greeted by a helpful avatar that guides them to key collaborative sections of the portal, including Online Discussion Groups and a Broker Blog for connecting with peers and industry experts.
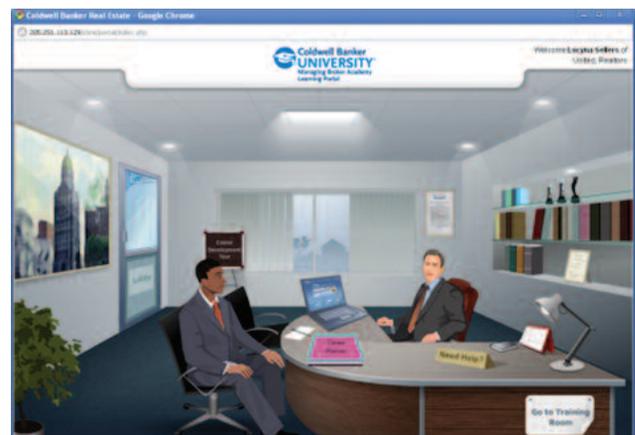
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Separate Career Development and Training & Resources 'rooms' provide educational planning and personal development tools, virtual counselors for creating professional development roadmaps and access to other resources on Productivity & Profitability, Leadership, Recruiting & Retention, Training & Coaching and Business Planning.

Key Portal Features

- An expert blog
- Real-time industry news feeds
- A forum for "Community Discussion and Best Practices"
- Linking to external content repositories using pass-through managers
- Deep links to structured LMS courses, when tracking and/or registration is needed in the LMS

- Self-paced "click & launch" courses (no registration)
- Links to public social learning platforms (Twitter, Facebook, etc)
- Streaming videos and podcasts for training and informational purposes
- RSS feed integration

Key learning and development resources include social information exchange tools such as:

- **Forums** – A virtual meeting ground, forums are the digital world's equivalent of the office water cooler, where people meet for quick informal exchanges.
- **Blogs** – To record and share learning experiences and ideas.
- **Tweets** – Not just for telling people what you are doing now, the Coldwell Banker Twitter page, accessed through the MBA Portal, provides news, tutorials, and links to helpful tips and tricks.
- **Social Networks** – A gateway to CB's Facebook and LinkedIn pages, they are a great way for sharing details of what you know, what you do, what you're interested in and where your talents lie, making it easy for users to search for resident experts on particular topics.
- **Social Bookmarks** – A quick and easy way to build a vast knowledgebase of related content, social bookmarks help groups of learners share the knowledge resources that they find most valuable.

Technology

The MBA Portal's architecture was designed by Aptara to be scalable, allowing new sections to be easily added to the interface and new content to be managed through XML files. Supporting technology includes: PHP, HTML, JavaScript, Adobe Flash CS4, Adobe Photoshop XML, mySQL, Apache Web Server and Microsoft Word. A rapid-prototyping, multi-miniteration development process was used to allow for innovative, quick and easy user experience design decisions.

Result

To measure the impact of informal learning, CB has designed a multi-pronged approach that involves metrics from Google Analytics, Single Sign-in Login records, random micro-surveys, and a 12-question, level-1 survey. The survey is focused on portal experience, videos, podcasts, self-paced courses and documents, and dynamically displays results and comments to users.

Though only launched four months ago, as of this writing, early usage metrics and feedback suggest that the Coldwell Banker Managing Broker Academy (MBA) Portal is already making learning more accessible, personal and engaging. The long term goal is for it to help teach, inspire and empower managers to more effectively coach their real estate agents and ensure their business' maximum profitability in the process.

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