

Cognizanti

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Educational Services
Building a Global
Community of Connected
Students, from
Classroom to Career



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By Andrew Barkla

IDP, a leading international educational service provider, seized the opportunity to support its customers at every stage of the international education journey - from searching for and attending a university, to career services and lifelong learning - with personalized, relevant content.

IDP has been operating for close to 50 years, creating a huge network of opportunity, with more than 700 counselors in over 30 countries.

When I came onboard as CEO two years ago, IDP was performing well, but with the rapid technological advances in interna-

tional education services, it was clear that continuing to do what had worked in the past would expose us to disruptive threats to our leadership position. In my new role, I met with many different groups - employees, education providers and customers - to better understand what those changes needed to be. It quickly became clear that it was the professionalism and compassion of our education counseling teams that separated us from our competitors in a crowded space.

Our customers trust our counselors' advice at life-changing junctures. Our teams take pride in understanding all the details so they can find the country, institution and course that will position our customers for success.

While this trust and bond existed face-to-face, the journey with IDP became disjointed once students moved beyond their home country to their new study destination. Our task was to remedy this, in a way that we'd remain robust and fit for purpose as consumers grow more accustomed to digital communications every day.

Offering Students Richer Resources for a Lifelong Journey

Studying overseas is a huge emotional and financial decision. The importance of providing our customers with the best advice and support is not lost on our teams, who spend 16 months on average with a student and his or her parents in the counseling process. Our customers' educational journey begins before we first speak with them. They're talking to their friends about studying overseas, reading university blogs, looking at school websites. And it continues all the way to when they graduate and begin employment in their chosen field – sometimes over many years. We wanted to serve students by offering them lifelong learning and career services.

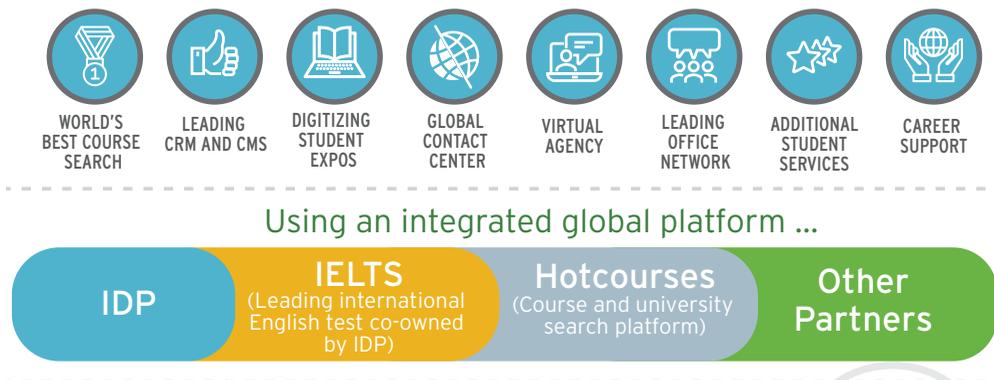
We knew we built great relationships with our customers when they were in their home country, but that relationship was often lost when a student moved to their study country, as our systems didn't speak to each other. This meant our customers weren't aware of the support available to them once they started their studies, such as the events we hold for students to meet each other, or the workshops we run to help them prepare for internships and part-time work.

This is why we made it a top priority to build a customer platform that would guide students on their journeys and establish an ongoing connection with them, enabling services like accommodation support, insurance referrals and, eventually, career support.

Our goal was to create the world's leading global platform and connected community for international students.

IDP's Digital Transformation Vision

A bold strategy to transform our industry by establishing a digital platform that enables and empowers a connected customer journey.



... ensures that we understand the needs and expectations of students and clients.



The world's definitive international student dataset and connected community.

Connecting our customers to success.

Source: IDP Education
Figure 1

We needed to place the customer at the center of everything we do. That is our True North.

Nurturing a Culture of Innovation

Traditionally focused on performance, we needed to embed and celebrate a culture of innovation through all levels of the business. Through strategic planning with key teams from across the world, we determined that customer experience and continual innovation would be the keys to unlocking our future success. By nature, our students are globally mobile and digitally savvy. We needed to be accessible whenever they needed us, through channels that suited their needs. We needed to place the customer at the center of everything we do. That is our True North.

Our board recognized that technological strength was key to meeting our goals, and as we began to identify what was needed to transform our organization, we knew we had to choose strategic partners. I was very aware of how other industries like retail, financial services and transportation were transforming, and was also aware of Cognizant's strong track record in this space.

We worked with Cognizant to develop our roadmap and document all the elements of our vision, while keeping the students very much at the center. It quickly became clear that we needed better data, systems and processes.

For example, over the last two years, IDP teams around the world have tested new systems and platforms to improve the customer experiences at our student recruitment events. At one stage, different teams were using four separate event solutions. It was clear we needed a single platform that could meet our customer and staff needs.

Similarly, we're now one-third of the way through consolidating our customer relationship management and contact center systems.

When that's complete, we hope to have a single view of our customers, and consistent and streamlined processes for our staff.

Supporting Individual Customer Needs

To be successful, our programs need to be built with, and for, our customers. We recruited internally to build a team of global customer ambassadors, selecting people from our regional offices who were digitally minded and customer-centric. These individuals are tasked with running co-design sessions with customers to ensure everything we build reflects their behaviors and needs.

Our ambassadors and teams led many roundtables, which was important because our customers' needs are very different depending on their home country, culture and personal preferences. While all students are unique, and it's dangerous to over-generalize, there are certain regional trends that we need to be aware of, such as the influencers in the students' decision-making process. In North Asia, for example, parents are very heavily involved in decision-making, and that's not necessarily true for other countries.

Despite these distinct cultural differences, there is a core mindset that unifies our customers. Around the world, IDP students are purposeful and progressive, and our services needed to reflect this.

We want to personalize the experience to each unique individual through smarter marketing automation systems, building a platform that will serve a contextually correct experience to each customer. You can only do that through technology and data. For example, we know some students aspire to attend highly ranked universities, while others are looking for more practical, vocation-based courses. Our data informs our

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personas, which helps us group our content. It is then up to us to develop those crucial one-on-one relationships.

There's always a balance when you're collecting customer data. We have to maintain the utmost of respect for our customers. Translating human empathy to the digital environment is core to what we do. It's about offering an opt-in capability but also letting users go gracefully if this is requested.

Early last year, we acquired a company called Hotcourses in the UK, which maintains the world's leading course search database. In doing so, we gained search engine optimization and digital capabilities, letting us support students earlier in their decision-making process.

The acquisition also gave us access to data that provides us with real-time insights into the online behavior of our students. When globally significant events unfold, such as

political elections or policy changes, we can see the immediate shifts and swings in search activity as students reconsider their destination preferences. This gives us the opportunity to provide relevant content across our digital platform that not only responds to this change in search activity, but also offers students a trusted source of information that assists with building credibility and loyalty in today's fast-paced news cycle.

Staying Ahead with Digital

We're close to 18 months into our digital transformation, and while we still have more to do, it's inspiring to see the growing enthusiasm of our teams as they build their skills and gain confidence in new digital capabilities.

What we do at IDP is life-changing. Together with Cognizant, our students and our teams, we have laid the foundation to build our connected community for our next generation of global leaders.



Author

Andrew Barkla is the Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of IDP Education, a global leader in international education services. He was appointed CEO of IDP in 2015 and has extensive experience in the technology, services and software industry, with over 20 years of senior management experience in roles across Australia, New Zealand, Asia and North America.

