



rSmart Sakai CLE 2.7.1 introduces smarter, easier integration between Google Apps and Sakai



At a Glance

What Sakai users wanted to do

- Create documents in a user-friendly environment
- Store documents in a central location and push updates everywhere they are published
- Share documents easily with classes and groups managed in their enterprise online learning platform

What they did

- Used the rSmart Sakai CLE online learning platform to save costs and take control of their technology
- Integrated Google Docs with the Sakai CLE to streamline sharing without the hassle of managing user access

What they achieved

- Cost-efficient content management, collaboration, and online learning systems
 - Seamless integration between key enterprise platforms
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About Sakai

Colleges, universities, K-12 schools and corporate learning departments all over the world rely on the open-source Sakai Collaboration and Learning Environment (CLE) to deliver online learning, group collaboration, and e-portfolio activities. The Sakai CLE provides educators and trainers with a full suite of online tools to communicate with classes, build and deliver rich learning experiences, and assess student work.

About rSmart

rSmart supports open software for education, focusing on the Sakai CLE and Quali enterprise administrative suite. By crafting a high-quality Sakai CLE distribution, rSmart makes it possible for institutions of all shapes and sizes to choose the benefits of an open-source path in online learning, and also realize the added security of fully professional, commercial support. By seamlessly integrating the Sakai CLE with Google Docs, rSmart enables users to create rich, collaborative documents within the context of a learning management system, and quickly share them with a class or collaborative group organized by their institution.

Challenge: Integrating Google Apps and Sakai

Thousands of schools and colleges have moved to Google Apps to give students and staff the advanced capabilities offered by Gmail, Google Docs, Calendar, Sites, and more. Users at these institutions often want to take advantage of these Google-powered tools inside the other enterprise systems used at these schools, such as the Sakai learning environment. However, having to choose between Sakai's native content authoring tools and Google Apps can leave users confused about where the latest copies of documents reside, and can introduce difficulties in managing class and group access lists across two systems.

“Using Google Docs in Sakai lets our instructors create learning resources where they feel most comfortable, but share them with the whole class easily, without looking up everybody’s username.”
—Rob Coyle, Instructional Designer

Instructors, for their part, are looking for tools that save time without creating extra work. They want to find all of their work in a single, central location. When they update a syllabus, lesson, or assignment, they want all of their students to get the latest version instantly. They don't want to manage class rosters or look up usernames in order to share content with their students and collaborators.

While trying to meet these demanding functional needs for their users, institutions are also looking to reduce costs and ensure predictable pathways to procure and maintain complex technologies. They seek systems that provide multiple capabilities and make fewer demands on local technical and support staff.



For more information visit:
www.rsmart.com

About Google Apps for Education

Google Apps for Education is a free suite of hosted communication and collaboration applications designed for schools and universities. Google Apps includes Gmail (webmail services), Google Calendar (shared calendaring), Google Docs (online document, spreadsheet, presentation and form creation and sharing), Google Video (secure and private video sharing - 10GB free), and Google Sites (team website creation with videos, images, gadget and documents integration), as well as administrative tools, customer support, and access to APIs to integrate Google Apps with existing IT systems.

For more information visit:
www.google.com/a/edu

Solution

Taking initiative to serve its existing and future clients, rSmart developed a close integration between the Sakai CLE and the rich Google Docs authoring environment. rSmart Senior Developer Duffy Gillman was happy to find the Google Apps API tailored to fit well with Sakai's native integration pathways for content hosting and secure, OAuth authentication: "Google's API made it easy to let users sign in to their Google account and share their documents back in Sakai – all in just a few easy clicks." rSmart is pleased to be able to offer Google Docs integration in Sakai both to institutions that use Google Apps enterprise-wide, and to individual Google users.

While Sakai already includes some basic document creation and sharing functionality, rSmart's unique integration of Google Docs enables users to take advantage of Google's richer authoring tools, which enable real-time collaboration, advanced document and spreadsheet creation, and improved accessibility. Sharing a Google Doc in Sakai now lets Sakai handle which users have access – often a volatile course roster as students drop and add classes – without having to manage a separate list of usernames with Google. And when users update a document in Google Docs, all changes are available automatically in all the Sakai sites where they shared it. Editing Google Docs is also available directly inside Sakai.

This Sakai-Google integration makes it even easier and more powerful for institutions to let their users take full advantage of the suite of Google Apps tools, tied to a full-featured online learning and collaboration platform like Sakai. The high value and low technical impact of Google's software-as-a-service combines well with the open-source control and professional support offered by the rSmart Sakai CLE.

Results

Released in October, 2010 in the rSmart Sakai CLE version 2.7.1, it's still too early to predict all the good uses institutions will find for the Google Docs integration with Sakai. "We know our instructors and students are already using Google," says Johns Hopkins University instructional designer Rob Coyle, "And rSmart bringing them to Sakai will make their lives easier, so they can focus on what they really care about: teaching and learning."

Institutions that tie Google Apps and Sakai to the same central identity service will be able to offer the same authentication for both platforms. Individual Google users just authorize Sakai with their Google identity on first use, using the OAuth protocol which keeps their username and password secure with Google. Once authorized, all users will be able to share Google documents with Sakai user groups of their choice without having to know or find any one else's Google identity.

Another great advantage will be for instructors who use Google Docs as their primary content repository, sharing centrally-managed documents across courses and terms. With rSmart's integration to Sakai, they'll always know where to find their documents: right in their Google Docs. And with Google's everywhere document access and Sakai's online presence, instructors can build and manage their course content from any computer, anywhere.

