


Customer Segment Story: INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING

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American colleges and universities have the unique responsibility to educate our future professionals. Doctors, lawyers, politicians, statisticians, computer programmers, advertising executives – you name it, the most important and high-paying professions are filled with candidates who graduated from an institution of higher learning. These institutions are places of learning, but first and foremost, they are businesses.

These businesses have very similar primary objectives as those in other industries – to increase revenue and ensure longevity. Colleges and universities also have some of the same risks and possible pitfalls as other industries. Fires, floods, theft, or other disasters are just as likely to bring unanticipated tragedy to institutions of higher learning as in any other business in any other industry.

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*– Jim Ott, Senior
Operations Specialist,
Fontbonne University*

Properly preparing for these types of disasters can mean the difference between a smooth redevelopment period after a tragic event or a long road of backpedaling before everything is restored to normal operating status. There are several reasons why a college or university would want to install properly tested fireproof containers to house their vital documents and other important media. The best reason is to proactively use internal risk management strategies and divert a crisis by installing these containers before a disaster occurs. Another possible reason could be that the state mandates that certain items be protected at all times. Whatever the reason for proactive installation, acting before a fire, flood, or theft can save precious time, effort, and money when trying to recuperate everything that has been destroyed. Miami University in Ohio learned this the hard way after experiencing a fire in a campus building two years ago. Devona Miller, Assistant Director of University Development, explains why they purchased a 4-drawer FireKing fireproof filing cabinet.

“In April of 2003 we suffered a building fire caused by a bolt of lightning striking an electrical transformer. Luckily, the result was a loss of a lot of replaceable items, such as envelopes, letterhead, and other supplies. However, this event opened our eyes to the huge potential for another fire where we weren’t going to be so lucky. Now, we have FireKing® cabinets protecting our most vital records – legal documents, financial information, etc. We are fully protected should another fire threaten us.”

In most cases it should not take an extreme event such as a fire to make you aware of the risk of being unprepared for one. Proper crisis management involves outlining potential problems and then coming up with acceptable solutions.

Fontbonne University, located in Saint Louis, MO, took that approach when reviewing data management policies at the college. Jim Ott, Senior Operations Specialist, comments on Fontbonne's back-up precautions.

"Our FireKing (data safe) was purchased at the same time as our back-up server equipment. We needed a safe and fully tested fireproof container to store electronic data in. Without its protection, the back-up server tapes would be at risk of destruction in a regular filing cabinet or safe. Our FireKing makes us feel confident that nothing important will be lost because of a fire."

Some universities and programs are subject to regulation by a higher authority. For example, Cornerstone University, in Grand Rapids, MI, must keep certain records protected from fire, flood, theft, or other disaster at all times. Darcia Black, Certification Officer at Cornerstone, speaks about the regulations put on her office for such vital records protection.

"Since we currently have no form of electronic certification paperwork, the State of Michigan requires that we keep all information regarding the students who go through our certification programs in a fireproof container. This way, both our administration, as well as our government, can request the proper documentation whenever needed, even after a tragic event such as a fire."

As mentioned above, there are certain state laws and guidelines that colleges and universities are forced to obey. There are also federal laws that govern how certain documents are protected in institutions of higher learning as well. University and educational management expert, Dan Madzelan, Director of Post Secondary Education for the United States Department of Education, states the law pertaining to specific document protection.

"Original signed promissory notes and signed repayment schedules for Perkins Loans, National Direct Student Loans or National Defense Student Loans must be kept in a locked, fireproof container until the loan is repaid or until the school needs the originals to enforce collection of the loan. If a loan is assigned to the Department, the school must send the original promissory note or a certified copy of the note, as well as a copy of the original deferment or cancellation form. The school may not send computer-generated forms or microforms."

This type of legislation is to protect the government's loaned student money, however these federal documents are not the only ones worth protecting in a FireKing fireproof filing cabinet or safe. Losing vital records such as student information, personnel information, legal records, tax information, titles, certificates, and many other important items can hurt a college or university from moving forward if they are not properly protected from disaster in the first place. Loss prevention methods that include vital records protection should be used in all colleges and universities to ensure the elasticity of the institution after an unavoidable crisis.