Pathify

The Hidden Costs of Your Old Student Portal

The Costs of Old Portals Add Up

While some things are easy to upgrade and discard (an iPhone, for example), moving away from any system that has been utilized for more than a year can be daunting. There's the work of integrating a new tool with existing platforms, moving old assets, training personnel and students on a new tool, and the dozens of meetings needed to coordinate both the implementation and the communication necessary for adoption.

If we're being honest, a big blocker to change--even positive change--is human psychology. Perhaps we implemented the system or discovered innovative patches to uplevel functionality. There's also a small chance that supporting the system as the only in-house expert also affords us some job security. As an IT professional, the most frustrating scenario is discovering a recently purchased tool doesn't live up to its hype, making it a candidate for early replacement.

We understand undertaking a large project takes time away from other priorities. It's worth considering your current portal's adoption rate, usability, and content age. Then add up the costs of maintaining your old portal.

If your portal has any of the following characteristics, it's time to weigh the costs and benefits of staying the course:

No Native Mobile App

Dedicated Support

Dedicated Servers Hosted On-Premises

Restrictive Content Admin

Resource Intensive Upgrades

**Outdated User Interface**

Infrequent New Versions

Hidden Cost 01: Hosting

One of the bigger costs associated with traditional portals is hosting for both production and QA environments Many of the institutions we have spoken with maintain on-site servers to host their older portal, which requires the proper conditions. This often means investing in extra climate control and a backup generator. Even then, hardware may fail, causing downtime for your portal.

If you have on-prem hosting, skilled IT staff will be needed to manage your servers.

Note that your dedicated server cost calculations should include yearly licensing fees, drive replacements, dedicated resources, and planned expansions.

**Hidden Cost:
$1,000 – $5,000**
per server per year
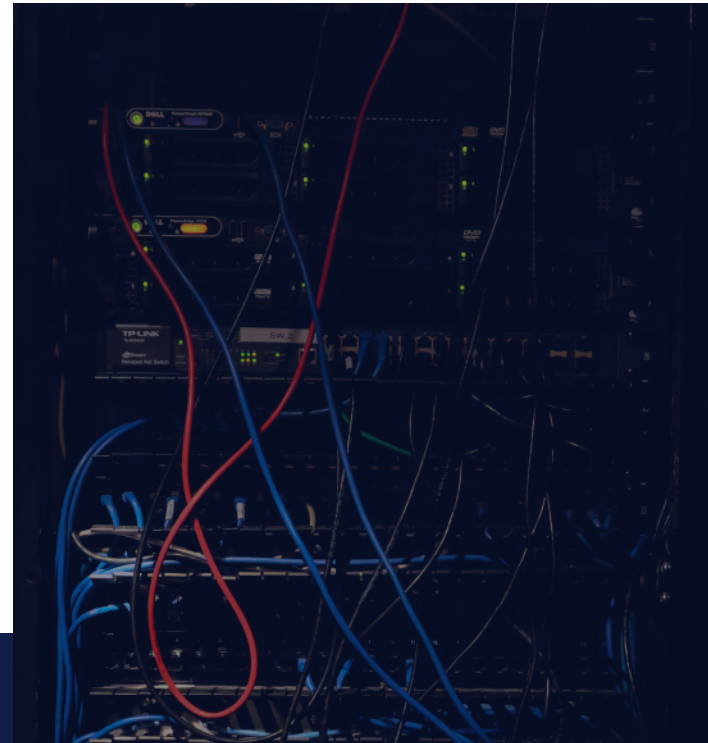
Hidden Cost 02: Maintenance & Support

Ongoing maintenance is never as straightforward as we imagine when a product is freshly implemented. Over the months, internal documentation grows increasingly outdated. Even more disturbing, the same thing may be happening to your portal vendor's support documentation.

Not all vendors update their knowledge bases after each release. Unfortunately, this means the lower tier technical support representatives that initially fielded your issue may be as in the dark as you are, which means you get to experience the joy of bouncing around technical support queues (our own frustrations experiencing the same may have seeped into that last sentence).

