ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

ABILENE CHRISTIAN RELIES ON RACKSPACE, ADDS ADOBE EXPERIENCE MANAGER TO BOOST PERFORMANCE AND FREE VITAL RESOURCES
Rackspace helps private university improve content management at a key moment.

BUSINESS
Acclaimed private university, offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in many fields of study.

CHALLENGES
Upgrade legacy systems, add Adobe Experience Manager and improve administrative workloads.

SOLUTION
Rackspace Managed Cloud, Dedicated Servers, Load Balancers. Rackspace Managed Cloud for Abode Experience Manager

OUTCOME
Optimize sites and AEM, enabling staff to focus on core work rather than manage IT infrastructure.

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ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

With an enrollment of approximately 5,000, Abilene Christian University (ACU) is a private university located in Abilene, Texas, and affiliated with Churches of Christ.

Founded in 1906, ACU is at the forefront of integration of technology into course curricula. The school has specifically embraced connected-campus, mobile-learning, and smartphone technologies, since 2008, when it became the nation's first institution of higher learning to issue incoming freshmen a free Apple iPhone or an iPod Touch.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Scott Kilmer, Abilene Christian's Director of Online Marketing, is an ACU graduate with a diverse career background, whose personal working relationship with Rackspace dates to 2001 at a previous employer. In 2011, Kilmer returned to campus to lead its online marketing efforts.

Although the top ACU technology needs at that time included server space and support staff, the university also needed to introduce several initiatives, combining marketing and IT, that were going to require expertise beyond what the university's centralized force could handle on its own.

"I knew from experience that there was reliability and high standards within Rackspace that my alma mater would want to be a part of," said Kilmer. "Obviously, we have fantastically skilled people here, but at the same time they have limited bandwidth, plus we needed to add 24-hour access and support for our systems."

OPTIMIZING ACU

The specific, initial need for Rackspace support came in 2011 in the form of ACU's introduction of new sites for which Rackspace was the hosting provider.

"We introduced Rackspace into the university technology process as a quick and easy way to just bring up these new sites in a reliable fashion," said Kilmer. "These were either centers or services or campus clinics for which we wanted separate web presences. Rackspace became the hosting provider for these sites."

One of the main reasons ACU chose Rackspace was because of Abilene's location and climate. "We do have the occasional power outage, and when the grid in Abilene is working through problems, there are times when on-campus infrastructure has to go down."

Kilmer emphasizes the importance of communication during those moments, and the crucial role Rackspace plays in helping ACU stay live. "You can imagine that when I have over 4,800 families that have entrusted me with their college students, I have to be able to respond to the web more than ever before, because that's where the families are going first to stay informed."

"RACKSPACE BRINGS NOT ONLY THE ADMINISTRATIVE SIDE OF SERVERS, BUT ALSO THE ADDITIONAL TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND APPLICATION SUPPORT TO AUGMENT OUR EFFORTS."

SCOTT KILMER :: Director of Online Marketing, Abilene Christian University

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"Rackspace helps keeps us up. It's a great relief, when we have holiday-hour, weather or emergency communications, knowing there's a Rackspace team that's staffed there. It's insurance that I hope to never use."

With the marketing and IT teams collaborating, the university next empowered Kilmer to identify a technology partner that would complement the activities and, in Kilmer's words, "determine a valid technology pathway for the university. They gave us that blessing to go out and find a partner like Rackspace."

Today Rackspace is helping the school with its use of Adobe Experience Manager (AEM) to optimize and manage content. With Rackspace expertise in support of ACU's usage, AEM helps the university get, and stay, on the same page — monitoring performance proactively and ensuring that all-important content management systems are reliable and available around the clock.

KEY CAMPAIGN BUILDS STRONG ACU FUTURE

ACU turned to Rackspace infrastructure during "Vision in Action," a $75 million development campaign launched in early 2014 to improve campus buildings and more. Arriving at a key moment for the school, the development effort kicked off to news that $55 million had been given to the school from three donors – including the largest gift in university history – to begin a series of construction projects that will transform the campus in a way not seen in nearly 50 years.

As the campaign drew near, the university was already generating thousands of pages, numerous websites, authors and many thousands of monthly page views. When complexity and consistency became central challenges for ACU (not to mention its third-party data partners), Rackspace helped Kilmer and his colleagues improve its Web content management system.

Said Kilmer: "The ACU site alone is a domain that encompasses 130 sites and over 38,000 pages. All are part of our transition into not only AEM, but also into our migration to

Rackspace. Once that is complete, we will actually darken the servers on campus, and our entire ACU presence will live in Rackspace."

MAKING THE GRADE

In operation today on Rackspace servers, the "Vision" site served as ACU's successful test case not only for the kind of traffic the effort was likely to see, but also how well AEM was going to respond to pages as Kilmer and team rolled them out.

According to Kilmer, AEM is a much bigger system in terms of system administration than most people probably realize. "I may not need an AEM architect on my campus, but I know that you all have retained the best ones in the country. So if by my subscription to Rackspace I at least have a pathway to gain an audience with one of those architects then it's one of the best value adds I can think of. I believe you need a solution partner like Rackspace if you're going to truly step into an AEM project."

With many moving parts and the support of Rackspace behind the scenes, Kilmer and his team rely on their Rackspace support team to suggest improvements along the way. ACU benefits from access to highly skilled professional architects through Rackspace as well.

"For small, private schools like ACU, taking a look at this solution is something to seriously consider because it's a part of our requirement to make education affordable and efficient as we can," said Kilmer.

What is ACU's definition of **Fanatical Support**®?

"Under my current contract I do not have application support coming from Rackspace, but that didn't stop them from jumping into action and solving a recent issue for us," said Kilmer. "Rackspace really blurs the lines between a client-vendor relationship. It's a culture that says, 'We'll make sure there's absolutely nothing left on our side before we tell the client, 'I don't think we can help.'"

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ABOUT RACKSPACE

Rackspace (NYSE: RAX), **the #1 managed cloud company**, helps businesses tap the power of cloud computing without the challenge and expense of managing complex IT infrastructure and application platforms on their own. Rackspace engineers deliver specialized expertise on top of leading technologies developed by AWS, OpenStack®, Microsoft®, VMware® and others, through a results–obsessed service known as **Fanatical Support®**.

Learn more at www.**rackspace**.com or call us at **1–800–961–2888.**