

CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

Blackboard erases barriers to education with 24/7 learning



Blackboard
NOW PART OF ANTHOLOGY

NetApp ONTAP enables on-demand learning for millions of students around the world

Blackboard, an Anthology company, is a leading educational technology organization that supports learners and educators around the globe, with more than 150M users in more than 80 countries. As the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close their doors, institutions scrambled to provide educational experiences that their students could consume remotely. Blackboard's virtual classroom tool grew by more than 45 times in less than 3 weeks.

Blackboard partnered with NetApp and AWS to enhance their Blackboard Learn software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering and to provide 24/7 performance and uptime for learners. Using NetApp® ONTAP® data management software on AWS, Blackboard can provision new storage in minutes rather than days or hours, dramatically improving scalability to meet the demands of virtual education.

**3,000% increase
in demand**

“We’re removing barriers to education, that’s what our mission really is about.”

Heather Woods
Senior Director of Client Experience Management, Blackboard, now part of Anthology

Delivering 100% uptime for nonstop learning

In March of 2020, the world changed dramatically. Global lockdowns shuttered schools, forcing students to take their education out of the classroom and into their homes. Entire countries had to change their approach overnight to accommodate fully online learning.

This situation presented a massive challenge to organizations like Blackboard. In the span of a few weeks, the company saw usage of their virtual classroom tool expand by more than 45 times. To keep up with the needs of learners and educators around the world, Blackboard had to be able to deliver ultimate uptime.

“Our Blackboard Learn SaaS customers demand 100% uptime,” says Joel Snook, senior director of DevOps Engineering at Blackboard, now part of Anthology. “They also expect performance and stability 24/7. Learning never stops.”

Blackboard managed several hosted on-premises data centers built on nearly 15PB of NetApp storage. Those data centers were fine for meeting prepandemic demand, but they were not scalable enough to keep up with the new pace of learning.

“Our provisioning processes were measured in weeks or months,” says Kris Stokking, vice president of Software Engineering at Blackboard. “In the cloud, we’re able to use orchestration and automation by leveraging NetApp ONTAP APIs to deliver on storage in a matter of hours. And that was the difference between success in continued education and catastrophic failure.”

Accommodating a 3,000% increase in demand

When demand for Blackboard’s SaaS product jumped 3,000%, they handled this unprecedented spike with ease on the AWS platform. NetApp ONTAP file storage enables Blackboard to tap into advanced automation and orchestration to improve reliability over what they could achieve on premises. According to Stokking, “We were very well positioned to handle that surge of usage by taking advantage of the scale of the AWS public cloud.”

Moving forward, Blackboard is focused on leading the educational technology community. With NetApp and AWS, the company can spend less time provisioning storage and more time innovating and delivering value for their customers. Speed is no longer a concern—ONTAP data management software enables Blackboard to spin up new storage in 90 minutes rather than weeks or months.

“What we discovered is that we have the opportunity to not only help folks in their continued education, but to actually lean into educational quality by leveraging digital tools,” says Woods.

“The reality of the pandemic presented the opportunity to rethink how education could be delivered in a way that better supports learners of all types. We’re removing barriers to education, that’s what our mission really is about.”

Heather Woods
Senior Director of Client Experience Management,
Blackboard, now part of Anthology

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About NetApp

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As a cloud-led, data-centric software company, only NetApp can help build your unique data fabric, simplify and connect your cloud, and securely deliver the right data, services and applications to the right people—anytime, anywhere. To learn more, visit www.netapp.com



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