The older your portal version is, the more support disappears. Whether it's outdated docs, no tech support, or modern security and accessibility standards leaving your portal behind, you're put between a rock and a hard place. Your choices are to migrate to a new platform or keep dedicating resources to maintaining what you've got.

**Hidden Cost: 4-8 hours**
per month + Major Reputational Risk

Hidden Cost 03: Development Hours

User expectations change as technology evolves. These days, most of us are used to logging into a platform (whether we're banking, socializing, or ordering a new pair of socks), and the experience is personalized according to our browsing history, profile, and location.

The traditional portal was a giant list of links directing users to online content or department pages. If you want modern features and innovation on a traditional portal, you have to build it or hire someone to do it for you.

Hidden Cost: $1,000 – $5,000
per month
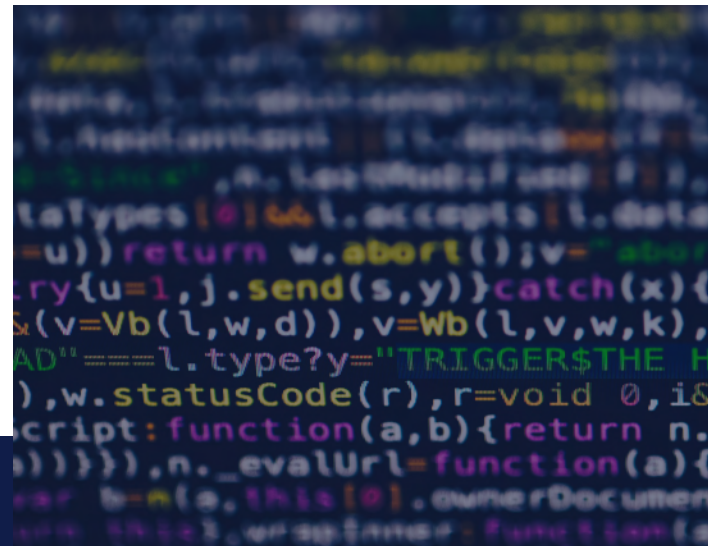
Hidden Cost 04:
No Mobile App

Generation Z is the most tech-savvy generation yet, and we don't see any signs that younger generations are going to begin shunning the latest developments in digital. They're dependent on their phones and demand a streamlined user experience across devices. A mobile app is no longer a nice-to-have, it's a must.

Many institutions purchase mobile app licenses in addition to their portal, requiring them to duplicate aspects of their portal in a separate mobile app. This is a cost that could be avoided with an integrated web and mobile-friendly portal platform.

**Hidden Cost:
$5,000 – $50,000**
per year

Hidden Cost 05:
IT Hours Spent on Content Management

Maintaining link farm portals is a lose-lose proposition. Tech support hates fielding the mind-numbing content updates required by every department and administrative function. Employees hate waiting for I.T. to fix a simple typo on their portal page.

Modern options allow granular delegation through role-based content permissions. For example, if information technology wanted to open up edit access to departmental staff or graduates on staff in Campus.app, they can. If they wanted to give financial aid access to delete obsolete program pages and create new program pages in addition to editing existing content, that's possible too.

Most of our customers estimate (very conservatively) that IT support spends a minimum of two hours per week maintaining internal pages and updating content before implementing a modern solution. This doesn't account for the cost of duplicating content across mobile apps or the potential cost of neglecting content and inadvertently spreading misinformation.

