

A CASE STUDY CASE STUDY

The Organization

Since its founding in 1958, NASA has pushed the boundaries of human exploration, put footprints on the moon and tire tracks on Mars. Along the way, NASA has pioneered new technologies that have improved people's lives. NASA's Training Academy is a learning organization that serves project practitioners by providing products and services that manage risk, maximize human capital, develop high performance teams and promote mission success.

The Need

The NEAR case study was the first of several customized interactive case studies that Palatine designed to engage NASA's engineers, project managers and project leaders to use the NASA training academy's new, online knowledge sharing portal (a research, performance support and learning website). The client's management team needed to offer best practice case studies and lessons learned of both successful and failed NASA projects to teach project management and leadership capabilities to new project managers (including engineers and other personnel that were not project managers, but had to manage elements of projects they were part of). The client also needed to bring traffic to their new website, but this was challenging since the Agency's organizational structure was highly decentralized and there were competing training organizations within NASA centers.

The Customized Solution

Palatine offered a technology-based and instructional design solution that would provide a series of "short courses" on project management tools,

techniques and skills using a real NASA case scenario as the simulation. Palatine chose to model the pedagogical design on Harvard Business School's Case Method, which brings the learner as close as possible to project situations of the real world. Palatine designed the case so that users would ask a series of interlocking questions, exercise skills of leadership and teamwork to analyze and synthesize conflicting data and points of view, define and prioritize goals, and persuade other team members to make tough decisions with uncertain information. Palatine created a template for the short course that would integrate into NASA's existing infrastructure and which could be used for all subsequent case studies. Palatine would also design and build a CMS (content management system) to capture, track and store all users' decisions. A key component of the design was to connect real-project/mission experience to solution. After extensive research and interviews, Palatine chose a compelling, real-life scenario from the Agency's own past. NASA's Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) mission, which successfully put a spacecraft on the asteroid Eros. The simulation's dynamic, film-like content allows users to fully assume the role of the NEAR project manager. Users to the site analyze problems presented and choose from several possible solutions. By comparing their own decisions with those of the actual (and successful) launch team, users develop the same skills honed by NASA project teams and demonstrate the best practices learned and used in the mission. The client applauded the site's fantastic navigational system and engaging content, noting specifically that animated icons are understated but clever, the section-header system of the horizontal bars that reveal content works well and transitions are interesting.

Impact

Short on time and resources, against a tide of scope increase, users faced the exact same challenge as the Discovery Program's A-team: to lead a faster, better, cheaper, operation and land a spacecraft on Eros. Users later compared their crucial decisions with those of the actual launch team in 1996. The simulation was an immediate success, brought new project managers to the website, enhanced practitioners project

management skills and capabilities, won I.D magazine's prestigious Interactive Web Design award, and led to the development of many more case studies to add to the client's portfolio.

About Palatine Group

Founded in 1976, Palatine Group is a leader in Project Leadership and Project Management simulations and technology-based learning solutions. For 30 years, Palatine has helped its clients accelerate their organization's performance, providing measurable results, along with increased profits. Palatine has trained over 50,000 managers, and is the first private company to launch computer-based business and project management simulations.