

**Middlesex
University
London**

Digital transformation done well: student-driven at Middlesex University

Universities are incredibly resilient institutions, having survived and often driven societal changes throughout centuries. The digital revolution accelerated by the pandemic may have caught some by surprise, but not Middlesex University.

Ranked second in the Times Higher Education young UK university league table, it prides itself on strong links with business to enrich student opportunities, and a multicultural and diverse community. And something else it is proud of, is its transformation journey to improve teaching and learning through IT and technology.

How? Through relentless problem solving, strategic and active leadership, senior executive support, and a bit of help from AppsAnywhere. Let's unpack their story...



Snapshot

Client: Middlesex University

Location: The Burroughs, London,
United Kingdom, Dubai, Mauritius

Students: 19,000 in the UK and 37,000 globally

Staff and faculty: 1,631 in the UK

Lab computers managed: 6,000

Applications managed: 200

The Challenge

Like most universities at the time (2017), Middlesex University provided access to course software through its computer labs and on-campus open learning spaces. Over 37,400 students enrolled in 316 undergraduate and 196 postgraduate programmes, across 4 global campuses learned on over 6000 computers.

“We had a whole team of staff whose role was to package and deploy software on a classroom-by-classroom basis. It took hands-on, intense effort, and many weeks over the entire summer period to get ready for teaching; and then we’d replicate that effort in the winter for any changes for the next semester. It was very labour-intensive, resource-hungry, problematic, and incredibly difficult.” – shared Roger Fox, Operations, Group Manager, Computing Communications Systems Service (CCSS) at Middlesex University.

It was a fine balancing act between maintaining rigid IT services and responding to the changing requirements of students and academics, which is to be expected in a dynamic teaching place like Middlesex University.

This created an inflexible environment, as any last-minute software requests, timetabling or location changes created ripple effects for Roger and his team, as each time they had to re-engineer the whole room.

Another challenge was computer load times and unnecessary wear and tear.

“Our machines carried around 200 apps, all installed in “fat images”, so every time you’d turn on the computer, it would scan around 50,000 files, when the student may only need to use Word.” – Naveed Khan, Device Logistics Manager at Middlesex University.

The Opportunity

A relentless problem solver, Roger led his team to find more efficient ways of dealing with this challenge. They came across AppsAnywhere through UCISA, the industry body, and through word of mouth.

We were looking into a number of solutions for virtual apps in order to reduce the footprint on our systems, as we were keen to introduce “bring your own device”, but they were prohibitively expensive. While they solved some issues we faced, they didn’t solve all of them. Once we were aware of AppsAnywhere, it started to tick all the right boxes for us. And the more we researched and approached other vendors, the more we kept coming back to AppsAnywhere” continued Naveed.

Before making any decisions, the Middlesex University team, including colleagues from the Science and Technology Faculty, spent a day at Sheffield Hallam University, where they saw AppsAnywhere in action, and learned from their change journey.

“On the train journey back from Sheffield, we thought if this does what it says on the tin, it could really be the answer to all our problems. And we were literally doing the calculations of our server infrastructure, licensing model, etc on the train. This led us to create a business case, because we thought this was a really exciting opportunity” continued Roger.

After visiting Durham University, who echoed Sheffield Hallam’s experience, it became clear to the team that AppsAnywhere was indeed the right solution for them and started to plan their adoption journey.



The 5-Phase Change Journey

A Middlesex “lifer”, Roger knew the university had a low-risk appetite for radical change, and the hardest part would be to sell the vision to the whole university. The new technology adoption plan had to be simple, inclusive and failproof.

Following the lean start-up mantra of “think big, start small, fail quick, learn fast”, the joint AppsAnywhere and Middlesex University project board, planned the rollout in incremental phases, designed to reduce risk and enable agile responses to feedback and adoption rates.



The 5-Phase Change Journey

1

Building and selling the vision

- Proof of Concept (POC) pilot
- 500 user licenses
- Specific computer labs and a few open learning spaces in the Sheppard Library



2

One lab at a time

- Uplifting the server infrastructure
- Expanding the deployment to 3,000 student-facing computers
- Many hours of apps packaging and preparation for the big roll out



3

Windows full site and BYOD

- Full site license
- Enabled students BYOD for Windows
- Locally installed apps coexisted with AppsAnywhere delivery
- New software title requests deployed through AppsAnywhere



4

Bring on Apple Mac

- Extension of AppsAnywhere to the Apple Mac campus estate
- Student-owned Apple Mac devices



5

AppsAnywhere in the driving seat

- Removing, where possible, any locally installed software
- AppsAnywhere is the default delivery method across the entire university
- Set the policies and protocols for business as usual





The Gamechanger

Life saver during COVID

- Having AppsAnywhere embedded well before the pandemic made a huge difference for Middlesex University staff and students. While many universities struggled during this time, it was “carry on as normal” for Middlesex University. It set a slight change of pace in the digital transformation journey, which pushed the culture change into “business as usual”.
- The staff, and especially the teaching staff, have really benefited from the transition, which was accelerated by the pandemic, when they could access applications on their own devices. It has also made life easier for the IT team, as they are able to keep staff applications up to date.

