

Case Study

Crawford Scientific



Company overview

Background Crawford Scientific are suppliers of chromatography consumables and analytical services. They are the UK leader in chromatography and mass spectrometry training.

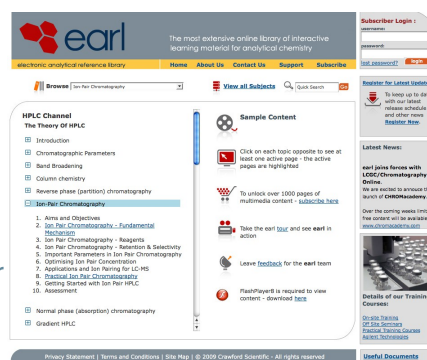
Web site: www.crawfordscientific.com

Feasibility Study

The objective of the feasibility study was to look at Crawford Scientific's current e-learning site Earl2Learn with a view to determining the possibility of implementing a number of client requested improvements to the site. Currently there is one default learning plan that all registered customers have access to view.

The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To investigate and reverse engineer the earl2learn platform to establish the feasibility of allowing clients to upload their own custom e-learning content.
- The ability to allow clients to create their custom learning plans utilizing existing Crawford Scientific material and their own custom content.



The outcome

A prototype system was developed for Crawford Scientific allowing customers to upload their own content into the current system, create and manage custom learning plans and an example of how these custom learning plans could be integrated into the current earl2learn web site.

After investigating how the current system worked, it was possible to create a simple user interface to allow customers to upload their own types of learning plan content. Actual content files are stored on the file system of the web server and the content details are stored in the database utilizing the existing table structure. Storing of the custom content required only very minor changes to the existing tables used to store the current learning plan content.

The next part of the project involved allowing the customers to create their own custom learning plans from their uploaded content and the default content created by Crawford Scientific. The learning plans are tree type structures split into various levels. The top level of the learning plans are channels which contain courses, courses contain course parts and course parts contain content. Working with Crawford Scientific it was decided that the interface to allow the creation of the custom trees should be very simple and intuitive and ideally a drag and drop type scenario where users could simply drop content on the desired part of their tree.

Research was done into available controls that would help with achieving this type of interface. Several free controls were considered, none of which provided the level of functionality required. Eventually a .Net tree control from a company called Obout was chosen. This control provided all of the front end functionality required and their comprehensive documentation and fully functioning free trial made it relatively straightforward to develop the prototype interface.



The users now have an interface where they can view their learning plan on the right hand side and lists of available content on the left. To add content to the tree it is simply dragged from the content panels onto the desired location within the learning plan. The learning plans can then be saved and are stored in the database.

The final part of the project involved looking at integrating the new learning plan structure into the existing site. Due to the way the existing site had been developed (.Net code, HTML and SQL all mixed up in one file) it was very difficult for Crawford Scientific to maintain and update. Therefore a prototype version of the site written in .Net 2.0 using best practice was created for the client which, once completed, will make the site a lot easier for them to maintain and update.

If a user is not logged into the site they will see the default learning plan which is the same as the one shown on the current site. If a user is logged in they will see the learning plan that is associated with the company they belong to.