ConnectYard

1. Description of technology, including functionality and features (for students and faculty)

ConnectYard is a web-based tool designed to improve communication between faculty and students using a variety of secure two-way channels selected by each user.

- Faculty and students click through a brief series of screens to select settings for notifications about activity in the course (Announcements, Discussion Posts, Dropbox, Gradebook, etc.) to be sent to their choice of text messaging or email.
- While there are a number of similar "notification only" tools on the market today, ConnectYard is the only one that integrates an extra layer of functionality to provide faculty with time-saving features to re-engage inactive students.
- ConnectYard is also the only one that includes a robust analytics feature regarding the engagement levels of individual students – a feature which is able to provide valuable information to instructors, faculty managers, or anyone interested in course or program metrics.

2. Objectives of the pilot

A. Determine whether the "push out" notification system offered by ConnectYard is fully functional, glitch-free, and easy to manage at the institution and end user levels
B. Determine whether faculty and students appreciate/prefer receiving notifications from the LMS
C. Determine whether ConnectYard provides the answer to the common question from faculty which was the premise of the tool being developed, originally: "What are my students doing in my course, and when?"
D. Determine scalability of the piloted tool. Can the vendor provide appropriate support if this tool is adopted on a larger scale?

Over the course of the pilot, a fifth objective emerged:

E. Determine whether or not faculty will effectively utilize the tools to access data regarding student engagement, in order to reach out to less engaged students or alter previous communication habits, differentiating messages to individuals or subgroups

3. Where was it piloted and for how long?

ConnectYard	JULY 2014	SEPT 2014	NOV 2014	JAN 2015	MAR 2015	MAY 2015
Chamberlain		Sandbox	2 Instructors 2 Courses	11 Instructors 11 Courses	Opted Out	
Carrington		Sandbox	5 Instructors 5 Courses	10 Instructors 10 Courses	8 Instructors 8 Courses	Opted Out
DeVry			Sandbox	7 Instructors 13 Courses	21 Instructors 32 Courses	14 Instructors 38 Courses

Note: Institutions that opted out of the pilot were not necessarily dissatisfied with ConnectYard's functionality or performance. However, the potential of acquiring some of ConnectYard's functionality for free (via Pearson's Notifications, which was developed by ConnectYard) was of interest to those with budget concerns.

4. Results / metrics of the pilot, any other facts regarding usage of the tool that can be provided.

A. Determine whether the "push out" notification system offered by ConnectYard is fully functional, glitch-free, and easy to manage at the institution and end user levels
   ● The tool works much better than it did one year ago. There are rarely, if ever, any errors or malfunctions on ConnectYard's part.
   ● Dissatisfaction with frequency of notifications received is most often due to the end user's lack of understanding of how to adjust these.
   ● ConnectYard made numerous and frequent upgrades and simplification to their product throughout our pilot as a result of feedback from our faculty.

B. Determine whether faculty and students appreciate/prefer receiving notifications from the LMS

   ● Faculty who expressed satisfaction with the frequency of notifications were the same faculty who invested time and effort in Preview Week and Week One to do the following:
      o Attend any one of the many training offerings to learn about the tool's purpose and benefits to both faculty and students
      o Complete the ConnectYard Setup Wizard according to the settings recommended in the training sessions
      o Post an Announcement explaining the tool's purpose and benefits to students
      o Encourage students to complete the Setup Wizard
      o Attend an optional Check-In Meeting during Week 2 or reach out with any questions or concerns

   ● Faculty who expressed satisfaction with the overall performance and usefulness of the tool recommended that ConnectYard be adopted universally, and be required rather than optional for faculty and student use.

- Faculty who expressed the lowest level of satisfaction with the tool:
    o Did not attend any training before the start of Week One
    o Did not even complete the Setup Wizard themselves
    o Did not forward questions/concerns from students to someone who could help them adjust their notifications settings
    o Were part of a very small group who report that they already spend adequate time in their courses and communicating with their students, and therefore this tool was redundant

C. Determine whether ConnectYard provides the answer to the common question from faculty which was the premise of the tool being developed, originally: "What are my students doing in my course, and when?"

- On the whole, faculty were impressed with the amount of information available to them via the analytics tools built in to ConnectYard. Many instructors who piloted the tool for the first or second time did not venture into this level of the tool, simply because it was still all too new to them. ("Just in time learning…" = They were able to absorb the fundamentals, but need more time and experience and training at the right time in order to comprehend the higher level.)
- Faculty Managers, however, found the data quite interesting, and ConnectYard invited several DVU FMs to a "Roadmap" meeting to help outline what kinds of reports would be most useful to them.
- A few very astute piloting instructors discovered discrepancies in the Engagement Scores for individual students that did not align with their "hunch" about those students' involvement in the course. Consultations with ConnectYard revealed that during the rollout of Pearson's "Notifications" Pearson withheld access to necessary sections of data from ConnectYard; other institutions working with other Learning Management Systems did not have the "skewed data in engagement scores" that we did. This is currently being corrected by a team from Pearson and ConnectYard.

D. Determine scalability of the piloted tool. Can the vendor provide appropriate support if this tool is adopted on a larger scale?

- As has been discussed with ConnectYard, each of the updates to the tool were welcome improvements, but required adjustments to the DeVry training materials which should be handled by the vendor in the future.

- ConnectYard also need to research and implement a working solution for a HelpDesk. All troubleshooting was handled by the Pilot Lead from DeVry and a single point of contact at ConnectYard.

Results of the Fifth Objective that Developed as Pilot Progressed:

E. Given information about students via Analytics built in to ConnectYard, will faculty effectively USE the information to differentiate communications, reach out to students who appear to not be engaged in the course, etc.? Why or why not?
- Several faculty mentioned that time and workload were an issue

- "Habits of workflow" — some faculty prefer traditional methods of counting discussions posts, sending email blasts to all enrollees rather than only the ones who have not read an Announcement, etc.
- A lack of understanding of the true potential of the tool — reference "Just in Time Learning" mentioned above.