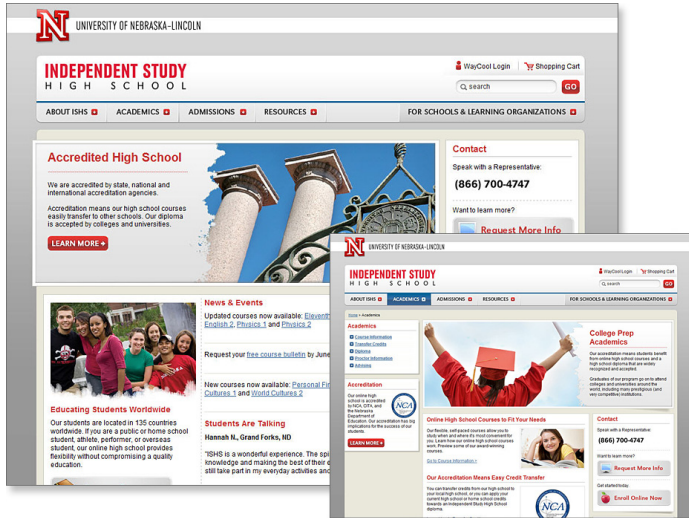


## CASE STUDY

# UNL INDEPENDENT STUDY HIGH SCHOOL

## Extended Education & Outreach



### Summary

In 1924, Dean Henzlik of the Teachers College at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) had a vision: all high school students should have the opportunity to receive top-notch education, regardless of geographical location. Five years later, this vision became a reality as Independent Study High School (ISHS) was established by UNL and the first correspondence courses were delivered to a group of 14 students from a small rural town in Crookston, Neb.

What began more than 80 years ago and has been bolstered with the arrival of the Internet is a school for the 21st century, grounded in tradition. ISHS still maintains

a strong commitment and mission to create opportunities for students everywhere to develop the skills, attitudes and knowledge that will enable them to be thoughtful, committed and successful people—in whatever vocation they choose. ISHS's reach and reputation has grown and includes a student body that hails from all 50 U.S. states, as well as more than 135 countries worldwide.

Given its history and desire to remain relevant to students of today, ISHS was looking to enhance and update its Web site to help with student recruiting, brand awareness of ISHS, communication and delivery of relevant information regarding programs and services, capitalization of SEO and SEM, and to create a site architecture that allows for quick turn-around, site expansion and additional education program offerings.

With its flexibility and ability to create solutions, Sitecore CMS was an ideal match for ISHS's needs.

In collaboration with Sitecore partner Aware Web Solutions of Minneapolis, ISHS's site was designed and developed to leverage key CMS functionality, a dynamic billboard to highlight key information, Google Appliance site search, strong calls to action, and the installation of the Online Marketing Suite. Within the first seven months of the new site's launch, ISHS saw a 1000 percent increase in overall site visits—which has helped bring about a significant, 30 percent increase enrollment.

Visit Site > <http://highschool.unl.edu>

### Challenge

In today's wired world, a web site is no longer considered a supplementary add-on tool in a company's marketing toolkit,

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**Trevor Olson**

President/CEO

Aware Web Solutions

which can sit statically waiting for its quarterly or annual updates. It is a necessity that demands an organization’s rapt attention and requires updates to be made frequently—sometimes on a daily basis. Having said that, an educational program that is based on distance learning and is completely online cannot afford to be limited in its Web presence.

The ISHS is well positioned within the online high school market as a university-based high school. What sets ISHS apart from other university-based programs is that ISHS was the first of its kind, and is known for its rigorous academics and preparation for college. To meet the demands of state and federal accreditation, it is critical for ISHS to continually expand and improve upon the mechanisms and methods that demonstrate the quality of its programs and enable ISHS to compete effectively.

To that end, ISHS recognized its Web site needed an overhaul. ISHS’s site had been developed in 2008 and was very static. An independent consultant maintained the site and utilized Dreamweaver to apply site updates. This hindered any immediate turnaround for edits or changes to the site. Beside this lack of efficiency, the site suffered additional limitations such as not being marketing or SEO-friendly.

“It was important to us that we deliver a scalable, long-term solution that empowered internal ISHS resources to manage and support the new online presence. We worked closely with UNL developers throughout the project to ensure the final product achieved that goal,” said Tina Nelson, managing director, Aware Web Solutions. “We also used a component-based architecture, allowing for greater ease in the collaboration between Aware and UNL developers as we plan for future expansion and add-ons.”

