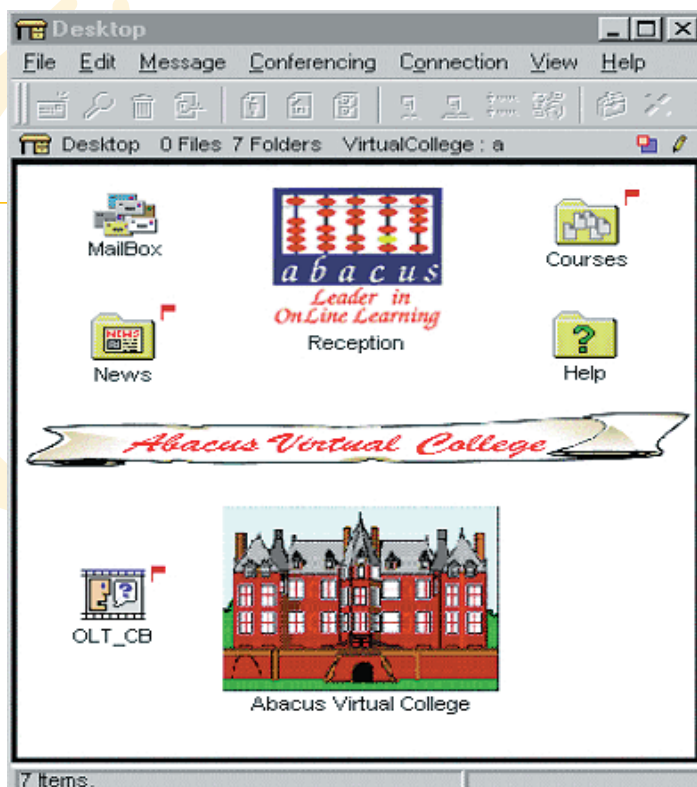# FIRSTCLASS®
CASE STUDY

The story of GAP,
an online training success
The Abacus Virtual College Powered by FirstClass

Graduates, wherever they live, are finding it more and more difficult to gain a foothold on the career ladder as employers look more and more for work experience. The word 'competence' is uppermost in employers' minds so it is no longer just a case of "what you know" but "what you can do" that counts.

The Abacus Virtual College, powered by the collaborative solution, **FirstClass**, enables educators to deliver anytime anywhere online training that will ultimately increase competency, satisfying employers' requirements.

In Northern Ireland where there is little scope for graduates to participate in management training and limited opportunities with larger organizations, the Management Institute at the University of Ulster was looking for an alternative solution.

Having identified the need for border counties in the south of Ireland to retain their young, talented people thereby ensuring the development of local communities, the institute was tasked with coming up with a management development solution that would offer incentives for local graduates to stay in their local community.

> ## "
> *One of the fundamental motivators in carrying individuals forward when they were under pressure was the peer pressure and support, available through online learning, using FirstClass.*
> "
>
> Gerry Crawford, Director and Co-founder of Abacus Learning Systems

Born out of this need was GAP (the Graduate Advancement Programme). FirstClass and the Virtual College were an integral part of the programme. Retaining high calibre graduates in the less favoured border regions, equipping them with real work experience, relevant practical knowledge of management and computing and Internet skills was the ultimate goal.

Course tutors attribute the high motivation, completion of work to deadlines and improved quality of work submitted by their graduates to FirstClass. As Gerry Crawford, Director and Co-founder of Abacus Learning Systems commented, "One of the fundamental motivators in carrying individuals forward when they were under pressure was the peer pressure and support, available through online learning, using FirstClass."

The GAP programme has been very successful with considerable immediate and long-term impact on the local economy. The comments from the graduates speak for themselves:

"I gained a lot more computer experience. As a result of the course I am now using the Internet at home."

"I have really enjoyed Abacus and hope to take another programme in the future."

"FirstClass has made me more confident with computers and new technology."

"I feel I have gained a wealth of computer experience, and have come a long way since November when I was totally computer illiterate."

"The Abacus Virtual College is a good idea — it's nice to have so much contact with EVERYONE in the group and to know you were never on your own."

"A very worthwhile venture! — This comes from someone who was afraid to turn on a computer nine months ago and now cannot get enough of them."

"I feel so much more confident with technology! The Abacus Virtual College took a while to get used to but (as predicted from the outset) can become addictive — BEWARE!"

"The FirstClass system meant that you could do the work when you wanted to."

"It was easy to use — I would definitely consider doing a course by this means in the future."

"I enjoyed the whole on-line experience and found it a lot more interesting than lectures or classes."

"It was very easy to contact the tutors or students and it was great being able to log in whenever it suited and to work at my own pace."

"This FirstClass system was very user friendly and simple to use."

"If you left a message you knew everyone could read it — unlike a phone message. It would be excellent if we were given the opportunity to do a further course in the future, using Abacus."

"When I finish the programme it will be like losing an arm — it has become such a part of my day."

"I think FirstClass is a great system for networking and exchanging ideas on projects."

For further information on FirstClass at the Abacus Virtual College, contact Keith Anderson
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Centrinity Inc. develops communication, collaboration and unified messaging software to enable corporate and education sectors worldwide to build online communities by sharing information and knowledge.

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