

Orbund



Case Study Bene's Career Academy

HIGHLIGHTS

- School of Cosmetology in Florida
- Three locations serving 370 students
- Transitioned their manual business operations to a fully automated electronic student information system
- Improved operational effectiveness that led to a 40% reduction in staff
- Increased student attendance by 35%
- Improved students overall grade averages by 10%

Bene's Career Academy Background

Bene's Career Academy is a private beauty and cosmetology school that was first established in 1977. It currently operates three locations--Brooksville, New Port Richey and Spring Hill, Florida--and has an enrollment of 370 students. The Academy provides career training in cosmetology, barbering, skin care, nail care, and massage therapy. It offers a full range of beauty services to the public through a connected clinic.

When Bene's management first started considering Student Information Systems, it quickly learned that these applications were targeted at traditional four-year colleges and universities. Career schools, in contrast, have a very different set of requirements.

Bene's Academy is an hours-based school meaning that students must complete a designated number of hours--e.g., 1,200 for a cosmetology degree--to graduate. Every day, students clock in and out, and their hours, in addition to other performance criteria, have to be recorded and tracked*. A typical full-time student will spend thirty hours a week in the classroom and doing hands on work.

Challenges & Goals

"Four years ago, Bene's was a 'mom-and-pop' operation," commented David Bracken, Chief Operations Officer. "We had two schools and almost all of our administrative processes were performed manually by six full time employees. We had seventeen filing cabinets filled with student files."

"Before we started reviewing software solutions, we developed a specific set of goals. Our primary objective was to automate all our manual business processes. We also wanted to integrate different workflows for student registration, grade review, and requirements monitoring. The system also needed to track tasks, action items, and due dates," Mr. Bracken noted.

"Most of the knowledge related to school administration was walking around in the heads of our employees. They had to remember what tasks to do and when to do them. If an employee wasn't there or decided to leave, that know-how left with the person."

By moving to the next generation of technology, Bracken not only expected improvements in staff efficiency but he wanted to expand student services. Ultimately, if the school could standardize more of its administrative processes, the business could grow.

Evaluating Different Solutions

"We reviewed a variety of software solutions but the majority were optimized for large universities," he shared. "They charge site license fees and their implementation and training costs were out of range for smaller schools like ours."

"The Orbund model of charging a per-student-per-month fee would allow us to add locations and increase enrollment in a cost-controlled way. The Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model means I wouldn't be spending time setting up servers, loading software, or perform recurring updates," he noted. "It frees me up to focus on school operations and the business."

The school required some unique integrations. Because student hours are continually tracked, a biometric time-clock module was required. The school also needed an integrated Point of Sale (POS) system that would allow clients to be charged and students credited for the service rendered.

"A cosmetology student has to perform 200 haircuts to graduate," he pointed out. "So if the student has logged in via the timeclock, and she performs a service that is entered in the Point of Sale system, her student record is automatically updated. Other systems didn't support the level of integration we were looking for."

The Orbund Solution

Bene's started using the Orbund Student Information System in July, 2016. The implementation process took about eight weeks but it allowed the school to incorporate thirty-three years of historical student records. The staff scanned and converted volumes of paper files to electronic records.

The Academy quickly realized several benefits. The teacher portal combined with integrated document management capabilities enable staff to review students' records and see: the enrollment agreement, school contract, historical reports, associated correspondence, their grades, and what requirements they've completed.

If students are not meeting their weekly time requirements, the school requires teachers to contact them. The Orbund system proactively alerts teachers, and any correspondence that is sent via e-mail or text, is automatically logged to the student's record.

Meeting Accreditation Requirements

A potentially expensive and often unrecognized cost for career schools relates to accreditation.

The Bene's Academy is accountable to the National Accrediting Commission of Career Arts & Sciences (NAC-CAS). This organization routinely audits the Academy for financial and student performance.

"It used to be that our staff would madly scramble to collect all the printed documentation required for an audit," related Mr. Bracken. "If an auditor cannot easily find required forms or data, if the school operations do not

match the school policies, or you don't answer their questions effectively, they can make a finding. This finding can result in a fine and a repeat visit. Return visits can cost your school \$5,000 to \$10,000."

With Orbund, the Academy can give NACCAS and financial auditors online access to student records. Records are automatically organized in file folders, optimized for review. Auditors can evaluate information remotely and all financial and performance data is in the record. Preparing for an audit is no longer a worrisome or labor-intensive process for staff.

The Results

"The results have been incredible," Mr. Bracken emphasized. "We are now fully automated and we added another school location. We do everything with one full-time and one part-time employee. We got rid of all the filing cabinets."

"Student attendance has improved by 35% and overall grade averages increased by 10%. We attribute these improvements to two things. Students are now able to better monitor their own performance which makes them more accountable. Our teachers provide more thorough follow up because the system supports their efforts."

It used to be that if students had questions about their grades, hours, graduation requirements, or account balances, they had to ask their teachers, the front desk or the business office. Now, they can access all their information via their school-issued Chromebook, or their smartphones. Even school texts are delivered electronically.

Automated alerting really drives staff accountability. For example, when a student is close to graduating, the Campus Director is notified. The notification shows if the student's graduation requirements have been fulfilled, and details any items that are missing.

"We would definitely recommend the Orbund system to other career-based schools,"

Mr. Bracken affirmed. "The product is flexible and affordable. The company also provides a 24 x 7 support line where you will get a live staff member who can actually answer your questions. We are now able to meet accreditation report requirements with two clicks of a mouse. It used to take us two weeks to complete. Orbund has made our school a better business."