



The Hokie Nation Takes Procurement to the Next Level

The Customer

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, better known as Virginia Tech, is a public, land-grant, research university with its main campus in Blacksburg, Virginia. It also has educational facilities in six regions statewide and a study-abroad site in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland. Through its Corps of Cadets ROTC program, Virginia Tech is also designated as one of six senior military colleges in the United States. Virginia Tech offers 280 undergraduate and graduate degree programs to some 34,400 students and manages a research portfolio of \$522 million. Virginia Tech is the second largest public university by enrollment in the Commonwealth of Virginia. In 2019 its total purchase order spend was in excess of \$840 million.

After a two-year search for a full-suite eProcurement software solution, and with the intention of acquiring a solution that would protect the institution's autonomy, Virginia Tech selected JAGGAER in 2008. "Unlike other universities in Virginia, we wanted to go true full-suite," said Mary

Helmick, Director of Procurement at Virginia Tech. "But what was really unique was that we wanted to implement eProcurement not just for our external acquisitions of goods and services.

We also wanted to use it for what we call our internal auxiliary operations, meaning the purchases departments make from campus services, such as the print shop. The vision was to have a one-stop shop for every purchase transaction within Virginia Tech, external or internal" she explained.

12 years of smooth operations...

In doing so, Virginia Tech disposed of a mountain of paper forms that had been required in the past. Today, virtually all purchase requests are processed electronically through the JAGGAER system, affectionately known as "HokieMart" after the university's mascot, the "Hokie Bird". "The only exception is for telecommunications, which has its own entrenched legacy system," Helmick said. "Otherwise everything is 100% on JAGGAER."

“The implementation decisions made in 2008 have stood the test of time. We have taken all the new JAGGAER releases, added a module here, turned on a feature there, but basically everything ran pretty smoothly for those 12 years, though in the past three we have initiated some re-engineering projects to see us through the next 12,” Helmick added.

... but VT needed an upgrade

“We love the JAGGAER system, as does everyone in the university: administration, central procurement, the departments, our vendors ... they are all huge fans. Now we’re ready to take it to the next level and one of the decisions we made was to move the full requisition process over to JAGGAER,” Helmick said.

The issue is that when JAGGAER was introduced in 2008, central procurement already had requisitions implemented in a financial ERP system. That decision was made so funds could be encumbered in the ERP system at the requisition stage. This meant this link could not be broken, and that in turn meant the purchase order had to be issued from the ERP system, after the procurement activities had been done in JAGGAER. So, while departmental requisitions run straight through to purchase orders on JAGGAER, requisitions to central procurement used to come to JAGGAER via the ERP system. “It worked, but this was clearly not ideal,” Helmick said. “For example, it makes it impossible to leverage the dashboards and full reporting capabilities in JAGGAER,” she added.

The re-engineering of the system involved what Helmick terms “debuckling” from the ERP processes and finally running everything through JAGGAER. “We really want to use

JAGGAER the way it is meant to be used, for all purchases, including the 1,400 or so really big ones in the central purchasing system!” Helmick emphasized. “This is going to be a game-changer, because we’ll be able to use the analytics to get real visibility over our spend,” she said.

Great Support from JAGGAER and Partner Network

Virginia Tech selected Stonebridge Ventures, a consultancy entirely focused on the higher education sector, to manage the transition. “There is such a great synergy between all three parties: Virginia Tech, Stonebridge and JAGGAER,” Helmick said. “We see clear progress with every update from Stonebridge. The project has gone like clockwork and with my IT background I know that’s a pretty rare thing!”

There was just one unseen hitch: Covid-19. The project started in February 2020 and Virginia Tech went into full crisis mode in late March. “We soon realized that this was going to take longer than we bargained for, so we really needed Stonebridge to keep us on track,” Helmick said.

Because of the complications with the ERP system, Virginia Tech opted to run a parallel instance for testing and production before the full go-live. The upgraded system includes new dashboards, together with some new forms such as sole-source request and contract modification request that Virginia Tech procurement will roll out to campus as a value-add. It will enable users to submit such requests directly to HokieMart rather than via email.

“JAGGAER provides the best in breed in eProcurement. We monitor the market. We

are always listening to our counterparts both in other universities and in procurement more generally across Virginia and nationally. And based on what we are doing here and what other people tell us, there is no appetite for change, anywhere at Virginia Tech – and speaking personally, based on 26 years' experience in procurement, I am more than happy to continue the relationship," Helmick affirmed.

Safely through Covid-19...

"We saw the quality of the system when the pandemic hit. JAGGAER was the one 'steady Eddie' when everything seemed to be in a state of chaos. We had 85% of personnel working at home but they were still able to make purchases and organize deliveries, 24/7, without a single glitch. This gave us great peace of mind because we were buying like crazy to get the equipment and supplies needed to keep the campus running, especially in April and May.

"Fortunately, our strategic suppliers, in particular Fisher Scientific, stepped up to the plate and secured the PPE we needed. We centralized everything through our Blacksburg campus, setting up a process in JAGGAER in just two days and together with a homegrown just-in-time inventory system, to ensure that everyone got fair and timely access to the supplies," Helmick said.

"We told our internal university customers across the Commonwealth of Virginia, "You don't need to search for hard-to-find PPE like gloves, disinfectant and hand sanitizer. Just order it through HokieMart! We were then able to distribute it quickly to the university via a centralized stockpile of product. We could not have done that without JAGGAER."

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