



By JOHN O'BRIEN

The Future of EDUCAUSE, Part 2: User Experience and Personalization

Several days before the 2008 U.S. elections, I received a widely emailed video. Set in time three days after the elections, it was a fictional news story in which the presidential win was decided by one nonvoter. The supposed nonvoter? Me. Frame after frame included some cleverly customized elements embedded into the video: a Facebook page announcing “10 million strong against John O’Brien”; a *New York Times* headline (“Nonvoter Identified: John O’Brien”); and, my favorite, a photo of a church sign: “All God’s Children Welcome—except John O’Brien.” Even a goat herder in a remote country said: “I cannot believe John would allow this to happen.” Clever and entertaining, the video completely captured my attention. It was my first realization of the power of personalization.

In 2017, personalized features are ubiquitous. If you listen to streaming music from Pandora, watch TV shows or movies through Netflix, or shop on Amazon, you’ve already experienced firsthand the kind of leading-edge personalization that many millions in investment dollars can create. These companies are relentlessly honing and perfecting the algorithms that drive their personalized experience. In 2006, Netflix famously offered a million-dollar prize to anyone who could best its existing filtering algorithm.

As personalization continues to shape the business landscape, we believe it’s time for EDUCAUSE to join the evolution. We have taken on, as one of our three strategic priorities, the mission of broadly personalizing the EDUCAUSE member experience. Driven by our stated goal to make it possible for our members to “discover, share, and build on resources individually and in communities,” we are engaged in crafting a user experience that is tailored to an individual’s tastes and preferences. This experience is enabled and fueled by data, both the data our members will eventually be able to embed in their EDUCAUSE profiles and the data we gather (with members’ permission), such as resources downloaded, EDUCAUSE events attended, and sessions prioritized. Ultimately, the level of

personalization that EDUCAUSE can provide will be directly proportional to the amount of data our members share and how accurate and up-to-date that data is.

This year we are finishing up important foundational projects to enable us to develop this kind of personalized experience. We completed an overhaul of our association enterprise systems, moving from a legacy system to one that will allow us to access and leverage our member data more easily and effectively. We have redesigned our website to make future personalization possible, and we’ve piloted new technologies, like beacons, while attending to data governance and data quality. The EDUCAUSE board and executive team have also been talking about a longer-term vision. The future scenario on the next page shines a light on the personalized experience we are planning to create over the next three to five years. This imagined vision will not be simple to realize, but we are thrilled to be embarking on this work. After all, next year will be the 20th anniversary of the merger that created EDUCAUSE. Then and now, our core competency and fundamental strength come from the connections we make and the resources we create and share to solve problems and advance our profession. Ambitious as this personalization vision may be, it will be shaped over time by input and ideas from our members. It continues and builds on everything that has made EDUCAUSE such an inspiring community.

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The EDUCAUSE Personalized Member Experience

Yuki works in the IT department at a member institution in the EDUCAUSE community, but she doesn't participate heavily. Her supervisor has asked her to take on some additional cybersecurity responsibilities (an area where she has less experience) and suggests she use some work time to learn what she can. Since all college and university members have full access to EDUCAUSE Center for Analysis and Research (ECAR) research and reports, she decides to start by visiting the EDUCAUSE website.

Using her InCommon login, Yuki quickly creates a member profile and selects cybersecurity as one of her current primary interest areas, opting in to receive additional communications from EDUCAUSE based on her interests and interactions. She browses a number of research articles, and she bookmarks some cybersecurity-related research for later exploration. The next day, Yuki gets an email from EDUCAUSE about a new campus security article in the latest issue of *EDUCAUSE Review* and new resources in the member-created *Information Security Guide: Effective Practices and Solutions for Higher Education*, both of which she marks for later use.

Yuki downloads the EDUCAUSE app to her mobile device and immediately discovers a thriving community of other EDUCAUSE members and connections, including some who have similar responsibilities and areas of interest and others who work for institutions facing challenges similar to Yuki's.

The following week, Yuki receives an app alert from EDUCAUSE suggesting she attend the upcoming 2019 Security Professionals conference and offering her a 10 percent discount as a first-time attendee. She checks with her supervisor and decides to attend the event. In addition, Yuki opens the EDUCAUSE app and drops a hello to three of the suggested colleagues also attending the conference.

Yuki is pleasantly surprised when a week later, she receives an email from the volunteer leadership of the EDUCAUSE cybersecurity community, inviting her to join and participate before she attends the conference. She also gets notes back from two of the app connections and is delighted to schedule lunch with one of them during the conference.

After accepting the volunteer invitation and joining the cybersecurity community, Yuki reads some of the community discussion archive, finds some helpful pointers, and identifies a couple of specific areas she'd like to focus on during the conference.

The day before departing for the conference, Yuki is pleased to see another email from EDUCAUSE, providing a suggested itinerary for her time at the event based on her stated profile priorities and informed by her activity. The schedule highlights opportunities for first-time attendees, basic/introductory-level sessions that will give Yuki the most value, a number of additional suggested connections who will be attending the event, and even an optional sponsored networking reception designed specifically for newcomers.

After the conference, loaded with information and business cards from her new contacts, Yuki returns to work feeling confident and engaged and looks into how she can participate even more in her new community.

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