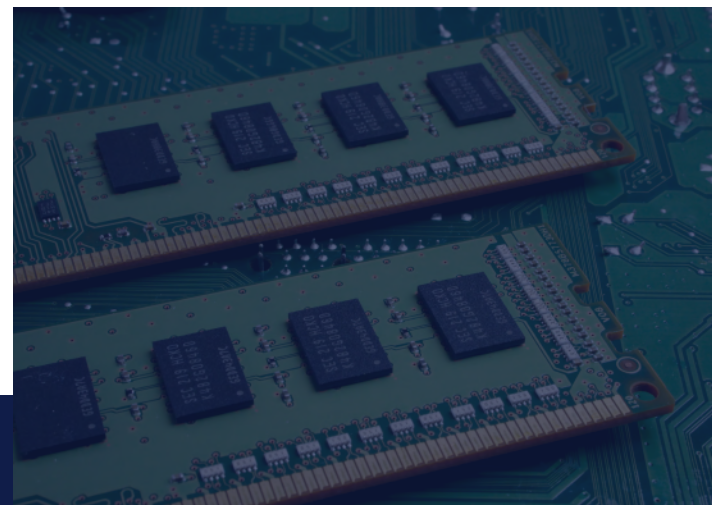**Hidden Cost:**
8–40 hours
per month
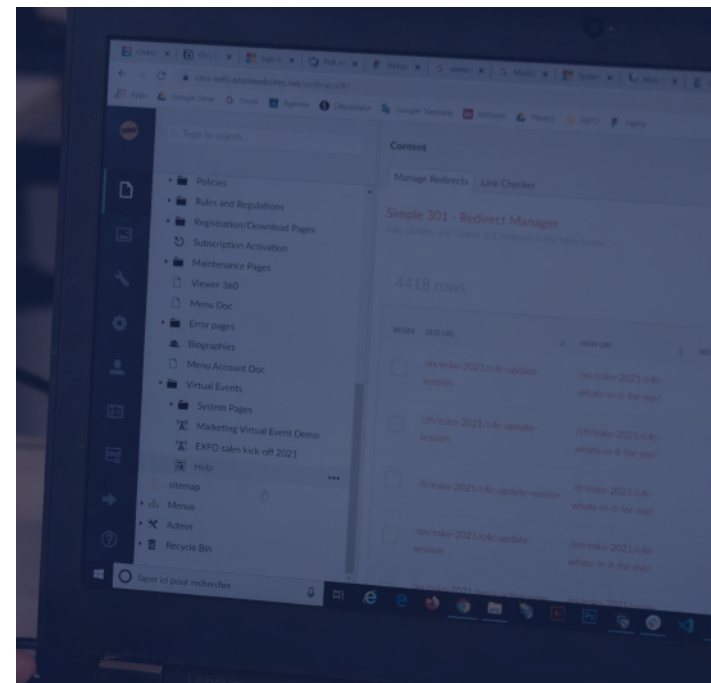
Hidden Cost 06:
Cost of Upgrading to a
New Version

Oftentimes portal service providers require template changes for a fresher UI or insist on charging for plug-ins that should be considered core features. In the case of vendors who insist on adherence to a major release schedule, internal resources must dedicate time to reading up on upcoming changes, determine how the update may negatively impact users or existing functionality, spend time performing the upgrade, and then dedicate several days to monitoring the system for issues.

Hidden Cost:
3 – 12 months
FTE IT Resource +
12-18 Hours of Downtime

Sample Calculator

Hidden Cost	Cost/Year	Assumes
Hosting	$1,974	1-2 Servers*
Maintenance & Support	$1,731	6 Hours Per Month**
Development Hours	$5,000	$0 - $10k / month**
Additional Mobile App	$15,000	$5k - $50k / month**
IT Hours on Content	$4,327	15 Hours / month**
Upgrades	$11,539	3 months effort**
Total Cost	**$39,571**	

* Assumes $987 per server per year
** Assumes $24.04 hourly rate based on IT Professional average salary of $50K

Pathify

Pathify is the most innovative student portal for higher ed. We're not just obsessed with making great technology, we're completely obsessed with student experience. Delivering cloud-based, integration friendly technology designed to drive student engagement, Pathify pushes personalized information, content and resources to the right people on any device. With a team of former university executives and technologists, we know what we're doing — and our recent incredible 84 net promoter score from customers proves it. Pathify has offices in Denver (headquarters), New York and Melbourne. pathify.com