



Google Apps Boosts Parental Involvement at Fountainhead Global School



Fountainhead Global School

Fountainhead Global School, in Hyderabad, India, is a local private school founded by the non-profit organization, Bodhi Vriksha. The school, which draws approximately 100 children, runs a daycare, playgroup, nursery, two years of pre-primary education, and 5 years of elementary education. Fountainhead aims to provide individualized attention to its young learners, keeping class size at around 20 students per class.

At a Glance

What they wanted to do

- Communicate information to staff, faculty, and parents quickly and frequently, at low cost
- Ramp up the security of the school's website, preventing hacking attempts and spam

What they did

- Deployed Google as a platform to host Fountainhead's static content and separate sections of the website that management, staff, and faculty can update frequently
- Increased site security by making some of the site content private - accessible only to parents or faculty with a Gmail login

What they accomplished

- Saved money by eliminating the need for a webmaster to maintain and update the site and the need to print out reports and documents for students or parents
- Encouraged collaboration among staff and students through Google Docs, driving parental involvement in classroom activities
- Increased site security, protecting the school from hacking attempts and reducing spam mail by 80% in the last year

The Challenge

In August 2011, Fountainhead decided to deploy Google Apps for Education to meet three critical needs: first, the need for a low maintenance way to update and distribute school-wide news frequently, second, to increase the security of the school's website, and finally, to provide the school's users with selective access to site content.

On the first challenge, Fountainhead wanted to be able to relay information to staff, faculty, and parents quickly and frequently without relying on a webmaster. As Meghana Musunuri, Founder of Fountainhead Global School noted, "We have photos and videos, as well as resources for the children, especially on YouTube, that we'd like to post." Before deploying Google Apps, the school's staff and faculty would submit content to the Webmaster for posting, and delays in the process would render the content less relevant. The second challenge that Fountainhead wanted to address through Google was site security, as hacking of the site had formerly resulted in a loss of data and the need to rebuild the site from scratch. Finally, school administrators wanted an easy way to selectively limit access to site content. They wanted to make the school's website public, with certain links accessible only to specific classes or only to parents.

To address these challenges, Fountainhead's Founder and Board of Directors considered several options in addition to Google: do-it-yourself Wordpress or other site creation tools available online, or hiring a web designer. In weighing the options, they found that hiring a web designer would make it difficult to update the site content frequently, while blogs were inappropriate for the type of static content they wanted to host. Google sites seemed to be the most versatile and secure option for hosting both static content and a blog site for announcements.

The solution

Once Fountainhead's administrators received a demo of Apps, their decision to switch to Google was made quickly. Deployment took only a week, and as soon as part of the site was up, staff and faculty found ways to incorporate new functionalities into classroom learning and administrative processes. A couple of training sessions for staff and faculty introduced them to basic features of Apps. The other features were adopted as needs arose. As Musunuri notes, "Training was simultaneous. We thought of what we wanted to use it for, learned that bit and started using it... once we started using it we learned a lot of things on the way." Google+ was especially helpful to teachers trying to learn new Apps features. As part of the deployment process, parents of the children received a briefing on functions such as accessing the sites for resources, using docs to see daily reports, and using sites with their children.

Google Apps addressed the school's initial challenges by providing staff and faculty with an easy way to update and disseminate content frequently. Since the school has gone Google, the website has been updated several times a day, and the latest content can be viewed by parents and children immediately. Further, sections of the site can be made public or private -- accessible only with a Gmail login -- which adds an extra layer of security that Fountainhead was seeking.

"Apps supercharged collaborative efforts"
— Meghana Musunuri, Founder of
Fountainhead Global School

Once Apps was deployed, Fountainhead's administrators started realizing an untapped potential for collaboration. Resource materials that were once shared among faculty and academic coordinators in handwriting, as printouts, or email attachments were now created, edited, and shared in Google docs, which prevented a duplication of efforts and the circulation of multiple drafts. The school has used Google Docs to produce templates for a range of purposes, which has helped staff and management save time and energy. Students — even at the primary school level — have been able to explore Apps and create simple digital presentations to share with their classmates. Teachers started using Google sites to distribute tests and assignments. As Musunuri observed, "Apps supercharged collaborative efforts."

The benefits

Since deploying Google Apps, Fountainhead Global School has saved money, as well as the time and energy of staff and management. The costs of retaining a webmaster to update the site, printing out reports for parents or making multiple copies of the same document, have been eliminated. The staff has noticed much less paper waste now that reports are shared online.

More importantly, Musunuri observes, "More than money, we have saved the hassle of sending each update to the webmaster and ensuring the details were added properly in the way we wanted. We've spent less energy in communicating with the parents." One of the most innovative sections of the website offers parents a 'Peep Into The Classroom,' with photos taken during classroom activities, YouTube videos, and downloadable homework assignments. Since the website is now the school's primary means of communicating with parents, most of the parents at Fountainhead have purchased a tablet in addition to a laptop, in order to keep track of their children's activities and help them learn using technology.

The school's new site is also more secure. There have been no reported hacking attempts for over a year and the school has achieved an 80% reduction in spam mail.

The money, time, and resources saved are being reallocated to updating the school's computer labs and improving its classrooms. Musunuri, now one of the school's most enthusiastic fans of Google Apps concludes that, "Going Google allows schools to concentrate more on the academic aspects of learning. Motivation on the part of the management, administrators, teachers, parents and their children to use online resources is something that was non-existent before we switched to Apps. Now all of us are online, collaborating easily and effectively. Apps is a time saver, efficiency booster and confusion crusher."

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