Secure and efficient BYOD

- Students love working on their own devices and having the freedom to learn anytime and from anywhere. Without AppsAnywhere this wouldn't have been possible for Middlesex University, as the alternative costs were prohibitive.
- The portal set-up enables access to software without opening the gates to security and privacy issues, which is vital for a large institution like Middlesex University

Student digital equity

- Middlesex University prides itself on its culture of diversity and inclusion, and digital equity is high on its agenda. The pandemic disproportionately affected students from lower socio-economic background, so the University invested in 1,500 laptops to lend out to students experiencing digital poverty.
- The focus of the IT team was to leverage existing technology and support students, instead of “getting online”, which made them a trail blazer during those difficult times.

Improved student experience

- Aside from the seamless transition to online learning during COVID, students were delighted with their AppsAnywhere experience. They were involved in testing the portal from the beginning and drove adoption through advocating it with their peers and teaching staff.
- BYOD was a game changer for many students, but the experience on campus also improved. They no longer needed to request access and wait for a software title to be installed when someone with admin rights became available. The lab computers were also a lot faster, more responsive, had most of the apps they needed, and there were plenty available.

Early engagement was key to the successful adoption, and Roger and his team were keen to share their enthusiasm and knowledge with the academic staff across the university, answer any questions and provide clarity. This involved a series of roadshows, Q&A sessions, open discussions, and live demonstrations to show the academics how this simplifies their work.

The students were an important success factor in the roll out, as they took to it “like ducks to water” and were actively involved in promoting AppsAnywhere internally and through a student video.

“We started with posters in AppsAnywhere-enabled labs and open spaces, and noticed students started gravitating towards those rooms. They were soon asking for AppsAnywhere labs, which then created momentum and helped with the cultural shift. Soon teaching staff were asking if they could use AppsAnywhere next semester, because it became so popular, and they could see the benefits” stated Roger Fox.

The transition journey took just under 2 years, and was actively managed by the project board, which included stakeholders across the university and AppsAnywhere customer success representatives.

Better use of lab space

- Now that students are no longer tied to specific labs for specific software, the teaching labs have become more flexible. There is a lot of collaborative space and flexible teaching rooms, more conducive to interactions and innovation.
- As computers no longer need high performance specifications, it enabled strategic discussions about the cost-benefit of replacing desktops with laptops and repurposing the space to the changing needs of the students.

Time savings, workforce efficiency and work satisfaction

- The biggest gain from this transition was the time and effort saved on reimagining the estate each summer. The team previously dedicated to this is now more agile and their work has expanded to improve processes, strengthen cyber security, and better support end users.
- The team also report improved stress levels, especially during the summer, as well as a more positive working environment. They get to take holidays during the summer now and can spend more time to support each other and grow as a team.

Longer hardware lifecycle and performance

- Before AppsAnywhere, computers had an optimum performance for about 3 years, after which they started to “struggle”. Now they receive updated hard drives and continue to perform well for much longer. The end user experiences a much more responsive machine, as they all have thinner images, with less strain on the machine.
- This has also significantly reduced the number of hardware-related complaints.

Cyber Essentials and security

- AppsAnywhere has facilitated the Cyber Essentials certification and maintenance, due to the enhanced control to turn access to applications on or off to from the admin portal. As most applications are accessed through AppsAnywhere, they are easily patched and updated throughout the year, without disruptions to users. If any vulnerabilities are identified, they can be easily and instantly turned off until the breach is resolved, without spreading it throughout the network.

Evidence-informed decision making

- The AppsAnywhere analytics plays a vital role in shaping and implementing the IT strategy at Middlesex University, particularly around licensing. One example was an app that was used for 75 hours a year, which allowed the team to calculate the ROI on licensing and supporting that title. This saved £6,000 per year. The same policy was applied to other apps used for less than 100 hours a year.

Cost savings and return on investment

- When it comes to transformative change, institutions look towards the future, inspired to embrace yet more change. So, cost savings and return on investment calculations are often not a priority, as they are considered progress towards a more sustainable and better version of themselves.
- When embarking on a digital transformation journey of this scale, universities want to know what it will cost and how much it will save. The list below should help institutions calculate savings, depending on their individual circumstances.
 - o Labour savings (FTE staff working on reimagining and maintaining software and solving support tickets)
 - o Hardware savings (extending the lifecycle + reducing new purchases through BYOD)
 - o Cyber security savings (increased capacity and capability to prevent and respond to cyber-attacks and vulnerabilities)
 - o Licensing costs (better estimate number of licenses and remove the apps with low usage)



A partnership that keeps evolving


“We love working with AppsAnywhere, and we have a very close relationship with them. The support we get from the team is timely and of excellent quality. I particularly enjoyed attending the SUMMIT days, and we even hosted one here at Middlesex University. It’s great to share ideas with colleagues from other universities and get inspiration for new initiatives” stated Zunaid Patel, Analyst Programmer.

The AppsAnywhere customer success approach treats every customer as a partner. Middlesex University made use of the Feedback Forum to share pain points and suggest improvements; the Academy supported with training to upskill the team, and the Customer Hub to reach out for support.

This translated into new software features such as Apps Packaging or Auto Licensing, which have been welcomed by the team as new ways to improve efficiency.

Find out more at:

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AppsAnywhere is a global software delivery provider that revolutionised how students and higher education faculty and staff access applications on campus computers or on personal devices. Since 2009, AppsAnywhere has been at the forefront of app management innovation, providing equitable, consistent and seamless digital experiences for more than 4 million students, in 300 institutions, across 22 countries.

“I’m genuinely proud of what we’ve achieved here, and it’s great to get positive feedback from other universities. It’s the best thing we’ve done in a long time!” – Roger Fox

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