The most important need for the redesigned site was the ability to increase student leads and enrollment. Related to this key goal, other focus areas included:

- Helping potential students make an educated decision about registering for ISHS.
  - o Listing of course availability, descriptions and requirements
  - o Tuition costs
  - o Pre-requisites (if any)
  - o Timelines for courses
  - o Diploma possibilities
  - o View a demo of an online courses
  - o Speaking online to a representative who can help visitor register or answer questions
  - o Clear calls to action to request more information or “enroll now” on each page
  - o Highlight the accreditation by NCA and the Nebraska Department of Education

## Aware Web Solutions At a Glance

Our greatest strength at Aware is translating complex business needs into well-organized Web sites. Leveraging our strategic, creative and marketing insights, Aware implements robust content management solutions that are uniquely tailored to meet the needs of mid- to large-sized organizations.

- Founded in 1998
- A mid-sized firm
- Over 100 CMS Implementations
- Our teams include: Strategists, Designers, Developers, Marketers, and Project Managers
- Consistently ranked among the top 15 Web firms in the region

- Assist current students with quick access to necessary information
  - o Student access to the front-end of the site to reach the learning management system
- Overall site goals:
  - o Intuitive site architecture making content easy to find and ultimately reducing call volume to representatives
  - o More detailed searching capabilities
  - o Media/Parent/Other visitor access to the site for newsletters, updates and relevant news releases
  - o Accessing information about UNL or Advanced Scholars
  - o A CMS that is intuitive and allows for easy updating of information
  - o Ability to measure the success of recruitment efforts, determine user behaviors and quickly adjust efforts without programming time

### Solution

ISHS partnered with Aware Web Solutions, Minneapolis, a Sitecore certified partner that, translates complex business needs into robust, well-organized and purposeful Web sites using industry-leading toolsets. Aware recommended Sitecore CMS to power the new UNL site and a UNL Sitecore-certified developer worked alongside Aware in the implementation.

Based on the preliminary requirements ISHS desired, Aware approached the project with a focus on the following solutions:

- Examining and streamlining the current architecture around increasing lead generation and enhancing SEO.
- Creating navigation paths that are intuitive and can drive the user to key content items. This includes creating a top navigation scheme that is favorable to this model.
- Creating a dynamic billboard solution for the home page that will highlight important information and/or call-to-actions.
- Sitecore CMS v6 to be utilized for content management.
- Sitecore Online Marketing Suite implementation to use for future measurement, behavior tracking, etc.
- Collaboration with UNL on specific development tasks.

“Using a continuous integration deployment approach to this project allowed us to support scheduled and managed builds when multiple developers were involved on the project,” said Adam Weber, solution architect and lead developer at Aware Web Solutions.

The highly effective collaboration utilized a component-based architecture, which allowed both parties to effectively separate the work when necessary. UNL will be able to reuse logic as they move forward with additional sites in Sitecore, and in fact, has already begun with the conversion of UNL’s graduate

and undergraduate programs online. The implementation was built to support a multi-site architecture to expand campus wide.

Key solution features included:

- Highly flexible content and presentation templates
- Use of “mega-dropdowns”
- Dynamic billboard to highlight key information
- Google Appliance site search
- Latest News feed
- Quick links callouts (request information, enroll now)
- Installation of Online Marketing Suite (OMS)

## Result

ISHS launched its new site in May 2010. In the seven months since the new site’s launch, ISHS has seen a 1000 percent increase in overall site visits, which have contributed to a significant 30 percent enrollment increase. ISHS and UNL are continuing to roll out additional sites in the near future so that, eventually, all extended education and outreach sites will be managed by Sitecore.

When asked about the project and the use and implementation of Sitecore for their web site, Danielle Dubuc-Pedersen, Director of Marketing & Customer Service for UNL’s Extended Education & Outreach department said, “In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, it has been a lifesaver. Universities are faced with limited resources and budgets these days. Sitecore and Aware allowed us to find a better way to utilize our limited resources and realize substantial results.”

Additionally, site analytics are showing that visitors are navigating the site and using it to find information versus calling the office requesting additional information. Both students and other learning organizations have commented on how great the new site looks and how easy it is to navigate and locate information.

The intuitive Sitecore interface and templates give staff the ability to update content easily and quickly, and provides great relief to the support staff at ISHS.

“Our high school teaches students in over 135 countries and throughout the U.S. entirely online. For us, it is critical to have a comprehensive website that reflects the same high standards of the school while effectively helping our students, their parents, and other learning organizations we serve. Sitecore enables us to devote our time to teaching our students without having to worry about maintaining a website,” said Barry Stark, principal at University of Nebraska-Lincoln Independent Study High School.

Trevor Olson, President and CEO of Aware Web Solutions, was pleased with the results of this project for UNL. “We proposed Sitecore CMS for this initiative because we knew it was a perfect fit for the online challenges UNL was facing. We anticipated a great outcome, but the fact that they’ve seen a 30 percent plus increase in enrollment, due in part from this project, is simply amazing.”