ZOHO Creator

REVAMPING COLLEGE EDUCATION

How Zoho Creator shaped SRM into a one-of-a-kind university

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Index

Prologue

What makes a university good? Effective instruction, a consistent placement record,importance given to extra-curricular activities. What makes a university great? An emphasis on research, unparalleled job opportunities, and an environment that fosters well-rounded individuals. What makes a university the No.1 private university in India? All of the above—but what's that extra something that sets it a class apart?

> " *...the confidence to roll out new initiatives.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Or, in other words, the confidence to do things a little differently. The confidence to implement a revolutionary academic system that no other university dared to. SRM, ranked India's No.1 private university, is a classic example of "been there, done that." Its flexible course selection and inter-disciplinary curriculum has saved many a student from the monotony of traditional courses, and helped them pursue their passions.

Bringing about such a monumental change was no mean feat. It required immense planning and coordination on every level—management, faculty, and students. Everyone had to be on the same page; which meant communication had to be continuous and consistent. With over 45,000 students and 3000 faculty members on board, the possibilities of things going amiss were plenty.

And a lot of things did go wrong. But the university, driven by Zoho Creator, succeeded in overcoming the odds to emerge a forerunner in the technical education realm. They brought about the much-needed change in the span of a year—a change that would've otherwise takenmany years to implement. This is the story of how SRM braved the paper storm by jumping aboard Zoho Creator.

Course selection

In an interdisciplinary curriculum, students have the freedom to choose their electives across disciplines, as well as their teachers. During the initial stages of the old system, students were given an application form where they chose their subjects and teachers.

The administration had to then manually sort through the forms and allocate classes based on the student choices. These forms travelled all around the institution; from the administrative office to the department heads to the teachers and back.

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Chaos was a way of life—departments and courses got mixed up, too many students opted for a class that had reached its capacity, and errors in information entry and interpretation made allocation a mess.

With student numbers growing exponentially, the paper mounds only got bigger, and were so difficult to process that it took weeks to sort everything out.

Sometimes, more than a thousand students would opt for the same course or lecturer, in which case the allotment was on a first-come-first-serve basis. Paper forms made it impossible to rank the applications by time, making allotment more or less random.
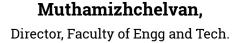
The next setback was generating schedules. Since students from a department chose different electives, the schedules had to be personalized for every student based on their selection. For 45,000+ students, this was a herculean task.

After Zoho Creator:
No more paper and no more delays—everything is online and automated.

> " **I got introduced to Zoho Creator, and found that we could build whatever application we required.** "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

A flexible curriculum needed equally flexible software, and Zoho Creator fit the bill perfectly. The admissions module built on Creator greatly uncomplicated course selection and schedule generation by automating most of the processes involved. Students could now select the courses and lecturers they prefered by logging in to their portals, even from their phones. When the class strength reaches a threshold, the module sends alerts and automatically redirects students to other courses.

> *We're now using Zoho Creator to select our subjects and our teachers. We love it because it's hassle free, and we can check our marks and attendance from any-where, at anytime.*

Apooru Shukla,
Student

What's more, the app generates customized schedules for each student, based on their choice of classes and faculty, complete with information about the buildings, classrooms, and faculty names. Now students can no longer claim they were searching for the room as an excuse for coming late.

Workflow at a glance:

- Elective courses for the semester are mapped to a set of lecturers. The course is made available for the students to select on their portals.

- A student elects the course, and also a lecturer of their choice. They can do this from their phones and tablets or from a computer.

- The app generates a personalized timetable for the student based on the courses they've chosen, including details of the building, room, etc.

- The app notifies the lecturers and the HOD of the students who've opted for a particular course.

- Once a course reaches its capacity, it's taken off the portal.

