

PageOne help RNIB

PageOne help RNIB learners get smart with their mobile phones.

Background

RNIB College is a specialist college in Loughborough for people who are blind, partially sighted and/or have learning difficulties such as mild to moderate autism and physical mobility difficulties. The college's aim is to help develop the skills and personal qualities of these disabled students for them to successfully progress on a social level and within their working environments.

With the growing sophistication of mobile technology, RNIB College recognised the benefit of embracing SMS technology to communicate with disabled students and enhance their overall experience. The College identified PageOne's JANET txt messaging system as an obvious choice for its current needs, partly as it already utilises the JANET network but also due to the resilient infrastructure and feature rich capabilities of PageOne's service. With specialist knowledge derived from its strong heritage in the and public sector, PageOne's solution features a comprehensive suite of one and two-way SMS services as well as unique integration options, all designed specifically to meet the requirements of the UK education community.

Challenge and Objective

RNIB College needed a solution from PageOne that would facilitate a stronger connection and feeling of familiarity with students, communicating key information such as the college lunch menu, college events and activities, technical updates and local town events.

The question remained whether disabled students were part of today's mobile culture, using phones and features in similar ways to their peers, or whether their physical and learning difficulties impeded usability and navigation of their handsets. College staff had traditionally used focus groups, surveys, talking

notice boards, email and tutorials to communicate with the students. However, all presented problems; focus groups and tutorials were skewed if only a few students attended, some less able learners didn't use email or found it difficult and responses to surveys were slow.

There were also operational challenges to overcome as any SMS system deployed needed to be user friendly and easily accessible for visually impaired members of staff. The SMS solution needed to be compatible with the College's speech software, Jaws 8, and for visually impaired members of staff to successfully operate the messaging system using keyboard commands instead of a mouse.



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Strategy and Implementation

To determine mobile user habits, all students were invited to participate in a mobile phone survey. Of those surveyed, 75% were visually impaired and used speech software on their phones to navigate the menus and read and write texts. All respondents used mobile phones for calls and 76% of used them for texts. Based on the results, RNIB College piloted PageOne's JANET txt system for one term with a select student group by sending out general College information that would have previously been distributed in global emails and newsletters.

Implementation of PageOne's system was extremely straightforward and totally cost-effective. PageOne worked closely with RNIB College to ensure that the system was user-friendly and met all their needs. As visually impaired students found some features more difficult to use than sighted students, they were given extra support in workshops and through one-to-one tuition. Several demonstrations of the technology's intuitiveness were given for teaching and residential staff to explain how the system worked, focusing on the

accessibility of the website and how it integrated with Jaws 8 so that blind members of staff felt confident to send out texts. Where challenges did arise with integration with Jaws, PageOne visited the college to listen to staff and student feedback and positively identify a solution.

Outcome

SMS has instilled a real sense of belonging, familiarity and consistency amongst students with 90% preferring to receive information through such means. Its convenience and ability to deliver instant and up-to-date, information is a huge benefit to the college, particularly having tested a number of other methods. Receiving information via SMS such as lunch menus and local events has proved immensely popular as it enables them to look forward to socially connecting with other students. The implementation of PageOne's innovative messaging solution has even led to students requesting further information to be dispersed via SMS.

The RNIB College is delighted that PageOne has given staff a new way to engage with students and boost student morale.

Significant improvements in response times have been seen from students who previously took weeks to reply to messages. Sighted staff trialing the system found it easy to operate. Some changes were made to the address lists and then the visually impaired members of staff were also able to send out texts quite easily. As a web-based solution accessible from any internet enabled PC, some staff even continue to distribute college information while on holiday.

The RNIB College is so impressed with the pilot scheme that it is researching other areas that could utilise PageOne's JANET txt messaging system, such as communicating news and information to parents and applying it to administrative functions such as timetable reminders and attendance queries.

For further information call now on: 0844 822 5100

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or visit www.pageonejanettxt.com