

Plymouth University puts applicants in control of their interview bookings and dramatically reduces the cost of scheduling interviews

Axolt's Scheduling enables Faculty Marketing and Recruitment Officers to save 23 weeks a year by empowering applicants to manage their own interview bookings. The time saved means they can now provide a more personalised service for applicants, ensuring they fill courses and attract the best students

The university receives approximately 25,000 applications a year, of which 3,000 or more require an interview. Interviews are avoided where possible but are mandatory for certain courses, e.g. government regulations require interviews for programmes such as nursing.

The university admissions team is responsible for working with each faculty to manage the interview process for their applicants. The invitation to an interview is one of the first interactions that the university has with each candidate and wants to make this as positive an experience as possible.

There is competition among all UK universities for the best candidates, especially with university applications predicted to reduce due to changing demographics. Plymouth recognised that the interview process was an opportunity to differentiate, but their starting point was a highly manual and error prone process.



CHALLENGES

One year ago a study was undertaken with the aim of refining processes, making better use of resources and improving the overall applicant journey. Interviewing was identified as a process with significant potential for improvement. It was entirely manual based work with colour coded spreadsheets and communicating by different email addresses.

CHALLENGES

It was very time intensive, but also prone to human error. Re-scheduling of interviews and last minute cancellations was a particular challenge for both applicants and the faculty staff members who were responsible for performing the interviews.

The cost of scheduling each interview was estimated at £14. An annual cost of over £40,000. A new role of Faculty Marketing and Recruitment Officers had been created and they were spending 23 weeks a year just managing interview schedules. This was proving a huge disruption from the job they had been primarily recruited to perform.

A BETTER APPROACH

The team started with some blue sky thinking and looked at expectations of other booking systems. Their benchmark was online restaurant reservation systems that put the customer in control of making, changing or cancelling a reservation when and where it suits them.

Salesforce is the University's Relationship Management platform which is used by the Student Recruitment and Admissions team as well as other departments across the institution. It was important to find a solution that integrates with Salesforce so that it could be used by all departments and fit into existing processes. This would also mean a common user interface for users which would reduce training time. The team identified several solutions but a critical part of the required solution was to streamline the applicants experience to the existing processes.

Scheduler is a solution that is native to Salesforce and exceeded this criteria.

Scheduler was chosen primarily for the flexibility the application offers, the scalability for future offerings and Axolt's willingness to meet the aggressive timescales that had been set for this work. In addition, the Axolt team came on to site to listen to the University's exact requirements and adapt to the terminology used across the sector which was critical for the success of the project and overall delivery of the successful solution.

The admissions team had to advise UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) about the proposed system and received very positive feedback about how this would improve the applicant's experience. It was clear that Plymouth had an opportunity to set the standard for other universities to follow.

Win #1 - The use of Scheduling has eradicated the time spent managing interview booking.

Challenge: The university needed to reduce the amount of time the team spent on low value administrative tasks and instead focus on engaging better with applicants. They had 2 years of pain with no-one owning this as a priority.

SOLUTION

Solution: Scheduler has put the interview booking process entirely into the hands of the applicants. Even last minute changes can be accommodated, which was something the team didn't think would be possible.

Feedback from early users has been extremely positive. The new system is so much easier to use and is much less stressful.

The Faculty Marketing & Recruitment Officers are now planning for next year to see how they can better use the time that has been freed up to provide a better service to applicants

Win #2- Applicants have been put in control of managing their interview booking.

Challenge: The old scheduling system wasn't just hard to administer, it also wasn't flexible enough to support the changing needs of the applicants for re-scheduling or last minute cancellations. And there were a few horror stories of applicants showing up unexpectedly with no-one available to interview them.

SOLUTION

Applying for university is a stressful process. Where possible the university will avoid the need to request an interview, but with some courses this is not possible. Applicants now have an online system available 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, that allows them to book an interview and amend or cancel it at any time if required. This means they can arrange to come for interview at a time that suits them and when they are fully prepared.

Having an applicant change an interview at very short notice might sound like an inconvenience to the university. But the admissions team takes the view that it is better that the applicant comes when they are fully prepared and in the right frame of mind. They want to give the applicant the best possible chance to do themselves justice.

"Unusually there wasn't a single dissenting voice when we decided on Bookingkare as the preferred solution. And everyone agreed that the solution should be embedded in Salesforce where all the data resided"

ROLAND MONGER

Strategic Admissions Manager

Win #3 - A platform for the future

Challenge: The admissions team started the project with specific requirements that needed to be met in a very short timeframe. They began with what they saw as a minimal viable product (MVP) but needed a solution that would grow with them over time.

SOLUTION

Scheduler includes some exciting capabilities that will be deployed in a second phase, for example, using a barcode on the applicant's phone to register them when they arrive for interview or for another event. This is another example of how the university will improve the experience and create the positive impression of a leading edge institution.

The team also quickly recognised the flexibility of the Salesforce platform and the willingness of the Axolt team to configure Bookingkare to the university's needs. The team has confidence that the Axolt will be a good partner for the future.

Apart from rolling out the applicant interview booking system to more faculties, other potential applications for Scheduling include booking student engagements and managing on-campus events.

AXOLT SCHEDULING OVERVIEW

The event booking, planning application is designed for event management companies which require streamlined operations and overall efficiency.

The Expert appointment Module provides comprehensive & intuitive interface for managing expert appointments, availability and skills.

www.axolt.com | support.axolt.com