> *All actions—choosing courses, choosing faculty, registering for classes— gets completed in one single process.*

Prof.Anand

Executive Secretary,
Faculty of Engg and Tech

Interdepartmental communication

Before Zoho Creator:

Communication was either by word-of-mouth or through circulars

In such a vast campus with so many people, it wasn't uncommon for one department to be in the dark about what the other departments were doing. A student could take a year's sabbatical by applying to his department head, and the administration would be completely unaware of it. As a result, the student would keep getting reminders to pay dues for classes they didnt attend.

> " *At times, one department was completely unaware of what another department was up to.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

After Zoho Creator:

With instant emails and push-notifications, everyone is on the same page.

Zoho Creator made seamless communication a reality. Instant emails, SMS, and push notifications ensured all information reached everyone concerned in time. And the beauty of it is that its all automated— one button click sets in motion a series of actions that sends out different versions of the notification, depending on the receiver. For example, when a student registers for a course, the course details are sent to them, while the faculty member gets the student's details.

> " *With Zoho Creator, now every department knows what's happening in all other departments.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Workflow at a glance:

- A student applies for a sabbatical to the HOD.

- Being a connected application, this information gets updated in every department's database that has the student's data.

- The app automatically sends alerts about the student's status to concerned parties.This way, every department is up to date on all relevant events.

Attendance

More departments, more courses, and more students meant more ledgers. As the days went by, it got almost impossible to keep track of attendance records, which in turn affected the calculation of internals. This also meant that people who were regularly delinquent got off scot-free. Needless to say, an efficient attendance tracking system was necessary.

> " *We had ledgers for everything. With so many records on paper, it was very difficult to track defaulters.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,

Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

After Zoho Creator:

Tablets and phones replaced heavy notebooks, and color-coded reports made tracking a breeze.

The attendance module put an end to bulky ledgers and allowed teachers to take attendance from their mobiles and tablets. All records are color-coded; the safe zone in green, the danger zone in red, and yellow for the ones in between. Students whose attendance is in the danger zone get a warning, and reports are generated periodically, which makes keeping an eye on student attendance even easier.

> " *Now teachers can take attendance right from their mobile phones.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Exams

Holding exams for thousands of students at once is no simple task; fixing dates, arranging rooms and supervisors, and sending out announcements and reminders - all required minute planning and coordination.

Before Zoho Creator:
Students, coordinators, and papers were all over the place.

Planning, scheduling, and communication were done by circulating papers around departments. Every time a piece of information had to be looked up, the coordinators had to sort through whole stacks of papers to find the one they wanted. Apart from being time-consuming, chances of those papers reaching the wrong hands were high.

After Zoho Creator:
Anxiety—for management, at least—took a back seat, courtesy of the app.

Calendar reports help plan and schedule exams sans any conflict with the dates and times—coordinators could view and allocate rooms right from the app. The app also took care of the task of communicating the schedule to students. Teachers could grade answer papers and keep a record of the scores in the app, and could instantly access any information any time they wanted.

> **"**
> *We could easily generate and track schedules on reports, and also inform students of dates by email and SMS.* **"**

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Accreditation

For a university to be recognized as a leader, its accomplishments have to be documented and submitted to the Board of Technical Education, the governing authority of colleges across India. And SRM had no shortage of accomplishments. Every now and then, teachers attended national and international conferences, presented papers, and won accolades. All this added to the university's credibility, and poised it to become the leading university in India.

Before Zoho Creator:

Documents of accomplishment gathered dust on shelves, and were impossible to pull out at short notice.

Documentation was troublesome and erratic, and again on paper. Everytime an accreditation was to be conducted, the administration had to find and scour records dating back many years, and manually put together reports for the committee. And teachers weren't regular in recording their achievements either. Many vital ones got missed, and this sometimes affected the university's rating.

> ❝ *Previously, there was lots of unstructured data on university achievements, like teachers attending conferences, papers being published, and so on.* ❞

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

After Zoho Creator:

Every document is filed electronically, and reports are generated periodically and can be pulled and printed instantly.

Every achievement is carefully documented. With quick filters like date, event, and department, administrators can access any record, however old it may be, in seconds. Reports with details of the event, participants, and awards conferred are generated periodically and readily available for sharing and printing. The app also sends frequent reminders to teachers to enter their progress for documentation.

> *Zoho Creator sends periodic reminders to teachers to update accomplishments, plus it auto-matically generates reports— when accreditation comes around, reports just have to be pulled and shown, no fuss.*

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Events

In a university as renowned for its extra-curricular activities as it is for academics, events occupy a prominent place. There are fetes, fests, contests, and symposiums almost every month, and a lot of work goes into organizing them. From collecting funds to deciding programs to rounding up participants, every event is carefully thought out and executed.

Before Zoho Creator:

Planning and executing events were rife with confusion, with no set process in place.

" *"We had students running from classroom to class-room, from block to block, with announcements.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Chaos set in a week before every event. Students ran from building to building to schedule events, give out announcements, collect participant names, request ODs from the HODs, and draw up the final list of programs and participants. And despite all the trouble the organizers took, some participants failed to turn up for the event, because they couldn't find or remember the stage or room where it was happening.

For inter-collegiate events, registrations were done on paper, and the participants' presence was marked by checking their names against the registrations. Names were frequently misspelled or missed, and large crowds gathered before the check points jostling for entry.

After Zoho Creator:

The app streamlined organization from start to finish, and made planning events just as fun as participating in them.

> **66** *Organizing events is now so much easier and hassle-free. Students post event updates on the app wall and get registrations done right there.* **99**

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Students use calendar reports to schedule and track events. Invitations are either posted on the student portal or sent to them individually by email. Once the participants are finalized, they're sent details about the event including the date, venue, and more. Requests for OD and reminders to participants using push notifications are taken care of by the app.

Inter-collegiate event entries are streamlined with QR-codes. Students from other colleges can register through web-forms posted on the event's web page. Participants are then emailed admission cards with a QR code that they print and bring with themto the venue. The organizers scan the cards for the code using their phones, and things like the details of the participants, and the programs they've registered for are automatically entered into the system.

Counseling

College life is a roller coaster ride, and it's normal for students to sometimes get overwhelmed. To help them cope better with academics and life, the university provides in-house counselors. Each counselor has 20 students under their wing, out of which at least 5 need extra attention.

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Before Zoho Creator:

Due to inadequate tracking, students could slip out of class using counseling sessions as an excuse.

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Setting aside time for counseling sessions from the regular schedule wasn't easy, and a lot of sessions were missed because students were held up somewhere else. There were also cases where students, under the pretext of meeting counselors, skipper classes and roamed the campus. Since there was no system to supervise their whereabouts, the counseling sessions were used more as an excuse than a means of self-improvement.

> *Students would say, 'we have a counseling session now,' and then escape. They wouldn't be seen for the rest of the day.*

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

With automatic schedules, making time for counseling is easy. Teachers and counselors can quickly check a student's status on their phones; whether they're in a class or attending a counseling session. If they'redoing neither, they can pull up the student and send them to the appropriate place.

After Zoho Creator:

Counseling sessions are now truly beneficial, as the app helps teachers make sure students actually attend them.

“ *We find out if students are missing from class by checking their schedule. If they are, we immediately locate them and take them for counseling.* ”

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

Conclusion

Zoho Creator gave SRM the tools, and the confidence, to forge ahead with their revolutionary system. They were able to implement all that they dreamed of, and more. Data is safe and easily accessible, processes are streamlined, and most importantly, papers have been done away with.

The story doesn't stop here, of course. SRM is still setting benchmarks in college education, and Zoho Creator continues to be the scaffold that SRM builds their systems on.

> " *In the next two years, we want to make SRM a completely paperless university.* "

Muthamizhchelvan,
Director, Faculty of Engg and Tech.

And we'll be right there to help them with it.

About us

At Zoho Creator, we've always worked towards a single purpose -
enabling the citizen developer to build functional apps without
having to learn to code. And with cutting-edge features like workflow
automation, low-code development,and native mobile access,
we're making it possible, one app at a time.

Trusted by

We'd love to talk! Reach out to us:

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